

Fostering Change when Governance is Complex: Some Lessons from Practice

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I: Introduction

Since 2014, the University of Cape Town's Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance has offered a part-time Masters programme geared to public sector and civil society professionals in South Africa and elsewhere in Anglophone Africa. The mission of the school is to "promote and inspire public leadership in Africa". Consistent with that vision, a principal goal of the Masters programme has been to help evoke among its participants a sense of possibility, of the potential for 'agency'.

Wherever feasible, the assignments undertaken by Masters' participants have thus focused on topics closely linked to their work challenges. The Mandela School's Working Paper series¹ includes some of the resulting research outputs, which seem of sufficient interest to warrant a wider audience. This overview paper provides a conceptually-linked introduction to the twelve papers included in Table 1 - selected as illustrative of the School's distinctive approach to strengthening public leadership. (See the bibliography for online links to each of the papers.)

Table 1: Fostering change when governance is complex – twelve case studies

	<i>Isomorphic mimicry</i>	<i>Public entrepreneurship</i>	<i>Multistakeholder interaction</i>	<i>Hostile political principals</i>
<i>Governance of public service provision</i>		<i>Health:</i> a new clinic in Metro Cape Town (Grammer) <i>Community infrastructure:</i> implementing the expanded public works programme in Eastern Cape (Mageza)	<i>Health:</i> engaging traditional leaders (Morewane) <i>Electricity;</i> Establishing an executive agency in Johannesburg (Mabalane)	<i>Education:</i> obstacles to using participation to improve learning outcomes in Zimbabwe (Chikohomero) <i>Agriculture:</i> obstacles to improving extension in Eastern Cape (Keka)
<i>Strengthening 'productive' sectors – the governance dimension</i>	South Africa's 'big fast results' Oceans Economy initiative (Pretorius)		Implementing the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in Zambia (Mbuzi) Challenges of inclusive urban development in Cape Town (Uppink)	Governing Zimbabwe's Marange alluvial diamond deposits (Makombe)
<i>Other governance interventions</i>	e-government procurement in Zambia (Chenga)			Civil society policy engagement in semi-authoritarian Uganda (Nkwatsibwe)

¹ The Mandela School's Working Paper series is managed by Zikhona Sikota

All public policy Masters programmes have to balance the “what” and the “how” of public leadership. While the Mandela School Masters gives some attention to the “what” (with teaching faculty who combine academic rigor and sustained exposure as practitioners), its primary focus has been on the ‘how’. As Table 1 signals, the Masters engages the ‘how’ in a way which moves beyond conventional ‘best practice’, ‘plan-then-implement’ approaches to development, and focuses rather on some of the innovative approaches to development practice laid out in the [Doing Development Differently](#) manifesto.² To be sure, in some settings and for some logistically-oriented tasks, a ‘best practices’ approach may perhaps provide a reasonable point of departure. However, for most tasks and in most of the ‘messy’ governance contexts, which are the daily realities of most Mandela Masters’ participants, ‘best practices’ presumptions are profoundly unrealistic.

The rows in Table 1 group the twelve research papers along a familiar sectoral dimension; the columns group them according to their application of four sets of DDD concepts. The paper follows the logic of the columns:

- Section II illustrates the hazard of ‘isomorphic mimicry’ via the empirical analyses of Chenga (2019) and Pretorius’ (2018).
- Section III explores the role of ‘public entrepreneurship’, using the examples of Grammer (2018) and Mageza (2016)
- Section IV highlights four case studies of multistakeholder engagement, its potential and challenges - Morewane (2018); Mabalane (2019); Mbuzi (2019); and Uppink (2017).
- Section V explores the possibilities and limits of engagement in a hostile political environment via Keka (2019), Chikohomero (2019), Makombe (2017) and Nkwatsibwe (2019).
- Section VI concludes by highlighting a common thread which cuts across the case studies – how context matters in shaping which approaches to action are likely to yield positive development outcomes.

II: Isomorphic mimicry.

When a plan-then-implement approach to development is adopted in contexts where it does not fit, the result can be the production of documents, which have little, if any, influence on what actually happens. This endless elaboration of detailed policies and implementation plans, which never see the light of day (at least not in anything like the way, which was intended), has become a highly developed art form among many development practitioners. Why, given that this sequence of events is so common, does it recur so frequently?

Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2017, chapter 3, p.30) suggest an answer. Building on a rich tradition of academic research, they have given this art form a name – ‘isomorphic mimicry’. They define it as *“the tendency of governments to mimic other governments’ successes, replicating processes, systems, and even products of the “best practice” examples, but conflating form with function, leading to a situation where ‘looks like’ substitutes for ‘does’ - governments look capable after the mimicry but are not actually more capable. We refer to this combination of capability failure while maintaining at least the appearance and often the legitimacy and benefits of capability as “successful failure.”* ”

Two of the Masters research papers explore examples of isomorphism. The first of these is Kaputo Chenga’s³ (2019) study of Zambia’s experiment with electronic government procurement (e-GP),

² For details of those aspects of the DDD approach which are given sustained attention in the Mandela School Masters, see Levy (2014) and Andrews (2013, 2017); both Levy and Andrews teach in the Mandela School Masters. Note that along with DDD, the Masters also focuses on another aspect of the ‘how’, the challenge of ‘leadership’ – with strong emphasis on its personal, self-awareness and inter-personal aspects.

³ Governance Adviser, Department for International Development (DfID), Zambia

begun in 2014. Chenga drills down systematically from the macro-political to a micro-level case study of recent experience with e-GP in Zambia's medical supply chain. Along the way, she reviews in detail the evolution of the de jure system of public procurement in Zambia; the de facto counterpart; the impetus for introducing e-procurement, both in Zambia and more broadly; and how (beyond the health sector) the e-GP roll-out proceed in practice. Key findings include:

- There is a longstanding disconnect in Zambia between de jure procurement rules (and repeated initiatives to improve them) and de facto procurement practices. The latter are characterized by the use of discretion, opacity and misdirection along lines consistent with the broader personalized realities of Zambia's political economy.
- Public announcements related to e-GP were greeted with great political fanfare – but there was very little subsequent momentum for follow-through
- e-GP was “generic and non-participatory” - the brainchild of a small group of champions, some within the Zambian government, others donors; once the champions moved on (or, in some cases, were pushed out of their positions by their political masters) it was left with only minimal support.
- The health sector had been identified as an early adopter of e-GP – but as of mid-2018 none of the seven e-GP tenders initiated by the Health Ministry in mid-2016 were successfully concluded within the system; three were withdrawn and four were awarded ‘outside the system’, including at least one case with rampant subsequent cost-escalation.

Chenga concludes: *“It seems the e-GP has only been rhetorically welcome in the Ministry of Health. Interests and incentives of stakeholders appear to be at the core of success or failure of the e-GP as a procurement tool. The e-GP has more ‘blockers’ and fewer ‘supporters’ across the procurement spectrum. Progress on the e-GP appears like a façade of success, suggestive of isomorphic mimicry.”*

The second example of isomorphic mimicry in (in-)action is South Africa's Operation Phakisa (‘hurry up’ in Sesotho) – an initiative inspired by Malaysia's *Big Fast Results (BFR) programme*, which hugely impressed then president Jacob Zuma when he visited that country in 2013. Operation Phakisa was launched with great fanfare in 2014. The BFR/Phakisa logic is as follows: identify a set of priority problems; bring together all the key stakeholders in a six week (!!) ‘lab’ to develop a detailed blueprint (a ‘3-foot-plan’) for action; leverage the authority of top political leadership to drive implementation; take stock annually to assess progress and modify strategy as necessary.

Pieter Pretorius's⁴ (2018) assesses in depth the experience of the Oceans Economy Operation Phakisa, the first major effort at implementation. He finds the following:

- There was a massive proliferation of targets (3,090 across the four selected action areas of aquaculture; marine protection and governance; marine transport and manufacturing; and oil and gas) - but very limited achievement, three years into the process (with exception of the oil and gas working group).
- A proximate cause for the limited achievement was that lines of management authority and staffing for Operation Phakisa initiatives were not clearly defined – unlike Malaysia, which put in place a robust management structure for BFR implementation.
- The underlying cause for Operation Phakisa's shortfalls lies in differences between Malaysia and South Africa in their ‘political settlements’ – whereas in Malaysia decision-making was concentrated and developmentally oriented, in South Africa there was more diffusion of decision-making, with limited pressure for performance from topmost levels. Momentum thus depended on the commitment and authority of upper-middle political and bureaucratic tiers, which largely were lacking.

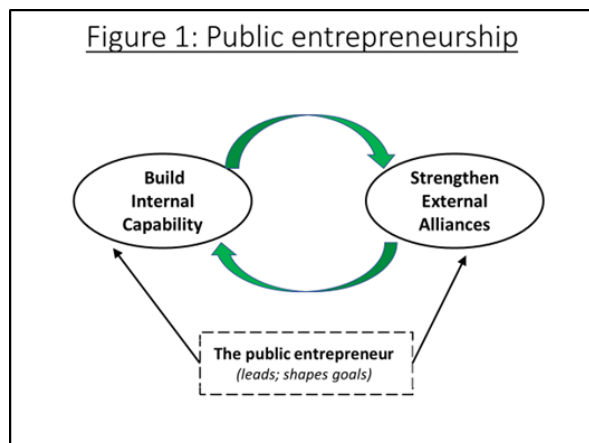
⁴ Chief Financial Officer, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Republic of South Africa

- The oil and gas action area turned out to be the revealing exception. By contrast, to the others, it was robustly managed, in an adaptive way, with systematic engagement of a broad range of stakeholders throughout the implementation process. It identified fewer - but more demanding - targets and met most of them on time. It helped facilitate major new investment in the sector.

Pretorius concludes by highlighting what, for all of the shortfalls in implementation, has been learned from the Operation Phakisa experience: *“It has brought into the spotlight the general weakness of the state to deliver, an inability to transform quickly, and the challenge of building sustainable relationships between different actors that normally operate in bureaucratic silos, governed by legislation rather than a spirit of co-operation...Results could be big, but are unlikely to be fast; incremental, rather than transformational.”*

III: Public Entrepreneurship

One of the many limitations of a plan-then-implement approach is that it conceives of development in mechanical, engineering terms. It ignores the ways in which political, social and institutional obstacles can confound the best-laid-plans – and the potential for ‘human agency’ to seek out ways to work around these obstacles. Drawing on the path-breaking work of Daniel Carpenter (2001), the Mandela School Masters brings human agency back in, under the rubric of public entrepreneurship. (In Carpenter’s framing, the natural home for public entrepreneurship is with upper-middle management – a principal target group for the Masters - not the top-most tiers of politics and the bureaucracy.) As Figure 1 illustrates, exercising such leadership involves clarifying/shaping goals, building internal capability, and strengthening external alliances. The process is mutually reinforcing. Stronger capability adds to reputation and the potential for building alliances; stronger alliances win more space for action, including to further strengthen internal capability.



Two research studies illustrate the central role of ‘agency’ on the part of upper-mid-level public sector managers in achieving positive development outcomes. Quinton Mageza’s⁵ (2017) research explores how a committed team of public entrepreneurs in South Africa’s Eastern Cape province successfully initiated and scaled-up implementation of the Vukuzakhe (an isiXhosa word meaning ‘wake up and build yourself’) community-anchored, labour-intensive public works programme. Key achievements included:

- An expansion in the number of work opportunities created per year from 1,950 (equivalent to 814 full-time job opportunities) in 2006 to 37,086 (9,286 full-time equivalents) in 2013.

⁵ Chief Director, Expanded Public Works Programme, Eastern Cape Department of Roads & Public Works

- A doubling in the proportion of overall work performed under the programme using labour-intensive methods - including a rise in the share of road maintenance undertaken by labour-intensive methods from less than 20% in 2010 to 72% by 2015.
- A re-orientation of effort away from main provincial roads (the 'comfort-zone' of the outside consultants) towards inaccessible community-access roads.

Key to achieving these gains was a shift from a predominantly outsourced initiative 'captured' by outside project consultants, to one managed and implemented within the department. (In the first five years of implementation, in an arrangement, which was a hangover from institutional arrangements which prevailed during the pre-democratic Bantustan era, the consultants were paid about 40% of programme revenues.) Changes in both internal capability and external alliances were key to the shift:

- To build internal capability, key steps included:
 - Secondment to the department of an International Labour Office (ILO) Technical Adviser to help build capacity within the department.
 - A programme with the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to train front-line staff in project administration and social facilitation.
 - A shift in payment mechanisms away from (prior to 2011) a consultant-managed process to one where, as of 2015, all beneficiaries were paid via the South African Post Office.
- To strengthen external alliances, a variety of participatory community-level structures were introduced, including:
 - The establishment of road forums in all communities where the Vukuzakhe programme was active – as a locus for “ensuring alignment of plans with local authorities, buy-in of local politicians and communities, and inculcating transparent and locally-responsive ways of identifying projects”.
 - Appointment of 'community overseers' from a list of names endorsed by local councilors and traditional leaders.
 - The establishment in each municipality where the Vukuzakhe programme was active of 'EPWP Political Committees' comprised of local councilors, traditional leaders and departmental officials; the committees were charged with “unblocking high-level implementation challenges, focusing the EPWP on community development, and enforcing vertical and horizontal accountability”.

As Mageza explores, central to these achievements was a sustained act of 'public entrepreneurship' – 'evocation of 'agency' by the Deputy Director General who oversaw the initiative, working closely with the Chief Director (Mageza himself) and the Director directly responsible for Vukuzakhe programme implementation

Kathryn Grammer⁶ (2018) uses the example of the ten-year process of successfully commissioning a new health centre to serve a low-income community to illustrate the centrality of public entrepreneurship in getting things done; in 2017, the third year of its operation, the Du Noon centre provided services to over 150,000 walk-in patients.

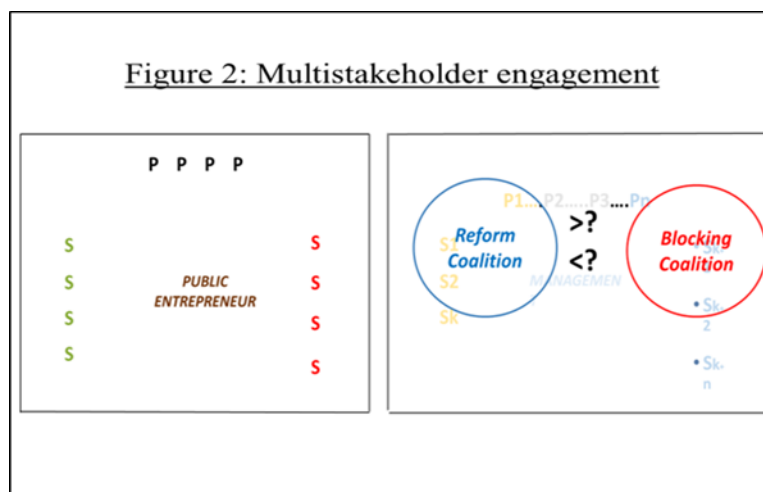
Commissioning a health clinic within a (by all accounts) well-functioning Health Department in the Western Cape provincial government might superficially seem to be a classic example of a plan-then-implement logistical task. In fact, as Grammer documents, the process was shaped by repeated crisis management by a coherent, dedicated team, with each crisis affording an opportunity for one or both of building internal capability and strengthening external alliances. Key moments included:

⁶ Director, Metro District Health System, Western Cape Health Department

- Winning commitment to build the new hospital – which had not been incorporated into the Health Department’s planning process, and only came onto the agenda in the wake of 2008 xenophobic violence within metropolitan Cape Town. The challenge of preparing a credible business case, and navigating the multiple bureaucratic processes required to win approval was a powerful spur for capability development within the Metro District Health Services (MDHS) team responsible for the project.
- Finding a site for the centre – a three-year process which, beyond the logistical, called for the development of skills in building external alliances to negotiate consensus on the site among community leaders, who held a variety of distinct views as to where the clinic should be located.
- A crisis in early 2012 when protests against the poor conditions of the pre-existing clinic in the area led to some health care officials briefly being taken hostage. The subsequent sense of urgency to accelerate action enabled the MDHS team to deepen its ‘external’ relationships with other parts of the Western Cape bureaucracy, as well as community leaders – and, in so doing, consolidate its internal effectiveness in responding to pressure.
- An effective team response to the challenge of re-prioritizing activities in the wake of 2015 Health-Department-wide budget cuts – further strengthening internal capability, and enabling the clinic to move to the provision of 24-hour service, and maintain labour peace, even in the face of unexpected financial stringency.

IV: Multi-stakeholder Engagement

A plan-then-implement approach presumes that the public purpose is clear, shaped by one or another well-defined principal (selected democratically, or otherwise) who communicates the social goal to policymakers and implementing. The reality (especially, but not only, in messy governance settings) is that much of the time there are multiple principals, with competing visions of the public (or personal) goal. Further, for any specific problem, there are likely also to be multiple stakeholders who can influence what happens, for good or ill. As Figures 2a and b illustrate, one way in which a public entrepreneur seeking to address the problem can make gains is to engage with a variety of stakeholders in ways which strengthen a developmental coalition – of course, the possibility also exists that a non-developmental (perhaps predatory) coalition could win out.



Four of the Masters research papers explore how (for good or ill) multistakeholder engagement plays out in practice. Ramphelane Morewane⁷ (2018) examines in depth how the engagement of traditional leaders was key to the implementation of a culturally-sensitive policy intervention, namely

⁷ Chief Director, Regional Health Services, National Department of Health

male medical circumcision (MMC). MMC became a policy priority in 2011 for two reasons: because circumcision was shown to have important protective effects in reducing the risk of HIV infection; and because traditional circumcision was associated too-often to be politically and socially acceptable with severe injury, or death.

Many traditional leaders initially were reluctant to support MMC; a range of efforts to reach out to these leaders through multiple channels turned this around. Morewane tracks the roll-out of MMC in three districts within South Africa's Limpopo province. Interventions to win the support of traditional leaders included:

- Ongoing dialogue between the Department of Health and the Local Houses of Traditional Leaders in at least one of the districts;
- Development of a joint protocol between the Department and traditional leaders, in terms of which any traditional leader seeking to open a school for traditional medical circumcision (TMC) was required to apply for a permit from the government department which acted on behalf of traditional leaders – and to incorporate arrangements for a dual MMC/TMC process.
- Cultural responsiveness in the assignment of medical and support staff – including by using staff from the relevant localities, having MMC conducted by staff who themselves were familiar with (and generally had themselves been through the TMC process), and limiting the involvement of women (who traditionally were excluded from TMC) in dialogue and implementation of the programme.

As Morewane details, these interventions resulted in a rapid expansion of MMC across the three districts – from under 5,000 in 2012 to over 45,000 just two years later.

Lauren Uppink's⁸ (2018) dissertation comprises a careful process-tracing analysis of the evolution, over a two-year (2014-2015) period, of a multi-stakeholder planning and development process (the Greater Tygerberg Partnership; GTP) which was intended to address the spatial and development challenge of building a more inclusive Cape Town along the Voortrekker Road Corridor (VRC) Integration Zone. Her dissertation is an example of how the Mandela School Masters can, sometime, straddle the boundary between academia and practice. Not only was Uppink part of the staff supporting the initiative, her Mandela School work undertaken in 2014 turned out to have a significant influence on how the GTP unfolded.

At a high level, the GTP presented an inclusive vision of the way forward. However, Uppink's research revealed that beneath the surface its goals were much narrower:

- While the GTP's original board of directors formally was made up of multiple stakeholders, in practice 7 of the 14 members were from the private sector, and only one (president of the Western Province Rugby Football Union!) formally from civil society.
- The GTP repeatedly advocated (against repeated objections by the City of Cape Town's Spatial Planning and Urban Design department) that it be given the role of "development catalyst" – framed initially to position the GTP as the "driver of combining public and private investment into viable development projects", including "the packaging of land, and the land release and tender process".
- The GTP's priorities were geared towards elites within the VRC:
 - Little work was done to "understand who actually lives, works or plays in the VRC"
 - None of the proposals emanating from the GTP included any effort (except at the most general rhetorical level) to address the urgent need among residents in the area for affordable mixed-income and social housing.
 - The GTP's principal practical focus was on "mega-block scale retail and commercial property development opportunities – including a proposal from a "private sector

⁸ Development integration officer, City of Cape Town (at time of writing)

agent with design scenarios for the Bellville City Core, including a vision for Bellville station redevelopment with a major retail component”.

Once the above surfaced, a change process to “rescue urban regeneration from patronage” gathered momentum. As Uppink’s paper details, this process was supported by a Mandela Masters ‘action research’ course, built around the innovative ‘problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) methodology. Key steps included:

- Clarification that, notwithstanding the composition of the GTP’s Board, the key authorizer for the partnership and its management was the office of the Mayor of Cape Town.
- Leveraging the authority of the authorizer to replace top management of the GTP - seconding a senior City of Cape Town official to perform the role of GTP CEO.
- A restructuring of the board of directors – reducing the role of members linked to property development, and bringing onto the board new members more closely aligned to efforts to foster inclusive urban development
- Initiation of a series of ‘quick win’ public space initiatives – geared to signal responsiveness to the concerns of the majority of residents along the VRC.

While, as of the time of writing the dissertation, the longer-run impacts of these changes remained uncertain, the process documented by Uppink is a rich real-time example of the potential developmental benefits of a shift from a formalistic engagement (where the disconnect between words and practice can be large) to one centred around a vision of pro-active public entrepreneurship and multistakeholder engagement in pursuit of an inclusive development vision.

Loyiwe Mbuzi⁹ (2019) uses the example of the Zambia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (ZEITI) to explore the potential for international standards-based global multistakeholder initiatives to improve governance in personalized competitive settings such as Zambia. Copper mining has long been Zambia’s main industry, and largest foreign currency earner. Against the backdrop of Zambia’s personalized, competitive politics (with relatively weak formal institutions, and high levels of corruption), what happens to the profits from copper has long been a subject of controversy.

Zambia is one of 51 countries implementing the EITI process; it initiated the process in 2008, and was validated as a fully-compliant member in 2016. The EITI provides two sets of platforms to help address the challenge of natural resource governance: a robust mechanism for bringing transparency to company-country financial transactions; plus a requirement that participating countries establish an in-country multistakeholder body (comprising six representatives of each of government, private sector and civil society actors) to oversee the transparency mechanism, and more broadly engage with one another around issues salient to the mining sector.

Is the EITI a mechanism for ‘transparency-washing’ or does it genuinely have potential to transform policy and practice related to the mining sector? Mbuzi’s research finds striking evidence in support of the latter view:

- The half-dozen civil society participants on the multistakeholder body comprised highly respected, informed activists (including Publish what you pay Zambia; the Zambia Council of Churches; Action Aid; and the Southern Africa Resource Watch).
- The ZEITI Reconciliation reports on mining revenues provided robust, publicly available information on mining revenue flows which “demystified the many rumours held by the public regarding the sector”.
- The ZEITI Secretariat “goes beyond the collections of data and puts emphasis on the use of this data to stir debate and influence reform” – helping to “facilitate discussions about policy

⁹ Senior Monitoring & Evaluation Officer, Zambia Anti-corruption Commission

on mining contracting processes, tax payments, and how the government spends the revenue it receives in Zambia”. (p.36)

- ZEITI advocacy for the requirement of a declaration of Beneficial Ownership of the country’s mining companies resulted in a new administrative effort to document BO by the Patents and Company Regulatory Authority.
- ZEITI developed a “Mineral Value Chain Mechanism” to monitor each step in the copper value chain from “preliminary studies and discussions about whether to extract, through the contracting process, to tax payments, to how the government spends the revenue it receives”. (p.36)

Kabelo Mabalane’s¹⁰ (2019) research explores how the relationship between the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and its City Power electricity utility affected service provision.¹¹ In the early 2000s, the Johannesburg Metro embraced innovative ‘new public management’ approaches to improving public service provision. It transformed many of its frontline service provision departments into autonomous executive agencies, complete with their own boards of directors. As the experience with City Power (the largest of these) shows, the result was very far from what was intended:

- City Power and the Metro were continually at loggerheads over goals – with City Power management focused on its bottom-line, and the Metro pushing for decisions more aligned with its “pro-poor service delivery philosophy”.
- The presumption had been that, as an autonomous executive agency, City Power would manage its own revenue. However, receipts from electricity payments comprised the equivalent of about 40% of the Metro’s revenue.
- The Metro, with the purported intention of introducing a single-payment regime for all city services, took control of billing – and put in place an ambitious new, information-technology driven revenue management and customer interface.
- The new billing system was riddled with inaccuracies – with City Power refusing to take any responsibility for the resultant ‘electricity billing crisis’, and non-payment, on the grounds that billing was no longer under their control.
- Eventually, City Power did respond, with a major new procurement contract (not approved by the City) to install electricity meters. However, the metering system and the billing system were incompatible with one another; blame-shifting proceeded in all directions.

Following a transfer of political control of the Metro, the initial intent of the new political leaders was to re-centralize control. They settled, however, on a wholesale replacement of the pre-existing board of directors with others more to their liking.

V: What is the scope for development gains in an adverse political context?

The messy reality in which development practitioners work often has little relation to the presumption (implicit in top-down, plant-then-implement approaches) of a well-defined developmentally-oriented principal. The institutional backdrop in the research studies introduced in Sections III and IV is one of multiple principals, multiple goals, and multiple stakeholders vying for influence. But there are other, potentially even more difficult, scenarios. Sometimes the hierarchical principal-agent relationship may be clear, but with a principal whose goals are not supportive of development. At other times, the scope for public entrepreneurship might be constrained by a dominant principal who limits space for multistakeholder engagement. Four research studies explore the potential and limits of what can be done in these latter scenarios.

¹⁰ State Security Agency.

¹¹ Mabalane’s case study is a somewhat awkward fit in this sub-section, insofar the stakeholders involved all are within government. I included it here both because the case is an example of how conflicts among principals can undermine public service provision and because, contra the focus of the next section (the other place where the case could have been presented), it would not be accurate to characterize the City of Johannesburg as an ‘adverse political context’.

Ayanda Keka's¹² (2019) research focused on the interplay between politics and the quality of the agricultural extension services provided by the Eastern Cape's Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform to small farmers in the province's Joe Gqabi district. The research used an innovative combination of process tracing of the interactions between political changes and the quality of bureaucratic management, plus a 'dynamic inquiry' methodology to assess the perceptions of long-time front-line extension workers in the district.

By the mid-2000s, South Africa (and the Eastern Cape department) had converged around an approach to agricultural extension built around principles of participation, problem-oriented-focus, management strengthening and continuous evaluation. In the initial years of implementation, the roll-out proceeded smoothly. Extension officers described the 2006-9 period as one where they were strongly motivated, adequately resourced with the requisite equipment for their work, embedded in a responsive hierarchy, including visible, supportive leadership.

However, from 2009-2011 (following political ructions at the national level within the ruling African National Congress, which cascaded down to the provincial level) there were wholesale changes in both the political and bureaucratic leadership of the department. The result was a major reversal in the quality of management, and the ability of extension officers to do their work, as evidenced by:

- A shift in budget to top-line administration – the number of senior managers rose from 23 in 2006 to 60 by 2013.
- A major reversal in how extension officers perceived their working environment. They described their environment for the 2010-2013 period as one characterized by bossy, authoritarian leaders, resource and equipment shortfalls, a 'dented image' and politicized decision-making.
- A series of top-down commands (resisted to the extent feasible by front-line staff) to undertake initiatives – e.g. planting crops out-of-season – which were simply infeasible, and destined to fail (which they did).

Ringisai Chikohomero's¹³ (2019) analysis of a programme to improve educational outcomes in Zimbabwe by supporting School Development Committees (SDCs) provides another example of a seemingly promising reform which subsequently turned sour as a result of a shift at the political level. By 2008, Zimbabwe's once widely hailed education system was on the brink of collapse. In part, this was a result of the broader (politically-driven) collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, whose GDP had fallen in half over the previous decade. Additionally, as Chikohomero documents, the decline in education sector performance also was a result of growing governance shortfalls. Over the course of two decades, the education sector had become a key part of the mechanism of control of the dominant political party, ZANU-PF. The behavior of employees shifted from compliance with rules, to "obedience" to hierarchical superiors – and from there to acquiescence in patronage and other non-developmental decisions emanating from higher-ups in the system.

In 2008, a contested national election resulted in agreement between ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to establish a Government of National Unity; the Ministry of Education was allocated to the MDC. Meanwhile, in the face of broader systemic collapse, there had been local-level experimentation with empowerment of SDCs (the one education governance institution that continued to function through the crisis). The GNU embraced this more participatory approach. Working together with international donors, between 2010 and 2012 capacity development support was provided to SDCs in 5,519 schools – reaching 21,573 SDC members.

For all of its seeming promise, the initiative did not last. The reforms threatened the bureaucratic foundation of ZANU-PF control. Notwithstanding the change in ministerial control, ZANU-PF officials

¹² Coordinator: Agriculture and Forestry – Joe Gqabi District Municipality

¹³ Currently, Institute for Security Studies; 2007-2012, Development Adviser, SNV, Zimbabwe

remained in control of the bureaucracy – with the top official determined to “show that ZANU-PF, not the GNU was in control”. In the 2013 election, ZANU-PF won back complete electoral control – and quickly put an end to the participatory initiative.

The remaining two studies in this group document how a search for entry points for governance improvement potentially can gain traction, even where the broader political environment is hostile. Makombe (2019) describes in rich detail the history of governance challenges associated with Marange alluvial diamond deposits in Zimbabwe. They are among the richest diamond reserves in the world – but for the initial years of alluvial mining (which began informally in 2006) they provided very little revenue to the country’s fiscus. Makombe examines carefully whether and how, notwithstanding what seemed on the surface to be monolithic top-down control by ZANU-PF, entry points for governance improvement might nonetheless be found. The study explores two sets of initiatives. The first comprises engagement via Zimbabwe’s parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy – a process of engagement which was initiated during the Government of National Unity period (though it is noteworthy that the committee was chaired at the time by a senior ZANU-PF member), and continued subsequent to ZANU-PF’s landslide 2013 electoral victory. The second entry point comprised a 2014-2016 initiative to elicit participation by local communities – leveraging as an entry point, Zimbabwe’s Community Share Ownership Trusts, established with great fanfare by then President Robert Mugabe in 2011. Both initiatives gained at least some momentum – pointing to the potential for pragmatic, adaptive engagement to achieve at least some (modest) improvements in governance, even in a seemingly adverse political context

Finally, Chris Nkwatsibwe¹⁴ (2019) offers a glass-half-full narrative. He explores comparatively the effectiveness of a variety of alternative engagement strategies by civil society in ‘semi-authoritarian’ Uganda. Nkwatsibwe distinguishes among strategies according to the extent to which the NGO approach was threatening content-wise and whether the approach to engagement was confrontational, collaborative, or somewhere in-between. Using process tracing methodology, he drills down in depth into civil society initiatives in two areas: a 2014-2016 free and fair elections campaign; and (the focus here) the evolution between 2000 and 2016 of efforts to influence the content of legislation to regulate non-governmental organizations.

Nkwatsibwe documents a clear difference between the (more confrontational) 2000-2006 approach to influencing the NGO legislation, and the more collaborative approach adopted subsequently. He details a series of confidence-building measures adopted by NGOs in the latter period, including:

- Investment by NGOs in their knowledge base;
- Outreach to build support for their position among the general public;
- Engagement with state stakeholders – including working with parliamentary committees, informal alliances with sympathetic parliamentarians and government officials.
- Participation in an advisory team of experts, comprising four government & four civil society members, appointed by the relevant government Minister.

He finds that the less threatening, more collaborative approach was more effective, in the sense that Uganda’s 2016 NGO Act and 2017 NGO regulations were “the most progressive set of NGO legislation Uganda ever had, both in letter and spirit”. He also cautions, however, “that it would be wrong to assume that this translates into a better operating environment for NGOs in Uganda. Far from that, the macro operating environment for NGOs has remained the same since the passing of the Act.” (p.33)

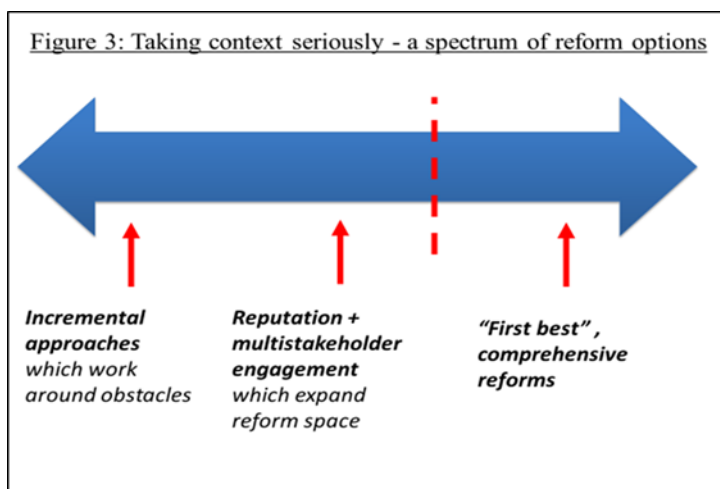
¹⁴ Resource person, Uganda National NGO Forum

VI: Conclusion – engaging contextually

The idea that context matters is a common thread which links the twelve research studies highlighted in the paper. Key questions about context addressed (implicitly in some, explicitly in others) include the following:

- How does the political-bureaucratic interface work in practice across a variety of distinct contexts? (Sections IV and V)
- Across different contexts, how much scope is there for agency on the part of public entrepreneurs? (Sections III-V)
- Who are the relevant stakeholders within a particular context (including sector-specific contexts)? How can public entrepreneurs engage these stakeholders in ways which can help build a developmentally-oriented coalition? (Sections III & IV)
- What are the consequences of engaging in ways, which fail to take context seriously? (Section II on isomorphic mimicry and the City Power case study in Section IV)

Figure 3 provides one way to summarize the implications for action of questions along the lines of the above. At one extreme (not shown) is inaction, a prescription of despair that in some contexts, nothing is possible; at the other extreme is the embrace of ‘best practice’ prescriptions, regardless of whether they actually fit the context. In-between are the practical options of adapting the ambition of what is attempted to what the context will bear - and/or (as per the half-dozen case studies which document relative successes) leveraging stakeholder engagement as a way of expanding space for development. As the figure suggests, being a development practitioner (inside or outside the public sector) calls for making choices as to which strategy to pursue, and how to engage; it is a craft, not a science.



At the heart of this process is a willingness on the part of those who manage within the public service – and of the civil society actors who engage with them – to be pro-active, seeking out, and following through on opportunities for making a difference, which are responsive to the contexts in which they find themselves. As the twelve research projects highlighted here hopefully illustrate, evocation of agency along these lines is what the Mandela School Masters programme endeavors to foster.

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