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## **Introduction**

### **New Public Management: An African Reform Paradigm?**

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#### **Introduction**

African countries are not new to reforms. Before and after independence they implemented a wide range of reforms: some were structural and mundane—covering such issues as income upgrading and structure for the various service cadres—but a few were truly ambitious and aimed at overhauling the public service for greater effectiveness, responsiveness and performance (AAPAM 1984). In spite of the many achievements of these latter types of initiatives, they could not resolve any of the multiple crises confronting African public services today—of mission, performance and internal management as well as reform direction. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether the new public management reforms that many countries in the region are currently pursuing have impacted positively on any of the above-mentioned elements, as they seem to have done in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and a number of other countries since the 1980s. This is the essence of this special issue of *Africa Development*.

The special issue is important in that it attempts to respond to one of the main problems of the NPM discourse in Africa as well as other developing countries—the thinness of the evidence of how NPM type-reforms actually work in practice in countries outside of the industrialised countries of the Commonwealth and OECD (Manning 2001). The

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papers in the issue analyse a number of case studies and highlights insights from implementation experiences.

If governance is the fundamental rules for regulating the relationships between rulers and the ruled, many countries in the region have embarked on economic and political reforms aimed at liberalising their economies and politics (Olowu and Sako 2002). In particular, there are expectations that such reforms may help to alleviate poverty. With respect to the latter nations of the world since 2000 committed themselves to halving world poverty by the year 2015, but Africa is one of the few regions of the world where these commitments are not likely to be realised (African Development Bank 2002). New public management reforms are expected to support these other wider societal reforms. The question is, have they?

In this opening paper, I am going to highlight the main elements of the NPM paradigm. Next, I shall articulate the major questions that have been raised in the course of implementing it in developing countries generally. Finally, I will provide a short introduction of the main papers contained in this special issue of *Africa Development* as these papers document and reflect on the NPM movement and practice vis-à-vis the African experience.

### **What is the New Public Management?**

A few observers have suggested that the term, New Public Management (NPM) is a misnomer. They argue that having been in the forefront of public management discourse for over three decades it can hardly be regarded as 'new' today (Argyriades 2002). More controversially they have suggested that to the extent that NPM undermines core public sector values, it is not really about public management but an attempt to displace public administration as a distinct social science (sub)discipline and field of practice (Farazmand 2002).

In spite of these criticisms, there is consensus today that NPM has made an important contribution to public administration in practically all countries. Des Gasper sums up the state of the art in his contribution to this volume:

...the New Public Management...emerged in the 1980s especially in New Zealand, Australia and Britain and in sister forms in the USA... They spread widely, especially in the 1990s, around many OECD countries and from them to lower-income countries, not least in Africa, partly through promotion by international agencies like the World Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat and management consultancy groups. At one stage NPM's proponents claimed to have intellectually defeated the older public management

and to be in the process of replacing it...NPM has done a lot to shake-up sleepy and self-serving public organizations, often by using ideas from the private sector. It provides many options for trying to achieve cost-effective delivery of public goods, like separate organizations for policy and implementation, performance contracts, internal markets, sub-contracting, and much more. It has a strong inter-organizational focus, as is needed in public management. But it has been spread somewhat like a religion: it was assumed to be modern, relevant and superior, so there was no need felt to prove that it suits the case concerned; to query this was held to show that you were outdated and reactionary...By now, NPM has lost much of its gloss, as experience mounts. In New Zealand, in many respects NPM's furthest frontier, the costs of a too narrow approach to public management have been major and there is considerable backlash.

The elements emphasised by different scholars and prospective public sector innovators differ but its key principles have been summarised as including the following seven main elements (Hood 1991; Owens 1998):

***Hands on professional management***

The catchphrase for this element is 'let managers manage'. It recognises that there is a need for professional management at the very top and that those who hold these positions should be given substantive responsibility for management—the achievement of clearly specified goals—rather than being administrators whose function is primarily to administer rules. If possible, such positions should be contractualised with the manager answering to the political manager for specific results. The argument here is that accountability requires a clear assignment of responsibility for action, not diffusion of power. The management role here is pre-eminent regardless of the specialised nature of the departments and ministries (hence, bringing an end to the specialist vs. generalist controversy in favour of professional managers). Their jobs are not career positions but contractualised though they also have wide powers to hire and fire those who are responsible to them. This also implies fundamental changes in the organisation of human resource management in the public services—as government–minister, minister–staff relationships are governed by direct contracts rather than indirect accountability via representatives.

***Explicit standards and measures of performance***

An important tool to implement the above-mentioned management regime is the need to have clearly defined goals, targets and indicators of success, preferably expressed in quantitative terms, justified on the basis of greater accountability in the use of resources. This focus on outputs and outcomes—for individuals, units and whole ministries—is in sharp

contrast to the tendency to focus on inputs in traditional public administration arrangements

***Emphasis on output controls and entrepreneurial management***

Controls exercised by mechanisms such as performance and programme budgeting in contrast to line item budgeting and long term planning and strategic management of the organisation. Strategic management focuses on the changing goals that the organisation must achieve in a rapidly changing environment—hence use of SWOTs. Focus on results rather than process means that the eye of managers is on the bottom line—ability to deliver on expectations or better still surpass them.

***Disaggregation of units***

Previously large monolithic ministries are broken up into corporatised units around products with separate performance contracts with the aim of separating policy from operational units. Over 70 per cent of the British civil service is presently organised in executive agencies.

***Competition in the public service***

The application of market principles in the public sector—through privatisation, commercialisation and market testing (tendering vs. bureaucratic provision). By separating provision (legal authority) from production (technical transformation of inputs into outputs), rivalry between diverse producers can be used to lower costs and improve standards.

***Stress on private sector styles of management practice***

The idea is to move away from military-style public service ethics to flexibility in hiring and rewards—e.g. lateral entry into the public service, performance evaluation and merit pay.

***Greater stress on discipline and parsimony***

Cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, resisting union demands, limiting compliance costs to business and, most importantly, the application of Information and Communication Technology. These are all in the drive to do more with less.

In actual fact, most close observers note that there is not one model of NPM but several. Ferlie et al. (1996), based mainly on the application of these principles in the United Kingdom, for instance, argue that there are four models—the ‘efficiency drive’ model, whose objective is to make the public sector more business like; the ‘downsizing and decentralization’ model, whose focus is on disaggregation, organizational flexibility and downsizing; the ‘management of change model’, which aims at inte-

grating bottom-up and top-down approaches to change; and the 'public service orientation to change' model, with greater focus on service quality. Guy Peters (1996) recasts these as schools of thought or orientations in terms of the diagnosis they offer to key problems confronting public administration at the end of the twentieth century—structure, management, policy process and key players and how to advance the public interest. The resultant schema is summarised in Table 1.

The main achievements claimed for NPM have been in the OECD countries—and PUMA, the public sector management section of the OECD organisation, has become an important division. It issues monthly news bulletins on the latest innovations and best cases in NPM style reform. Public sector management improvement features prominently in the EU conditions for new states wanting to join the Union.

John Halligan summarised the achievements of NPM in these countries by noting that, 'public sector reforms in the OECD during the last 20 years have been notable for the magnitude, breadth and significance of the changes' (2001: 3). However, he also notes that there are wide variations between countries. Halligan shows downsizing as the most important universal attribute of public sector reform using the NPM strategies in OECD countries. A close scrutiny of the figures he gives shows that most countries have reduced their general government outlays as a percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP). It also shows that only a few (3) countries among the list of 12 countries could be regarded as 'aggressive downsizers' (Ireland (-17.9 per cent), Netherlands (-9.8 per cent) and New Zealand (-8.4 per cent). Most others had only marginal cuts and some seven countries (Japan, Switzerland, Finland, France, Norway, Portugal and Spain) actually increased the general government outlays as a percentage of their gross domestic product). He also notes that some of the countries still have large public sectors even after these cuts (the range remained from 31 per cent (USA) to 53.3 per cent (France)). While most countries in the bid to improve performance have used managerialisation, contracting and outsourcing, the extensive application of market principles in the core public service has been limited to a small number of countries, notably the United Kingdom (Halligan 2001: 6).

Privatisation and corporatisation (as a means of avoiding privatisation) have been used extensively in a number of countries. Similarly, performance management and managerial decentralisation (countries that favour intra-public service (e.g. New Zealand) do not use intergovernmental solutions, as in the Nordic countries) are widely used. In contrast, only about a half of OECD has adopted accrual accounting and only two

have accrual budgeting in the whole of government (there are some pilots) (see Kok 2003). Policy coordination has been consolidated and policy advice diversified in many countries with the government functioning more as a competitor with non-state think tanks and as enablers of these other actors (Commonwealth Secretariat 1995).

**Table 1: Major features of models of public sector governance**

	<b>Market government</b>	<b>Participative government</b>	<b>Flexible government</b>	<b>Deregulated government</b>
<b>Principal Diagnosis</b>	Monopoly	Hierarchy	Permanence	Internal regulation
<b>Structure</b>	Decentralisation	Flatter organisations	'Virtual organisations'	No particular recommendations
<b>Management</b>	Pay for performance other private sector techniques	TQM*; teams	Managing temporary personnel	Greater managerial freedom
<b>Policy Making</b>	Internal markets, market incentives	Consultation negotiation	Experimentation	Entrepreneurial government
<b>Experimentation</b>	Low cost	Involvement consultation	Low cost coordination	Creativity activism

*Note:* \*TQM= Top Quality Management.

*Source:* Peters (1996: 21).

### **Debates and dilemmas in developing countries**

NPM has not been wanting in terms of its adulators and critiques even in the highly industrialised societies. Owen Hughes (1998) argues that NPM represents a paradigm change in thinking and practice of public administration. The latter he felt belongs to an earlier era that is gone for good. He then proceeded to highlight the major factors that have led to this sea- (paradigm) change. His list includes the emergence of right-wing politicians in Western countries who saw the state as a part of the problem

(because of its huge scope, size and methods), economic and fiscal crises of the welfare state, economic theories such as public choice, agency and new institutional economics that both provide explanation for poorly performing public services and offered alternatives and other factors such as changes in the private sector corporations, ICT technology etc (see also Minogue et al. 1998).

On the other hand, there are those who point out that while public administration must take to heart the message of market discipline, there are serious problems in asserting that no differences exist between public and private sector management. Second, some others question the empirical validity of NPM both in terms of its claims of private sector management ideals and of public sector management. For instance, most private sector organisations rarely operate in the manner presented in NPM. More importantly, customers and citizens are not the same, and the contention that contractual production is always more efficient than direct bureaucratic production is not borne out in evidence (Kelly 1998: 202). Thirdly, there are those who believe that the NPM remedy is contradictory. Deriving from public choice rhetoric, if managers are guided by rational self-interest why should they be trusted to perform in the public interest? Terry (1998) has gone on to argue that the entrepreneurial model might undermine democratic values of fairness, justice, representation and participation. Such comments have been brought home more forcefully after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

Even proponents of NPM in the developing countries now acknowledge that all is not well with public sector reform (PSR) inspired by NPM in developing countries. A World Bank website notes that on average, 'only one third of reforms achieved satisfactory outcomes' and these outcomes were often not sustainable. 'Neither downsizing [nor] capacity building have achieved their goals of reducing civil service size nor improved service delivery and civil servants have not owned the reforms or adhered to codes of ethics' ([www.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/strategies.htm](http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/strategies.htm)).

There is no doubt that old style public administration emphasises a number of crucial principles for organising public sector services that are challenged by NPM. Guy Peters referred to them as 'chestnuts', an appropriate terminology, for that is what they are—the basics (Table 2).

**Table 2: Old public administration chestnuts compared with NPM doctrines**

<b>Old Public Administration</b>	<b>New Public Management</b>
Apolitical Civil Service	Political and Accountable Management
Hierarchy and Rules	Markets are superior to markets, emphasis on contracts, not rules
Permanence and Stability	Contractual management
Institutionalised Civil Service	Only small policy and a strategic center required
Internal Regulation	Internal regulation only for the rump of the service, not privatised or decentralised
Equality of Outcomes	Differential outcomes

*Source:* Extracted from Peters (1996).

Each of these 'chestnuts' represents an element of an administrative culture that took more than one century to institutionalise in each of the industrialised countries. In fact this change required a profound form of administrative reform in each country. It took so long because as several authors who have written about this tell us, the change affected not only the public sector but also the educational and political subsystems. In a detailed study of the rise of meritocracy (what he refers to as a revolution) in Great Britain, Michael Young argues that it was founded on the conviction by its promoters that 'the rate of social progress depends upon the degree to which power is matched with intelligence...civilisation does not depend on the stolid mass[,]. . .but upon the creative minority' (Young 1958: 14, 15). The foundation of the public service in each country, whether in the 'old' world (represented, for instance, by Britain and France) or the 'new' world (USA), was the reform of public service institutions as the crucible for ensuring that the best and brightest in the society worked for



the public good, in the public service (see, for instance, Ruban 1995 on France and Mosher 1968 on the USA). These basics—neutrality, meritocracy and objectivity—were the essentials for coupling (democratic) power to the social reality of international competitiveness. Democracy may produce people with limited expertise in governance, but political leaders found in getting to office a huge and relatively efficient machine at work that was able to sublimate its own interests to the public good—an issue revisited in discussions on the post-1989 reconstruction of Eastern Europe and African countries today (Suleiman 1999; Adamolekun 2002).

The entry point of NPM is its critique that this machine has become outdated and has perhaps overstretched itself. But its main elements as described above needed the foundation of the old public disciplines to be effective—informal structures such as executive agencies, contracts between units within the service and accrual budgets etc. Research by those who have worked on the countries referred to as the ‘Asian tigers’ (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) shows that they have combined elements of old and new public administration (see Hilton and Root 1996; Quah 1996). The first was needed to advance the cause of the second. In a very wide-ranging review, Nick Manning—one of the early apostles of NPM while at the Commonwealth Secretariat, now at the World Bank—highlighted three reasons why NPM has not been the great success it was expected to be in developing and transition countries.

First, is the absence of democracy. NPM has thrived in climes in which the model of the citizen is of one who is very demanding of his/her officials. In contrast in developing/transition countries, the model of the citizen hardly existed. Treated as subjects rather than citizens they have learnt not to expect great levels of service from their public service—if anything, the society served state officials rather than the other way round (see Mamdani 1996). Second, the absence of the basics of an old public administration discipline made the introduction of the new elements of informal structures and practices difficult to sell. Thirdly, NPM has had marginal impact even in its heartland. Manning’s colleagues at the bank came up with an interesting typology to explain the success or failure of NPM in developing countries:

Emerging World Bank evidence is consistent with the proposition that it is only where the New Public Expectations have generated the motive and where Old Public Disciplines have provided the capability that any broad,

multi-sector public management improvements have been worthwhile—NPM style or otherwise (Manning 2001: 303).

A combination of capability and motive is therefore critical to the success of reform, NPM or not. In a sense, this evidence is also consistent with the African experience as my own observations of reform have found, it is exactly those countries that spend more on their civil services to put in place a meritocracy that are able to also advance on the new reforms (see Olowu 1999). In a sense, these elements sound very much like the pre-conditions Max Weber highlighted for a bureaucracy—*strong economy*, able to provide surplus salaries to pay an army of civil officials, commitment to *political and economic equality* and the existence of an *ethos* supportive of the public service.

In spite of these criticisms, most OECD countries adopted NPM type reforms and have not only promoted them in their own countries, but in those countries where their aid resources go. Several countries have therefore attempted these reforms in Africa—some based on the logic of their own social and political dynamics but many more based on the strictures and conditionality of bi-lateral and multilateral agencies. We examine this further in the next section.

### **Challenge of contextualising NPM in Africa—Main contributions in this volume**

The five papers in this volume can be categorised into two broad groups. The first are those that provide empirical cases of attempts at implementing NPM in African countries. The joint paper by Mutahaba and Kiragu focuses on the experiences of five African countries: Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia. These five countries include the western, eastern and southern parts of the continent, and being examples of countries that have received substantial donor support to implement NPM type reforms, their experiences are worthy of the attention devoted to them. They show both successes and failures, but more importantly, they underscore the notion of the three generations of reforms in the continent, all strongly supported by donors since the economic crisis of the 1980s. This suggests that each succeeding wave provides crucial lessons for the next. For instance, ‘third generation’ reforms have seven main elements. First, they took a differentiated approach to pay, with selective pay strategies for strategic groups or sectors such as tax management or special service delivery enclaves. Second, there was an effort to refocus government to its core functions: law and order, infrastructure and social services provision, regulation of the private sector and economic management. Third,

for other services for which the public sector had responsibilities, and even those within the core functions, attempts were made to separate provision from the production function, leading to the support for local governments and the creation of autonomous agencies, while at the same time strengthening the policy framework of government. Other elements of third generation reforms include greater emphasis on performance and the overhauling of personnel management practices to focus more on individual performance. In many countries, three-year contracts for heads of ministries, departments and agencies became the norm, ethical codes were updated and training policies were restructured as part of the fight against corruption. Finally, parallel efforts are also being made to modernise budgeting, financial management systems and information technology (Stevens and Teggenmann 2003; Phiri-Mundia 2003), and to re-define the strategic framework for cities (e.g. Kampala, see Nabukeera 2003). All these have made a difference in terms of improving performance and productivity in many cases. Apparently, these are all consistent with the NPM philosophy, but external players have largely driven them to set prescriptions of good governance that are not consistent with local political and economic realities. Most importantly, they are largely financed with donor funds with no real plan for sustainability or the localisation of the many key structural or institutional transfers. Yet, the current reforms—definitely more successful than the first set of reforms—still have their problems, which are highlighted in their paper.

A second paper in this genre focuses on the experience of Ghanaian cities in implementing NPM-type reforms of separating production from provision, or what Nicholas Awortwi refers to as having multiple providers instead of single government provision. The important lesson here is that governments require a different type of capacities in comparison to what they used to have. This includes the capacity to regulate, make, monitor and facilitate contract-based production of services they once produced directly. In other words, there is a quantitative and qualitative increase in transaction costs for reforming governments. Yet, the reduction of costs was the most important consideration for transferring the production to other producers. The issue is at the heart of the controversies over NPM even in the western countries.

The contribution by Asmelash Beyene belongs to the second category of papers in this volume—they try to interpret the context of African NPM. Beyene's paper derives from a major study initiated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in the 1990s on the constraints that small- and medium-scale enterprises confront in African countries.

The reason why this is an important and relevant study is that if the main challenge of African countries is to survive and prosper in an age in which globalisation has become triumphant, African governments need to position themselves to promote those enterprises that are likely to enable them to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalisation. His research again finds out that it is those countries that have good economies that are able to effectively support their SMEs. Asmelash Beyene and his colleagues found that the regulatory environment was wanting in many respects in the 13 countries they surveyed. Only countries like Mauritius, Tunisia actually provided an enabling policy and regulatory framework. A few others such as Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Morocco, Namibia and South Africa had a variable environment, while the others provided what he describes as a disabling environment.

The paper by Moses Kiggundu is the best one in this tradition. Drawing on micro and macro indicators, he argues quite effectively and persuasively that Africa is less prepared for globalisation than any other region of the world. Thus, this is the reason why Africa is getting less from globalisation than other regions, and thereby there must be a change if things are to be turned around. NPM is only one of such responses but there are much more important responses that must take place at the policy level before we engage the managerial. He counsels that the formulation of a response to globalisation will only be successful if it is based on nationally shared core values that define the strategic directions for the future. That would help these countries to respond to the present institutional weaknesses at macro and micro levels.

A paper that is difficult to place by my two-fold classification is the fine paper by Des Gasper. He reviews the evolution of NPM and subjects its doctrines to critical analysis. He argues that African policy managers must engage in critical thinking. NPM may not be helping in this direction. Nevertheless, from his case study of the South African response, he shows how public administration students and practitioners can collaborate to ensure that they make NPM relevant to their contexts rather than as defined by organisations attempting to interpret the interests of international capital for Africans.

Therefore, in a sense, we have a very broad variety of contributions, and it is important that these contributors have provided us with a balanced and empirical assessment of NPM in Africa. But they go beyond that to suggest how the NPM discourse can make more lasting but valuable contributions to African public sector management. Mutahaba and Kiragu suggest that African countries must pay attention to those issues

that have been largely avoided by bilateral and multilateral actors in their donor-based public sector reforms—the issues of how to build and retain capacity, and in particular how to improve pay in African civil and public services. Capacity building efforts that lose sight of how to sustain already built capacity are at best unproductive. Nicholas Awortwi concurs and suggests how this can be done at the municipal level with strong support by national and other actors.

Similarly, Moses Kiggundu and Asmelash Beyene suggest that African countries must pay attention to globalisation and how to take advantage of the opportunities it presents. Both are quite detailed in their discussions. While Kiggundu sees a policy response as more critical, he also suggests a number of specific institutional responses. Beyene is of the opinion that the cutting edge of industry in a continent that has experienced de-industrialisation is to provide an enabling framework for small and medium scale enterprises. Finally, Des Gasper proposes that the challenges faced by Africans are one that should force us to think more critically and constructively. His point underscores the importance of having effective national and regional research and training institutions on public policy and management. Many of these institutions established in the years following independence have gone comatose as the retinue of consultant took over advisory work on public sector reform in the continent. The universities and other colleges of higher learning have been similarly affected. The quality of their graduates is low, and they lack the wherewithal, the information base and equipment to make original contribution to policy debates. This is compounded by the fact that their brightest and best have become the subject of internal and external brain drain.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this special issue is that African management systems must not only respond to democratisation but also to globalisation. These two challenges require reforms that take us beyond NPM to a restructuring of institutions and systems of public policy as well as those of management. It will require radical restructuring of thinking in institutions within and outside the public sector, and such efforts must be orchestrated by political and administrative leaders, as well as leaders of research and training institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The last word must come from the paper by Moses Kiggundu. He argues that one of the reasons for lack of progress may be that 'too much attention is paid to undertaking specific reform and capacity building interventions, but not enough attention is paid to the development and articu-

lation of national core values and their relationship to the underlying values that drive globalisation'. Nationally and regionally, there would be a need for in-depth diagnosis and analysis of the readiness for globalisation—especially to take advantage of important regional initiatives such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the United State Government's African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the Trade for Development and Enterprise (TRADE), as well as various poverty reduction and capacity building strategies including the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). This must form the background to the relaunching of an agenda for a really New Public Management taking into consideration the context not only of globalisation but also democratisation. Indeed, these two should be the fundamental elements of an African administrative space, much in the same manner as the existing European administrative space. The current CAFRAD initiative would therefore need to be reformulated in the light of these developments.

African public administration systems have developed along the European prototypes. This special issue suggests that changes in the African political and economic contexts make important adaptations necessary. Democratisation, globalisation and the huge inequalities that pervade the continent are critical elements of the context. These coupled with the multiple crises in African public administration make rethinking essential. Clearly, Africa needs to overhaul its administrative systems to make them competitive and democratic. Such an effort must however be constructed by Africans themselves, though of course in active collaboration with external partners. If Africans are to lead the process, the commitment of the top political, administrative and civil society leadership would be necessary. Moreover, there is also the need for more research into African public management—one that connects the problem of financing the reforms locally with local structures and initiatives for reform in full view of insights from international experience. In such a framework, public management reform will be rooted in shared values necessary to confront the challenges of both democratisation and globalisation.

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