



Assessing the Impact of the New Public Management as Manifested in the Malawi Decentralization Policy (1998) and New Agricultural Policy (2005): A Case Study of Zomba District Agricultural Office (ZDAO) (Concept Paper).

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Abstract

A new wave in managing the public sector emerged on the scene with the inception of the New Public Management (NPM) approach late in the 1990s. However, almost every paradigm and approach that has been injected into public policies bears some significant impact, either positive or negative, on the masses given the particular context in which it operates. Mostly, considering the importance of food security for every nation, I have been prompted to analyze the impact of NPM in the agricultural sector. However, the analysis will draw a parallel line between Decentralization and New Agricultural Policy and show how NPM concepts are adopted in the two policies. In recognition of the introduction of commercialization, termination of subsidies, and introduction of decentralization in most Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs), District Agricultural Offices (DAOs) and Extension Planning Areas (EPAs), scrutiny and assessment will centre on the impact of NPM, its detrimental effects and beneficial ones.

Keywords: new public management (NPM), public sector, decentralization, new agricultural policy, devolution

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores and examines two public policies, Malawi Decentralization Policy and New Agricultural Policy, within the public sector which suggest there has been the implementation of the very concept of 'reinventing the government' as proposed by Osborne and Gaebler (1993:19-20) in the sector. Careful assessment will be placed on the effects of this coined 'reinvented government' administration also known as the New Public Management (NPM) approach on the policies aforementioned.

In recent years, Malawi's public sector has gradually transcended from the more rigid traditional approach of public service to more flexible public reforms espoused in the New Public Management doctrines. These reforms as recommended in the Civil Service Action Plan of 1996 "included the following: institutional rationalization and realignment with policy and legislative framework; viable human resource framework; conditions of service; performance contracts scheme; privatization; outcome based management and financial management systems; decentralization; outsourcing/contracting out; user fees; information communication technology; and economic management" (Malawi Government as cited in Tambulasi 2005:1). The climax of the reforms came with the formulation and legislation of the Malawi National Decentralization Policy in 1998 in which the Malawi Government had to decentralize and devolve all political and administrative authority to district levels as a process of consolidating democracy (Malawi Government 1998:1). It therefore becomes fruitless to assess the impact of the reforms devoid the inclusion of the elements of the Decentralization policy, and as such, emphasis will be placed on the policy as well.

The study adopts a qualitative methodology, with reliance on key informant interviews and personal interviews with Civil Servants at the Zomba Municipality Assembly and Zomba Ministry of Agriculture, in addition to desk research conducted at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. Due to limited time, the only area of focus was Zomba district and as a result, the findings cannot be generalized unless backed by the archival sources conducted through desk research. The research involved two interviews, one conducted at the Zomba Municipality headquarters with the Assistant Director of Planning and Development (DP&D), and another at Zomba District Agricultural Office with the Assistant District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO), at Kalimbuka township.

In this paper, the conceptual framework is outlined first, followed by the analytical framework of the two policies, of Malawi National Decentralization and New Agricultural Policy, a brief background of the study area, and then the description of NPM enshrined in the policies will be laid out, after which the focus will be on the impact of NPM in the Agricultural Sector and on all functions operated under the

Decentralization Policy dictates, then the challenges will follow and thereafter the matter will be put to rest in the conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a concept, New Public Management (NPM) emerged in the mid-1980s with the state-market debate when scholars started discrediting the “traditional public administration” both “theoretically and practically” (Hughes 2003:1). They started searching for a flexible, market-based form of public administration (ibid). Firstly, according to Osborne and Gaebler’s book, *Reinventing Government*, a “radically new way of doing business in the public sector” had to be mapped out to necessitate effective and efficient delivery of public goods (1993: xviii). According to Hughes (2003:4), the new model has been given several names such as “managerialism” (Pollit 1993); “new public management” (Hood 1991); “market-based public administration” (Lan and Rosenbloom, 1992); or “entrepreneurial government” (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993).

It is therefore defined as by Osborne and Gaebler as a paradigm shift with a set of operating principles. These principles include promoting *competition* between service providers, *empowering* the citizens by pushing the control out of the bureaucracy, focusing on *outcomes* and not inputs, being driven by *missions* not rules and regulations, defining clients as *customers*, *preventing* problems before they emerge, emphasizing energies on *earning* money rather than spending it, *decentralizing* authority, *operating on market mechanism* and not bureaucratic mechanism, and *catalyzing* all sectors- private, public and voluntary- into action to solve community problems (Osborne and Gaebler 1993:19-20). Tambulasi points out that the “key to the concept of NPM is the adoption of private sector instruments into the public sector” and the rationale of NPM is based on the assumption that “the private sector is efficient and effective because it utilizes market based principles” (Tambulasi 2007:3).

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the “new paradigm¹ for public management” was campaigned by the following eight characteristic “trends”: “strengthening steering functions at the centre; devolving authority, providing flexibility; ensuring performance, control, accountability; improving the management of human resources; optimizing information technology; developing competition and choice; improving the quality of regulation; and providing responsive service” (OECD as cited in Ocampo 2002:249). Driven by the support of

¹ NPM is described as a new paradigm since it stresses on the total overthrow of the traditional administration and the holistic adoption of the new model. Thomas Kuhn, described such a revolution, a “paradigm shift”, where the old model fails to answer apparent problems even when it is remodeled and adjusted. Paradigms are closed logical systems that change only through a revolutionary-all at once (Kuhn 1962:52).

OECD and the Commonwealth, almost all African countries have embarked on economic and political reforms aimed at liberalizing their economies and polities (Olowu 2002: 2).

However, greater emphasis is placed on the seven elements that summarize all the key principles of NPM as articulated by Hood (1991) and Owens (1998), which are briefly elucidated below.

Hands-on professional management

As Olowu puts it, the catchphrase for this element is “let managers manage”, this centres at providing autonomy and “substantive responsibility” (2002:3) for managers to operate their functions. His argument is based on the expression that accountability requires a clear assignment of action, not just a mere diffusion of power.

Explicit standards and measures of performance

Olowu authenticates that only after clearly defined goals, targets and indicators of success are available displayed, all performance would meet desired measures and standards (2002: 3). Setting standards is the best means of facilitating minimal wastages, and a focus on outputs and outcomes “in sharp contrast to the traditional administration” which had greater emphasis on inputs rather than outputs.

Emphasis on output controls and entrepreneurial management

Hood acclaims that resources be directed to areas according to measured performance and not assumed responsibilities when most of which have not been executed (1991:4). His guiding principle is the ‘need to stress results rather than procedures’.

Disaggregation of units

According to Hughes, this involves breaking up of large entities into ‘corporatized around products’ which have specialized areas of performance and the deal with each other at one ‘arm’s-length basis’ (2003:52). Olowu discovers that 70% of the British civil service is presently organized by executive agencies (2002:4).

Competition in the public service

Olowu affirms that NPM apply “market principles in the public sector” for efficient delivery of public goods. These principles include commercialization, privatization and market testing, which creates massive competitions and rivalry between producers (ibid). This rivalry works out the market exploitations through forcing competitors to lower their prices² and improve their quality products.

² According to some economic principles, this is eminent in situations where more producers are available to a minimal number of buyers, giving the buyers preference of choosing who to buy and who to sideline. However, in certain situations buyers would buy expensive products because of the quality of that product.

Stress on private sector styles of management practice

This involves moving away from the military-style of management to a more flexible and 'proven' private management style approach (Hughes 2003: 52; Olowu 2002:4). The style includes flexibility in "hiring", "firing" and "rewarding" justifiably through the output observed.

Stress on greater discipline and parsimony

Hood acknowledges the need for 'cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, resisting union demands, limiting "compliance costs" to business, which he typifies as "doing more for less" or being parsimonious, and checking resource demands of public sector (1991 :5).

These are the benchmark principles that have been employed in the assessment research and each policy will go through the lens of NPM based on the above mentioned principles. As Tambulasi points out that "NPM paradigm is notoriously difficult and slippery concept to pin down" (2005: 10), a clear straight jacket definition cannot be found in the literature, except for the various and complementary conceptions that attempt to describe NPM and its characteristics. Based on the conceptions provided above, the examination's *prima facie* focus will now be on the Malawi New Decentralization Policy and the New Agricultural Policy nexus, and how NPM has affected their implementation. As Ferguson and Mulwafu enlighten us that one of the major outcomes of the post-Cold War democratization in Africa is the devolution of authority from the Central Government to the Local Government, it became increasingly purposeless for the study to sideline the New Decentralization Policy 1998 (2004:1).

THE NEW ERA AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND DECENTRALIZATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS

In this section of the paper, a recap on what is comprised in the policies is the main focus. In the interest of the priority of the aims of this paper, the first to be discussed is The Malawi National Decentralization Policy as it sets the background to the New Agricultural Policy.

The Malawi Decentralization Policy (1998)

The Decentralization Policy was drafted as part of the process of consolidation democracy in Malawi (Malawi Government 1998:1). The major aim of the policy is to decentralize administrative and political authority to the district level (ibid). The National Decentralization Policy was finally approved in October, 1998, and the Parliament passed a new Local Government Act which championed the Decentralization Policy which was passed in the same year (Malawi Government 1998:2). The aims of the policy include: "devolving political and administrative

authority to district levels; integrating governmental agencies at the district and local levels into one administrative unit; diverting the centre of implementation responsibilities to the districts; and promoting popular participation in the governance and development of districts (ibid).

The immediate result of the Decentralization Policy was the empowerment of District Assemblies (DAs) in all developmental programmes according to the National Development Plans (ibid). The finances had to flow through the DAs which then disbursed it to various offices as intended and did not go directly to the Ministry offices and stations as before.

According to the policy, each DA is now headed by a Mayor, who is at the helm of administration and a councillor per ward or village. However, there are three types of Local Assemblies in Malawi: the city, municipal, town and district assemblies as Tambulasi and Kayuni elaborate (2007:11). Of these assemblies are only three city assemblies (Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu), one municipality (Zomba) and the rest are district or town assemblies. Mayors are appointed officials but could emerge from elected councillors, while councillors are elected through the Local Government Elections. Complaints on any developmental issues are supposed to be directed to the councillors, but however, since 2004, there have not been any councillor available as there have not been any Local Government Elections since 2000.

In the nutshell, the policy devolved the administrative powers from the central government to the local government through the empowerment of DAs in development programmes and rural participation.

The New Agricultural Policy (2005)

The policy came on board due to the difficulties followed by the failure to maintain the aims of the old agricultural policy. Before 1985, Malawi was self-reliant in food production and was producing enough even to export to the neighbouring countries according to the preamble of the policy (Malawi Government 2005:3). However following the liberalization and natural disasters such as famine, Malawi has become a “net importer of most agricultural products as maize, livestock and horticultural products” (ibid). In attempt to minimize this impact, the Ministry of Agriculture formed the Agriculture and Livestock Development Strategy and Action Plan in 1995 mandated to address the matter and it led to the formulation of the new policy (op. cit.:5).

The major objective of the new policy is to create “**a nation with sustainable food security and increased agro-based incomes**” (Malawi Government 2005:3). The specific policy objectives include; “revitalization and development of marketing

infrastructure in Malawi; commercializing maize production to achieve food security; development of agriculture zones to produce sufficient quantities of agricultural commodities” and others (Malawi Government 2005:12).

A BRIEF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXTUAL DESCRIPTION OF ZOMBA DISTRICT

This analysis is context specific to the Municipality of Zomba. As the former Capital City of Malawi, Zomba Municipal city lies 183 km to the eastern of Blantyre city, the Commercial City of Malawi, with two distinct sections, one mountainous low density area and lower high density area facing each other. This was the district which the colonial masters took for habitation, which offers the natural heritage of the mountain plateau, inland basin Lake Chilwa, clean mountain rivers, and large scale woodlands of eucalyptus plantations. The city’s old capital structures remain magnificently static to date, and it houses the administration of the University of Malawi, National Statistical Office, Malawi Police Training School and Headquarters, the first Malawi Army Battalion Cobbe Barracks camp, Malawi’s Maximum Prison, Malawi’s First Parliament, Malawi’s first State House and the first Government Administrative Structures.

According to the 2008 National Population Census (the most recent at the time of publication), the district had 670, 533 people occupying a land area of 2,580 km². The city’s population which largely locates to the mountainous side was only 87,633 (NSO, 2008). This population is mainly composed of smallholder farmers producing maize for consumption. According to the 2011 Welfare Monitoring Survey, 95.5% of the Zomba rural households and 55% of the city households grew maize as their staple food in 2010 – 2011 season, but 41.7% of the rural population and 42.9% of the city population had run out of food in the months of March to July, 2012 (NSO, 2012:111). This indicates the vulnerability for food insecurity and emphasizes the need for a feasible agricultural policy implementation to cushion the vulnerable populations. The district’s agricultural services are under the management of the Zomba District Agricultural Office (ZDAO), which is supervised by the District Assembly and the Zomba Municipality Council, following the Decentralization Act of 1998 and the current policy which the ZDAO uses is the New Agricultural Policy (2005). The ZDAO oversees eight Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) with an approximate total of 227,062 farming families as of 2007 as detailed below:

Table 1: Distribution of Farming Families and EPAs in Zomba district

Zomba Extension Planning Area Distribution		
	No. of sections	No. of Farming Families
Chingale	17	33398
Dzaone	14	33398
Malosa	8	19618
Mpokwa	17	29891
Ngwerero	9	22243
Msodole	8	27376
Thondwe	18	44715
Likangala	6	16423
Total	97	227062

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 2007

THE IMPACT OF NPM IN THE NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND DECENTRALIZATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

As already disclosed, the criteria for the assessment is based on the seven elements of New Public Management as articulated by Hood (1991) and Owens (1999). The impacts of NPM in the two policies, Decentralization Policy and the New Agricultural Policy, are assessed against the seven elements and are outlined below.

Improved Service Delivery

It has been observed that since the inception of NPM in the Agricultural sector, there has been an improved service delivery, due to hands-on professional managers promoted based on merit than political affiliation. The Assistant DADO³ realized that in the past, the public sector had ineffective service delivery, simply because officials were not properly qualified, but only favoured the ruling party. A similar observation was noted by the Assistant Director at the Municipality. This improved service delivery also owes to the explicit standards of performance introduced by NPM in the sector. According to the Assistant DADO each department at a District Agricultural Office has a mandate to ensure that quality is attained. There are some signs of internal marketing encouraged. The sector conducts performance appraisals annually to identify hard workers who could be promoted or be sent for further training.

Independence in the Operations of Tasks

Furthermore, departments have become autonomous and as such, they are able to manage their own affairs without external control especially from the Ministry of

³ Assistant DADO refers to the Assistant District Agricultural Development Officer; the superior of the position (District Agricultural Development Officer) is often referred to as a DADO.

Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) or the Machinga Agricultural Development Division (ADD)⁴. The Office is given finances through the Zomba District Assembly to budget without the dictation from the MoAFS or Machinga ADD. In the past, the finances went through the ADD and it was disbursed only when that ADD saw a need for the disbursement with some 'conditionality' dictations on the use of the finances. In other words, the Office had no mandate to draft its own budget and it had no stable financial allocation. According to the statements of the Assistant DP&D, Decentralization Policy has greatly empowered them as power has been devolved from the Central Government to the Local Government, making the Municipality more autonomous and independent.

Discipline and Time Management among the Civil Servants

According to the Assistant DP&D, at the Zomba Municipality, time and financial wastages have been minimized with the inception of NPM. Staffs are now motivated to work harder and keep time by increased salaries based on outcome and by an anticipation of acquiring promotion. Competition has driven workers to increase the quality of their output. While the Assistant DADO also consents to the same by recognizing that now job descriptions are followed except for those which require financial allocations which had not been the case in the past. With regards to fiscal discipline, she realized that at times the finances are used for some purposes not within the budget, according to need. However, she confesses that the finances are allocated for given period which falls within the given period without additions to the allocation. This has come with the element of discipline and parsimony introduced by NPM.

Improved Overall Output from the Clients

Especially with the emphasis on competition, there has been a recommendable increased output of farm outputs are the Assistant DADO testifies. Competition that came with the Agriculture Shows, where farmers had to display their commodities, encouraged farmers to emphasize on quality service delivery. The farmer who displays the best commodity gets awarded. This encourages farmers to increase their effort in the production process. In addition to the report from Sintha Mkuziwaduka that Malawi managed to export maize surplus weighing 400,000 metric tonnes⁵, is a sharp evidence of change from the previous records attributed to better and improved management.

Reduction of overheads as some expenses are met by the user fees

With regards to the introduction of user fees as pushed by the NPM assertion of "those who benefit pay" system facilitated the reduction of overheads in the Office. She exemplify that with the Zomba Residential Training Centre where in the past, farmers received free training through it accompanied accommodation and food, but recently,

⁴Zomba District Agricultural Office is affiliated under Machinga ADD.

⁵"Maize sold to Zimbabwe" The Daily Times, 22nd April, 2007

farmers are supposed to pay for some of their costs for the training. Another example given is that of Dip tanks, where also in the past, free services were offered, but with the Decentralization Policy, the dip tanks are now owned by various communities which charge for their services to cover for the maintenance costs. The similar approach is carried by the Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) underneath the ZDAO especially those managed by the ZDAO's Crop Development Department. These EPAs lease out ploughs, farm carts, tractors, ridgers, and other farm machineries at a fee to farmers in need of them. With regards to the benefits the element accrued to the Municipality, the Assistant DP&D asserts that the introduction of user fees in public toilets had paved way for accumulating resources that are used for maintaining the public toilets. However, he points out that the resources have not been enough for the maintenance work of most public toilets in town. Citing an example of the flea market, he suggested that the user fee of the market has not been for profits but maintaining its toilets and facilities.

Reduced responsibilities through contracting out/outsourcing

The work overloads that characterized most city assemblies during the former regime of public administration, is now a thing of the past, as the Assistant DP&D observed that most of the vigorous work were being outsourced to foreign workers at some fees. He cited the example of the Flea market which is managed by a private enterprise but declined to expose the name of that firm. As Tambulasi and Kayuni also pointed out that due to some vendors vandalizing of some facilities such as taps, the Zomba "local assembly decided to outsource the facility to some private service provider who (now) charges the users" (2007:14).

Private-Public Partnership as a Crisis Management Mechanism

Private-Public Partnership has benefited the public sector a lot in the areas where the public sector alone could not effectively deliver. The partnership is called upon as a 'rescue button' when the disaster strikes. According to the statements of Assistant DP&D, the Municipality worked with the private sector during the construction of the flea markets and during the Operation Dongosolo⁶. Tambulasi and Kayuni learns that Press Trust had donated some finances of up to K123 million for the construction (2007:11). On the other hand, the Assistant DADO also notices with relief that the current fertilizer subsidy programme is being operated in conjunction with the private sector such as AGORA, PANNAR SEED, Small Farmers Fertilizer Revolving Fund of Malawi (SFFRFM), and even with local agro-dealers. She emphasized that this PPP is taken across the country, as the Government intends to implement various humanitarian or development projects. In support of her assertion, villagers are also enjoying fruits of Private-Public Partnership, where the Government (Blantyre ADD) in

⁶ Operation Dongosolo is coined for the forced removal of vendors from the streets of all urban cities; the word, Dongosolo, according to Tambulasi and Kayuni means 'Order'.

conjunction with Oxfam Malawi has set a K7 million irrigation scheme in Thyolo at Sub T/A Khwetherere⁷. The emphasis on Private-Public Partnership (PPP) cannot be despised as greater synergetic gains were attained during the 2002 Hunger Crisis, when the Government worked hand in hand with the Private Sector in combating the disaster and recognizing the worst hit areas, as the Assistant DADO notices.

Difficulty in Downsizing of Staff

However, it was also noted that downsizing or redundancy became difficult to implement in the Municipality. The Assistant DP&D asserted that most workers had developed empathy with each other such that whenever, others were discovered to be on the list of those who were to be dismissed; their friends were greatly demoralized consequently. According to his report, from 2004 to 2007, the number of workers reduced from 520 to 420, yet out of this reduction, only 50 workers were dismissed, while other 50 workers retired.

Decentralization produced deficiency

Decentralization in the MoAFS brought reduction of supervision and consultation between the Central Government officials and the Local Government officials which necessitated the sharing of vital information for proper administration. Consequently, most workers at the Local Government Level are deficient of vital administrative knowledge and expertise, and they often make mistakes which can be easily avoided.

Democracy impinging on the Implementation of NPM

It has also been noticed that democracy and freedoms have worked against the full throttle implementation of NPM as most workers who are disadvantaged because of some of its elements, such as contractual policies, discipline, tend to challenge their rulings through the office of the ombudsman. That demoralizes the drive for the implementation of NPM to the extent that compromises must be involved whenever an action is to be taken against any offender.

CONCLUSION

The impact of the New Public Management has been largely beneficial than detrimental as observed above. The new approach to administration encouraged participation and reduced the dependency attitudes in the local communities. Both the Assistant DADO and the Assistant DP&D commended that the introduction of NPM was a positive development and required to be improved rather than abandoned all together whenever problems arise in its implementation process. The approach envisages seven elements according to Hood (1991) which includes; Emphasis on hands-on management, explicit standards of performance, emphasis on outputs than

⁷ "Oxfam in K7 million irrigation scheme" *The Daily Times*, 18th June, 2007

inputs, disaggregation of units, competition, private sector management styles, and greater discipline and parsimony. The resultant impacts of the NPM approach are both positive and negative. The positive impacts include: greater output observed from the client farmers, improved performance by the civil servants, reduction of overheads expenses, crisis management through the PPP, independence in the local authorities, and required levels of fiscal and behavioural discipline. However, the approach brought problems which include: downsizing and demoralization, deficiency of information and expertise through the alienation created by decentralization, and excess freedoms. However carefully crafted a paradigm might seem, it still would attract some unwanted consequences. The best paradigm is that which attracts less of detrimental effects and more of beneficial ones, and NPM does just that.

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