

## BOOK REVIEW

**Gelase G. Mutahaba, Benson Bana & Ernest Mallya, *Reforming Tanzania's Public Sector: Assessment and Future Directions*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki and Nyota Publishers, 2017. 465 pages, ISBN 978-9987-70-830-22**

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Despite international support, continued expressions of political commitment, and general agreement on the desirability of a strong public sector, the public sector reform (PSR) agenda in the region is better known for its many failures than its limited successes (Yanguas, 2017). Why many states in Africa seem to be stuck in a spiral of corruption and institutional weakness while others somehow manage to build effective bureaucracies that are able and willing to tackle the challenges of development? These interesting questions raised by Yanguas, capture the dynamics and politics of public sector reforms which have for decades been regarded by both international donors, government officials, and public administration scholars as critical for an efficient, responsive, transparent, and accountable public sector, particularly in the global south. Drawing from Tanzania's experience, Mutahaba, Bana, and Mallya in *Reforming Tanzania's Public Sector: Assessment and Future Directions* shed some light on those pertinent questions.

Their book presents a candid assessment of public sector reforms in Tanzania and beyond. The authors analyze public sector reforms in Tanzania using organizational and behavioural theories to illuminate a range of public sector reform practices, their justifications, and their performance from the historical past to the present.

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This book is worth reviewing for at least three reasons. First, it explores a topic with impeccable relevance in public administration research. Second, as noted in the opening section of the review, while some African countries seem to be stuck in mud puddles of inefficiencies, Tanzania seems to somehow build effective bureaucracies that are relatively capable of addressing development challenges. Interestingly, this book unlocks this puzzle. Third, the context of public sector reforms in Tanzania has evolved overtime since the book was published in 2017. The political dynamics and practices of public sector reforms have also evolved. The review will generate insights that will be useful for future public sector reforms interventions.

The authors organized the book into sixteen chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. They begin by setting the scene by contextualizing public sector reforms in the wider organizational and behavioral theories, reflecting on the conceptual foundations of public sector reforms, scope and highlighting the boundaries of public sector organizations. The authors also use the historical approach to reflect on the early reforms carried out at the time of independence, their rationale, and the institutional logic embedded in them. The reforms implemented during this period are dubbed as 'early reforms' covering the period from the 1960s to the early 1980s (pg. 22-28). In Chapter two, the authors locate public sector reforms from global and political economy perspectives, highlighting the internal and external triggers of public sector reforms. The remaining chapters focus on public sector reforms practices in different settings and sectors, covering subjects ranging from a review of public sector reforms in selected countries (Europe, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand); origins of public sector reform movements; status of implementation of cross-cutting reforms across different sectors to major reform shifts from the cross-cutting reforms to specific reforms in areas such as health services, education, water, agriculture, and land.

The book bolts several strengths. First, it offers a genuine assessment of the public sector reforms that Tanzania has implemented over the years. Previous studies on public sector reforms are narrow in scope and rather dated. Second, the book generates interesting insights on the subject of public sector reforms in Tanzania reflecting on practices, dynamics, and implementation across a wide range of sectors such as health, water, agriculture, land, etc. Third, the book makes a meaningful intellectual contribution to the discipline

of public administration and public sector management in Tanzania and beyond. Fourth, the author's expertise in public administration studies, including public sector reforms and first-hand experience on Tanzania and Africa's public sector reforms design and implementation enables them to analyze the subject of public sector reforms with clarity, force, and authority. Finally, the book reveals critical insights on public sector reform's historical trajectory in Tanzania and the discourses that inform current and future reforms.

Notwithstanding its strengths, there are some areas where the authors could have strengthened the book, making it more compelling. First, the book falls short of an elaborate methodological rigour. The methodological approach used is largely qualitative but does not address issues of sample size of the respondents, sampling techniques, how the data were analyzed e.t.c. Although the book claims to use several methods of data collection from respondents such as interviews and Focus Group Discussions, these methods are not detailed in terms of explaining how they were used. Equally, the analytical rigour is not seen in the methodology. It is difficult to comprehend how the collected data from both primary and secondary sources were analyzed to obtain the evidence that the authors use to make their arguments. Second, the writing style is more of a consultancy report than a solid academic book. This can be seen in the methodological part (pg. 30-31) and from Chapter two to the last Chapter (pg.33-435). These chapters' structure and argumentative style draw heavily from government reports on public sector reforms in the country and beyond. Third, the book does not tell the reader clear-cut objectives or questions it had set to respond to from the outset, although it mentions the objectives in the conclusion chapter.

Despite some reservations, the book, "*Reforming Tanzania's Public Sector: Assessment and Future Directions*" remains a relevant work for students of public sector management and Tanzania's public sector reforms in particular. Its theoretical and empirical contribution to the frontiers of knowledge on public sector reforms in Africa and beyond is likely to endure for generations to come.

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## Reference

- Yanguas, P. (2017). Varieties of state-building in Africa: Elites, ideas and the politics of public sector reform. ESID Working Paper No. 89, Retrieved from [https://www.effective-states.org/wp-content/uploads/working\\_papers/final-pdfs/esid\\_wp\\_89\\_yanguas.pdf](https://www.effective-states.org/wp-content/uploads/working_papers/final-pdfs/esid_wp_89_yanguas.pdf)
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