

Preface

Those who teach, research and advise in the field of development policy and management constantly grapple with key questions of public management reform. What is it exactly? How much of it is 'new' and how much merely a restatement of long-established ideas? What is the way ahead for public management in developing and transitional economies? Should governments keep providing most public services, or should they let private and civil society contractors in on the act? Should the centre cling to the reins of power so as to minimize corruption, or should it delegate downwards so as to empower frontline staff and the communities which they serve? Should reformers borrow from the innovations and practices of developed countries or should they seek to devise their own creative responses to the public management problems they face?

The aim of this collection is to move the public management reform debate forward by considering the ways in which these and other questions are currently being answered across a range of countries and systems. Many of the issues were raised in a 1997 International Conference at Manchester on Governance for the Twenty-first Century, and many of the contributors (Heeks, McCourt, Minogue, Mundy and Polidano) were more practically involved as advisers to the Presidential Commission on the Transformation of the Public Service in South Africa in 1998. We hope that a little of the enthusiasm, interest and commitment of these undertakings have survived to enhance the contributions to this book.

The questions raised rarely produce unproblematic answers, and the complexity of the diverse situations is compounded by the uncertain findings of existing empirical research. We therefore have no wish to insist on particular positions on public management reform, and sympathize with policy-makers who face hard choices and dilemmas. We hope that our contribution will help to clarify these dilemmas and choices, and demonstrate clearly the outlines of the necessary reform agenda on which a properly critical evaluation can be based.

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