

**EXAMINING MALAWI'S PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS AND ITS IMPLICATION
ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP: POTENTIAL HINDRANCE TO
PROGRESS?**

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT THESIS

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used acknowledgements have been made.

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Full Legal Name

Signature

17th April, 2024

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I, the undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with my approval.

Signature_____

Date_____

Happy Kayuni, PhD (Professor)

SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Prof. B. J. Uledi-Kamanga, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake and that every large task can be accomplished.

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All in all, I give thanks to the Lord God Almighty for making this possible; I will forever glorify Your name.

ABSTRACT

Recognized by almost all scholars as an important determinant of success in Public Sector Reforms, leadership plays an essential role in shaping the nature and direction of organizational evolution. This study analyses the complex landscape of leadership within the context of Public Sector Reforms in Malawi (Using the case of National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens), undertaking a systematic examination of its role on various elements of reform implementation. Specifically, with the general consensus among scholars on its significance, leadership emerges as a prerequisite in the effectiveness and success of public sector reforms. The main aim of the study therefore is to identify and examine the complex leadership factors that affect the implementation of public sector reforms. A unique feature of this study is the exploration of the potential effect of different leadership styles—ranging from supportive and directive to participative and achievement-oriented—in facilitating the successful execution of Operational Reforms, Financial Reforms, Administrative Reforms, and Management Reforms. Using a qualitative approach, the research methodology involved in-depth interviews with a diverse range of participants, which included general staff, middle management, and senior government officials. The study sample, consisting of 30 respondents, provides helpful perspectives into the complexities and challenges faced in the pursuit of public sector improvements. One of the notable finding is that funding and resource inadequacies (which ultimately affect leadership) emerge as prominent barriers to effective reform implementation, along with a discernible shortage of leadership personnel suitable for driving these transformations. Despite these challenges, the study explains specific instances of commendable progress. This research not only exposes the challenges but also emphasizes the essential role of leadership in progressively steering the direction and determining the outcomes of Public Sector Reforms in Malawi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
GOM	-	Government of Malawi
MDAs	-	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
PSR	-	Public Sector Reforms
PSRMD	-	Public Sector Reforms Management Department
SC	-	Statutory Corporations
SOE	-	State Owned Enterprises

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the background information which gives an overview of public sector reforms followed by definition of key concepts; the chapter then presents the problem statement of the study. After discussing the problem statement, the chapter highlights the study objectives and the study questions. Lastly the chapter states the justification of the study and outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background information

Public sector reforms are now a general occurrence in different countries worldwide with the intention of boosting the provision of services, advancing efficiency, addressing political expectations, satisfying economic development conditions, aligning with the citizen's needs and desires, and supporting general governance standards (Dzimhiri, 2012).

Although there has been a push, in most African countries, towards adopting public sector reform initiatives, there is evidence that these reforms have not fully delivered what is generally promised in the official documents (Dzimhiri, 2012, p. 51). It is argued that desired positive results from PSR have not been achieved because of several reasons. Schacter (2000, p. 24) argues that the donor community's technocratic approach can also be blamed for the failure. Specifically, he explains that: This technocratic approach is based on a blue print solution in which there is an assumption that public sector reforms problems and their solutions could be fully specified in advance, and that projects could be fully defined at the outset and implemented on a predictable timetable over a fixed period (Schacter 2000, p. 7).

In other words, according to Schacter (2000), the whole idea of conceptualization and even plans of implementation were all done either in Europe or America and had no real connection to the geographical place of implementation in Africa. Consequently, what was initially conceptualized became more theoretical than practical.

Secondly, another important factor responsible for the failure of public sector reforms in Africa is what Brautigam (1996, p. 99) calls the “non-provision for participation of locals at the leadership level of the reforms implementation”.

This element originates from the initial perennial problem of donor agencies and international financial institutions purposely excluding local participation in both the leadership and ownership of the Public Sector Reforms (PSR) agenda. Their reasoning is based in the belief that the vital technical expertise, leadership competence, and financial capacity needed for the implementation of PSR can only be provided by externals. Thus, they believe that local bureaucratic and political leaders do not have the efficiency and integrity, hence rendering them unsuitable for active involvement in formulating and implementing reforms. This perspective emerges from the erroneous assumption that "outsiders can enhance state capacity despite a lack of effective internal demand for more capable governments" (Brautigam 1996, p. 99). Despite the fact that is correct to acknowledge that designing and managing a PSR program requires a high level of administrative capacity, it is also essential to acknowledge that expertise in administrative skills is not a preserve of foreign experts.

Malawi has over the years embarked on several public sector reforms which according to Sikwese (2021) can be categorized into five generational reform packages. Numerous studies on public sector reforms in Malawi show that the reforms have not achieved their objectives because the issues that the reforms were meant to address remain unresolved. This failure could be attributed to a lot of factors but this study aims at exploring how leadership can play a pivotal role in addressing the problems that are preventing public sector reforms to succeed. This is because, “leaders have the ability to influence by developing capacities of themselves and of others”; and in the process any expected change is ultimately sustained when embraced by all individuals in the organization especially through the leader’s communication of his or her vision (Brillantes and Perante-Calina, 2018, p. 151-152).

It is important however to have a better understanding of the key conceptual issues being discussed in this thesis.

1.2.1 Definition of Key Concepts

1.2.1.1 Public Sector Reforms

There have been different views and definitions of Public Sector Reforms, by which many people and researchers have described it as the attempt by governments to change ways of doing things. For instance, Schacter (2000, p.152) defines PSR as “the strengthening of the way the public sector is managed”. In other words, public sector reforms are implemented as one way of coming up with new ways of doing things so that the public sector can be managed efficiently. According to Omoyefa (2008, p. 56) “The assumption is that things are not properly managed in the public sector, that unnecessary wastage has crept into the ways the public is being run and that too many people are doing poorly what fewer people can do efficiently so changes from the old way of doing things must take place”.

Public sector reforms encompass the introduction of innovative practices in public management with the aim of initiating modifications, transformations, and changes across various facets (Brillantes and Perante-Calina 2018, p. 152). Dzimbiri (2012) echoes a comparable definition, portraying public sector reforms as the modernization of what was formerly referred to as administrative reform, aligning with the UN's 1983 definition. This involves intentional endeavors to bring about fundamental changes in public administration systems, either through comprehensive reforms or enhancements in key elements such as administrative structures, personnel, and processes (p. 51). Additionally, Tambulasi (2010, p. 3) characterizes public sector reforms as "planned systematic changes to the structure, processes, and operation of the public sector."

All in all, this thesis takes the definition by Kayuni, Chihana & Msiska (2018) because it is more comprehensive and takes into consideration the practical elements of reform packages. According to Kayuni, Chihana & Msiska (2018, p. 54) public sector reforms are understood as “processes and practices which are concerned with improving the capacity of institutions to make policy and deliver services in an efficient, effective and accountable manner”. Although reforms vary in their specific nature, they may be any of the following:

size reduction of public sector personnel, streamlining of business processes, curbing bureaucratic red tape and corruption, decentralization, fiscal and economic reforms and performance management among other reforms in the social, economic and political realms (Brillantes and Perante-Calina, 2018, p. 152).

All these reforms, ranging from “financial to management reform aim to bring about long-term productivity improvements in the public sector and better service to the community” (Scott 1994, p. 5) are also core elements of reform packages. So, in general, the whole essence for the implementation of public sector reforms is to transform the public institutions to start performing better and provide efficient and effective services. Therefore, some of the common questions in the public sector reform studies are: Why is it then that these goals have not been achieved over the years? What are the reasons for the failure? (Kayuni, Chihana & Msiska, 2018).

1.2.1.2 Public Sector Leadership

Bennis (1985, p, 20) said that "leadership is the most studied and least understood topic of any in the social sciences". No wonder, there are several definitions of leadership. In this context, this thesis is focusing on public sector leadership. Public sector leadership denotes a combination of a set of unique abilities and behaviors that public officers or senior public officials embrace to transform and improve public administration (Saporito & Turrini 2020). Specifically, this may involve attaining above normal results in performances, after introducing public sector reforms coupled with semi-independent decision-making power for public officials (Saporito & Turrini 2020). Specifically, public sector leadership is mainly about directing public organizations in delivering services successfully, while in alignment with predetermined public policy, as well as meeting the needs and aspirations of citizens (Van Wart 2016).

Based on the definitions above, public sector leadership includes the management practices and strategies utilized by public officials to advance efficiency, transparency, and accountability in providing public services as well as implementing policies. This process of public sector leadership involves the skills and capabilities needed to steer through complex political situations, nurture collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and push innovation in the public sector.

1.3 Problem statement

The public sector in Malawi grapples with a range of challenges, encompassing corruption, accountability issues, a lack of transparency, slow and inefficient procedures, overlapping structures, and a deficiency in coordination, often exacerbated by partisan politics. The root cause of these challenges is frequently traced back to a leadership vacuum. This study aims to

explore the role of leadership in addressing these issues and assess its impact on public sector reforms in Malawi.

According to the World Bank (2000), a significant contributor to the failure of public sector reform efforts is the "technocratic" approach adopted by donors. This approach treats public sector reforms as an engineering problem to be solved through blueprint or textbook solutions, often overlooking the contextual nuances of the Malawian situation (p. 153). Omoyefa (2008) contends that public sector reforms in Africa, including Malawi, have been detached from the people they intend to benefit, emphasizing the need for an ethical foundation rooted in utilitarianism. However, he observes that the reforms in the African public sector often prioritize selfish interests over the greater good, contrary to the utilitarian principle of maximizing happiness and well-being for the majority (p. 29).

Similarly, the public sector in the Philippines faces governance issues, as outlined by Brillantes and Perante-Calina (2018). These challenges include corruption concerns, accountability issues, cumbersome rules and regulations leading to slow and inefficient procedures, bureaucratic red tape, overlapping structures, lack of coordination due to a silo mentality, and excessive partisan politics (p. 152). The authors argue that many of these challenges can be attributed to "bureaupathology" and bureaucratic malaise, often stemming from a failure or absence of effective leadership. While some attribute these issues to resource constraints, including financial limitations, Brillantes and Perante-Calina highlight that leadership deficiencies play a crucial role in exacerbating bureaucratic challenges (p. 152).

The authors argue that leadership can play an important role in public sector reform addressing the problems that confronts the public sector at different levels. This is to say that even though there might be a lot of issues attributed to the failure of Public Sector Reforms the role of leadership in public sector reforms cannot be overemphasized. This is because leaders in the public institutions have the power to influence the implementation of the public sector reforms if they are committed, supportive, directive, participative and achievement oriented in the way they perform their duties. The implications and benefits of this study will help to guide the leaders in government institutions to own the process of implementing the PSR and influence their subordinates to work together and achieve this common goal.

This study aims at exploring implication on leadership of public sector reforms in Malawi. Many studies have discussed a lot of factors that have attributed to the failure of public sector reforms not only in Malawi but across Africa and the rest of the world. But no studies have established if leadership has played any role to contribute to the failure of the reforms. It is important to understand that if leaders are capable of influencing people to pursue certain actions they can also assist in the implementation of the PSR. This is because leaders are in a better position than ordinary citizens to support, guide and encourage their subordinates to work towards the achievement of organisational goals. Therefore, this study aims at exploring the impact of leadership on the success or failure of public sector reforms in Malawi.

1.4 Study objectives

This section discusses the study's main and specific objectives as highlighted below.

1.4.1 Main objective

- The main objective of this study is to explore how leadership can impact public sector reforms in Malawi.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

Using National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens as a case study, the specific objectives are to:

- a. Analyse the nature of public sector reforms that are implemented in Malawi
- b. Identify the factors that have affected the public sector reforms' implementation in Malawi
- c. Examine if leadership can bring significant changes in the public sector reforms

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the discussions above, the research attempts to answer the broad questions below;

- a. How can leadership impact public sector reforms?
- b. What are the public sector reforms that are being pursued in Malawi (and specifically at National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens)?
- c. How can leadership bring about significant changes in public sector reforms?

1.6 Study justification

There have been many studies on public sector reforms in Malawi, Africa and the rest of the world. It is important to understand that leaders are very influential in all sectors of the society. From this study it will be observed that leadership has a very important role to play, and when it comes to public sector reforms leadership is at the centre of everything. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how leadership can contribute to the failure or success of the public sector reforms. It will also provide insights on the best practices that can be adopted for the successful implementation of public sector reforms in Malawi.

This study is going to add value to the leadership and public sector reforms literature in Malawi and assist public institutions or government to adopt new policies for the successful implementation of reforms through the recommendations that will be given out of the findings.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis has been organized as follows: the first chapter introduces the study and explains the problem statement whilst the second chapter reviews the related literature on Public Sector Reforms and Leadership, the third chapter discusses the research methodology that has been used in the study, the fourth chapter presents the research findings, discussion and analysis and lastly chapter five summarizes and concludes the discussions.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the background information of the study on the reforms that have been implemented in Africa, Malawi and across the world, and presented the problem statement. The chapter has also explained the main objective and specific objectives of the study. A gap has been noted in the literature which does not examine the role of leadership in public sector reforms. This gap has led to the main objective of this study to explore if leadership can have an impact on the implementation of public sector reforms.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature on Public Sector Reforms in Africa; suggested solutions to public sector challenges in Africa and a comprehensive discussion of the link between public sector reform and public sector leadership. Finally, the chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study.

2.2 Public Sector Reforms in Africa

Public sector reforms in Africa have been driven by the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector. These reforms have been influenced by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have advised countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to implement public sector reforms (Des 2002). The reforms have focused on areas such as political-administrative relationships, delegation of authority, and performance management (Madichie 2022). However, the implementation of these reforms has faced challenges, including budget constraints and conceptual ambiguities (Fernandez & Fernandez 2020). For instance, South Africa has undertaken administrative reforms to create a capable and accountable public service, but ongoing deficiencies and challenges remain (Agwanda 2019). The evolution of public sector reforms in Africa has aimed at achieving sustainable growth and address challenges such as poverty and unemployment rates. Comprehensive adoption and implementation of organizational mechanisms such as privatization, contractual performance, and decentralization are seen as restorative measures to improve public service delivery.

Conteh and Huque (2014) explores the paradoxes and contradictions of public management reforms in developing countries, shedding light on the challenges and complexities faced in implementing these reforms. It examines the concept of the inclusive state and its role in public management reform in developing countries, highlighting the need for inclusivity and equity in governance. The paper appraises the new public governance as a paradigm of public sector

reform in Africa, providing insights into the potential benefits and limitations of this approach. It analyzes case studies from different countries, such as Pakistan, Brazil, Tanzania, Thailand, and Turkey, to understand the experiences and understandings of public participation, collaborative governance, decentralization, and accountability in the context of public management reforms. Karyeija (2012) observes that public sector reforms in Africa have had contrasting degrees of success, some may be deemed as excellent performance while others can be classified as limited success or failure.

Conteh and Huque (2014) also discusses the internationalization of performance management and budgeting, as well as the need for a developmental public service in Sub-Saharan Africa, offering alternative perspectives on public sector reform. Overall, the paper provides a comprehensive examination of the paradoxes and practices of public management reforms in developing countries, contributing to the understanding of the complexities and nuances involved in these processes. In other words, it is apparent from this paper that there are no real ‘one size fits all’ in relation to public sector reforms in Africa and developing countries (Therkildsen 2001).

Comparing the implementation processes of Public Sector Reforms (PSR) in Kenya and Zambia, Kigaru (2002) argued that the pace of PSR implementation has been sluggish in both countries. In Kenya, the retrenchment of public servants through a voluntary early retirement scheme between 1994 and 1996 was reversed by the hiring of teachers during the same period. Similarly, in Zambia, the downsizing of the public service from 1997 to early 2000 led to a decrease in the total number of government employees from 139,000 to 102,000.

In Botswana, the successful implementation of public sector reforms has been highlighted by Bakwena, Bodilenyana, and Mothusi (2019, p. 195). The government in Botswana has undertaken various public service reforms aimed at enhancing productivity, aligning with the objectives outlined in National Development Plan No. 9. The reform programs include the Performance Management System (PMS), Work Improvement Teams (WIT), Computerized Personnel Management System (CPMS), Organizations and Methods (O&M), Privatization, Performance-Based Reward System (PBRs), parallel progression, scarce skills, job evaluation, localization, and decentralization (Republic of Botswana, 2003). The adoption of reforms in Botswana is distinct, not solely relying on traditional public administration but also incorporating subsequent reforms like new public management and initiatives such as

organization and methods (O &G) in the mid-1980s, work improvement teams (WITS) in 1993, the performance management system (PMS) in 1999, and the Computerized Personnel Management System in 1996.

Compared to six other sub-Saharan African countries, Botswana stands out as a trendsetter in the successful implementation of reforms. The factors contributing to this success include a departure from traditional public administration and the adoption of subsequent reforms. In contrast, other countries faced challenges with donor involvement in reforms, leading to suspensions and conflicts. Despite substantial donor support in Zimbabwe, reforms progressed slowly, emphasizing the significance of government commitment in achieving successful reforms in African countries.

2.3 Selected Suggested Solutions to Public Sector Reforms Challenges in Africa

Building on the work of Conteh and Huque (2014), Rubakula (2014) discusses the adoption of the New Public Management (NPM) model in African countries in the 1990s, with the expectation of achieving efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. However, the implementation of NPM reforms in Africa has faced various challenges, leading to partial implementation and mixed results across different countries (Fatile et al. 2010). Munzhedzi (2021) suggests that in order to address these challenges, it is important to consider the local context before implementing any outside-based reform. In this case, Rubakula (2014) proposes a shift towards Public Value Management (PVM) as an alternative to NPM, which emphasizes public integrity and can potentially resolve the challenges faced by public sectors in Africa. The idea of shifting towards PVM is supported by the emphasis on efficiency for public services and result-based management. Munzhedzi (2021) and Rubakula (2014) also highlights the importance of public integrity as a measure of trust, competence, professionalism, and confidence in individuals, agencies, institutions, disciplines, or the entire nation. The central argument by Rubakula (2014) is that he suggests a shift towards PVM as a potential solution.

Political support is another critical issue that has been suggested as a possible solution. In this case, Karyeija (2012) brings in the argument that since public sector reforms do not happen by chance but are planned, there is a need for adequate political support. He argues that it is through political support that public sector reforms are initiated and it is through the same support that they can be sustained. In most African countries, public sector reforms are eagerly initiated by politicians but on the way, they abandon the process. His observation is critical

taking into consideration that political stability in most African countries is not guaranteed. New governments come in with their own agenda which do not prioritise public sector reform initiatives. This has been highlighted by several scholars as one of the major challenges to public sector reform that needs to be carefully considered (Kilelo 2015).

In order to address the problem of inefficiency of the public sector in Africa, Yanguas and Bukenya (2016) discusses the shift in the discourse from 'best practice' to 'best fit' governance. Specifically, they introduce three broad analytical approaches that have gained popularity in the development community which are: leadership, social accountability, and policy adaptation. These approaches are introduced in public sector reforms to address the challenges by focusing on political leaders, civil society, and local actors. Yanguas and Bukenya (2016) argue that in each has initiatives that are beneficial such as the Africa Governance Initiative, Open Government Partnership, Africa Power and Politics Programme, and Problem-driven Iterative Adaptation. Such initiatives are said to have the potential to improve public sector effectiveness and integrity in Africa. Despite this popularization of this approach, currently there is still no tangible evidence that the approach championed by Yanguas and Bukenya (2016) has so far worked in Africa but they still are good ideas anyway.

Lamidi, Agboola and Taleat (2016) start by mentioning challenges faced by public sector management in Africa, such as institutional capacity, multiple accountability, declining public service ethics, social values, civil service morale, and corruption. They point out that efforts to curtail these challenges are deemed essential for meaningful public sector reforms. Lamidi, Agboola & Taleat (2016:17) propose strategies to enhance public sector performance, including Total Quality Management (TQM), Organizational Strategic Management, and Training and Development. These strategies aim to improve productivity, quality of services, and promote a well-managed policy and regulatory environment. Lamidi, Agboola & Taleat (2016:17) reflect on the historical evolution of public sector reforms in Africa, aiming to revert back to the efficiency levels of the past. They also discuss the future of African public sector reform, acknowledging the constraints and challenges faced in achieving desired outcomes. Ultimately, Lamidi, Agboola & Taleat (2016:3) point out that focusing on these proposed challenges will facilitate restoring professionalism in the civil service and ensuring effective service delivery as a major preoccupation of ongoing government reforms.

Although Lamidi, Agboola and Taleat (2016) have suggested several strategies, their applicability in the public sector in Africa is questionable. For instance, Total Quality

Management (TQM) is designed to be more relevant in the private sector and not really public. It may require the change of focus and philosophy of the public sector to TQM to become relevant. Also, with or without reforms, Organizational Strategic Management and Training and Development have always been part and parcel of the public sector core business hence it may be wrong to consider them as special initiatives.

Several scholars have criticized New Public Management (NPM) since its inception. One of the criticisms has been that NPM tends to break apart the public sector through contracting out and other prescriptions. While criticizing NPM for tending to break apart the public sector, Christensen & Lægreid (2007:4) suggests what is known as whole-of-government (WG) approach. They argue that the key differences between NPM reforms and the whole-of-government (WG) approach are (1) Focus and Emphasis- NPM reforms focus on decentralization, disaggregation, and single-purpose organizations. WG approach emphasizes a holistic strategy, values, trust, collaboration, team building, and involving participating organizations; (2) Values and Culture- NPM reforms aim at efficiency, performance, and market-oriented practices. WG approach seeks to reestablish a common ethic, cohesive culture, and a distinctive ethos of public service. (3) Coordination and Collaboration- NPM reforms may lead to increased fragmentation. WG approach aims at coordination, collaboration, and whole-of-government solutions. (4) Ethical Standards- WG emphasizes setting ethical standards and values in public service. (5) Myth Perspective- NPM reforms are sometimes seen as imitating private sector practices. In this case, WG is viewed as a countermyth to NPM, focusing on collaboration and holistic solutions. In other words, these differences reflect a shift from a more market-oriented and efficiency-driven approach (NPM) towards a more collaborative, values-based, and holistic approach (WG) in public sector reform initiatives. Although the WG approach aims to promote collaboration and coordination across different government agencies and departments, the utter number of institutions involved can lead towards what was initially being avoided- bureaucratic bottle necks (Carayannopoulos 2017). Issues of overlapping responsibilities and other factors may delay the timely implementation of reforms and also increased administrative costs.

2.4 Public Sector Reforms and Leadership

Public sector leadership has gained attention in recent years, but there is still a need for more research and training in this area (Kaijo 2011). The literature on public sector leadership is still underdeveloped compared to business administration studies, but it is emerging as a distinctive

and autonomous domain (Orazi, Turrini, & Valotti 2013). The public sector literature should focus more on administrative leadership within organizations and link explicit models with concrete data. Hence Ticlau & Hinteá (2016) argues that there is a need for more research on public sector leadership. Virtanen et al (2020) in their paper "The Future of Public Sector Leadership" lament the lack of detailed discussions on leadership development in the public sector. They suggest that public sector leadership and leadership development will attract exponentially growing interest in the coming years.

Although the literature on public sector leadership in the scholarly literature is limited, there is support among scholars for transformational and servant leadership theories, which emphasize supporting, empowering, and valuing followers (Morton 2023).

Tizard (2012) specifically mentions some public sector challenges that will need effective leadership to address them. Some of the challenges include: (a) severe financial pressures while at the same time facing growing citizen demand as well as raising public and user expectations; (b) a paradigm shift in the relationship between citizens and public service providers affecting the business, public, social, and third sectors; (c) lack of common languages between sectors, poor governance arrangements and accountabilities.

Leadership skills are important for improving the performance of public sector organizations, and an integrated leadership style that combines transformational and transactional approaches is likely to be most effective (Franken & Plimmer 2019). Harmful leadership behaviors can limit employee development and the effective delivery of public services (Van Wart 2016). These behaviors include micromanagement, managing up but not down, low social and career support, and reactive leadership (Ticlau & Hinteá 2016). Investment in leadership development, selection, and performance management is recommended to address these behaviors.

However, there is an important aspect in this discourse which is to highlight the difference between management and leadership in the public sector. Leadership requires personal investment and goes beyond the traditional management approach (Spice 2009). Another issue is the impact of red tape and bureaucracy on public sector organizations. Leaders can influence how managers perceive and respond to red tape through transformational leadership behaviors (Mir & Rahaman 2006). Additionally, the cultural transformation within public sector agencies

plays a crucial role in successful reform. Leadership, both political and senior management, is instrumental in initiating and implementing reform, choosing appropriate technologies, and galvanizing support (Trong Tuan 2017). Furthermore, the public sector has unique characteristics such as goal complexity, formalization, and accountability to stakeholders. Public sector leaders need to navigate these complexities and motivate employees through a focus on public service and involvement in important policies (Moynihan, Wright & Pandey 2012). Overall, public sector reform and leadership require understanding the specific challenges and contexts of the public sector to effectively drive change and achieve organizational goals. This is why public sector reform for the Government of the Republic of Serbia, has focused on improving human resources management and developing effective leadership at all levels (Janovac., Orlandić & Vukčević 2023). Leadership is considered an essential component of public administration, and different dimensions of leadership have been explored in the context of ensuring stability in government administrative machinery. If ill managed, leader-centric behaviors may lead to ambiguity and worsen change initiatives, while leadership focused on engaging employees can support the reforms (Higgs, Kuipers, Steijn 2022). Digital tools and approaches are also influencing public sector reform leadership, with the potential to further the ambitions of various reform movements (Lindquist,2022).

Dunoon (2002) argue that public sector organizations need to strike a balance leadership and management. Hence focus should not really be on one against the other. He points out that the balance is achieved by addressing management for ongoing operations and leadership for deep-reaching change. In this case, public sector organizations face the challenge of managing day-to-day operations efficiently while also driving transformative change within the organization. In other words, balancing involves recognizing the importance of both management and leadership and understanding that they reflect opposing values. He further argues that collective forms of leadership are considered to be of greater value in the public sector, as they promote collaboration, inclusivity, and shared decision-making. This collective leadership is also supported by Xavier (2014) who points out that public service leaders must have skills in setting the strategic direction, ensuring buy-in from employees, and making decisions and taking actions to realize the strategic direction. They should also possess people skills, visionary leadership capability, and decision-making skills.

Among other benefits, Dunoon (2002) argues that firstly, collective leadership collective leadership is valued in the public sector because it promotes collaboration, inclusivity, and

shared decision-making, which are essential for addressing complex challenges and achieving organizational goals. Secondly, it allows for diverse perspectives and expertise to be considered, leading to more informed and effective decision-making processes. Thirdly, collective leadership fosters a sense of ownership and engagement among employees, as they feel empowered to contribute their ideas and take part in shaping the organization's direction. Fourthly, it helps build a culture of trust and transparency, as leaders work together and involve stakeholders in decision-making, enhancing accountability and legitimacy. Fifthly, in the public sector, where the focus is on serving the public interest, collective leadership ensures that decisions are made with a broader perspective, considering the needs and aspirations of the community. Finally, it also enables adaptive and innovative responses to emerging challenges, as collective leadership encourages learning, experimentation, and continuous improvement. In order to fully embrace collective leadership, Xavier (2014) points out that leaders in the public service need to be team players, results-oriented, self-confident, and of high integrity.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This thesis relies on two leadership theories: Power and influence leadership theory and Transformational leadership theory.

2.5.1 Power and Influence Leadership Theory

This research employs the power and influence leadership theory as a guiding framework for its analysis. The theory is chosen for its emphasis on how leaders can inspire their teams through the use of power and influence (Lunenburg 2012). It's based on the understanding that power is the ability to influence behaviour, change the course of events, and overcome resistance. The theory proposes that leaders can draw from diverse sources of power, such as legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and referent power, to direct and inspire their followers successfully (Mulholland 2019).

These elements of power are summarized as follows by Mulholland (2019, p. 125) and Lunenburg (2012, p. 5-6):

- a) Legitimate authority is exercised by virtue of occupying an official position/office. It may initially encourage compliance, but overreliance on it may lead to dissatisfaction or even resistance by subordinates.

- b) Reward authority comes in when the leader has the power to withhold or offer rewards to employees hence influence their behavior. It may work over a short-term period by influencing employee behavior patterns but just like legitimate power, prolonged dependence on such authority facilitates a sense of dependency among subordinates hence making employees feel manipulated.
- c) Coercive authority, is derived from use of force or threats and it may facilitate temporary compliance but the disadvantage is that it may lead towards, frustration, fear, and alienation among subordinates.
- d) Expert authority is derived from expertise of the leader in a particular task(s). It is usually linked with trust within an organization. Leaders who exercise expert authority can stimulate inward motivation and attitudinal alignment among subordinates.
- e) Referent authority is type of influence that a leader attains due to the admiration, and trustworthiness they sway from their subordinates. It has the prospective to promote keen trust, steadfast compliance, and deep allegiance from subordinates.

This theory is particularly relevant in government institutions, where leaders can employ various strategies to motivate individuals, fostering dedication and collaboration for the successful execution of reforms. Motivated individuals are more likely to exert effort, ensuring the accomplishment of their shared objectives. During the implementation of Public Sector Reforms (PSR), leaders can introduce incentives, such as awards, for employees. These incentives serve as motivators, encouraging employees to exert extra effort to achieve the reforms and earn recognition. Moreover, incentives serve as a means of acknowledging.

2.5.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

The thesis is also guided by Transformational Leadership Theory which emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to achieve exceptional performance beyond their self-interest. Specifically, in the context of public sector reforms, leaders adopting transformational leadership styles are expected to facilitate innovation, encourage a shared vision, and boost a positive organizational culture. Based on the available literature, research guided by Transformational Leadership Theory explores how leadership behaviors, such as inspiring and motivating employees, conveying a compelling vision for reform, affect the success or hindrance of public sector reforms.

There are several scholars associated with development and advancement of Transformational Leadership Theory. For example, Bernard M. Bass is generally regarded as one of the forerunners in the theory of transformational leadership and he authored an influential book entitled "Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations," (Bass 1985). Another scholar Burns, aptly argued that transformational leaders inspire and encourage followers to exceed their own self-interests for the greater good (Khanin 2007). In other words, good leaders have the capacity to generate interest within an organization to aspire for collective identity which also ensures that innovation and change are embraced.

Literature shows that there are four main elements of Transformational Leadership Theory and these are (Reza 2019, Dung and Hai 2020):

- a) Idealized influence or Charisma- Leaders are viewed as role models and in the long-term they impart pride and respect in their subordinates when they learn from their behaviour.
- b) Inspirational motivation- This implies that leadership is mainly about instilling inspiration and encouragement to followers and this is done by communicating a persuasive vision and focus more on the ultimate goal rather than individual interests.
- c) Intellectual stimulation- Stimulation of creativity as well as critical thinking among subordinates is considered critical in this element of transformation leadership. The leader encourages an inquisitive culture that leads towards looking for innovative solutions.
- d) Individualized consideration- In relation to this element, leaders show a personal connection and concern to the specific needs of each follower hence provides support and any other individual empowerment strategies.
- e)

The main argument is that organizational leaders who demonstrate these characteristics are likely to be effective hence a higher level of employee satisfaction and improved organizational effectiveness (Malik, Javed, and Hassan 2017; Dung and Hai 2020).

Although the theory has been influential, it has also been criticized by some scholars. One of the criticisms is that it is difficult to the basis for differentiating transformational leadership from other available leaderships styles. In other words, the process of differentiating transformational leadership from other leadership style has the potential of merely being a subjective process rendering it problematic to conduct consistent empirical research across different settings (Ladkin and Patrick 2022). Furthermore, some have argued that the theory is

too idealistic hence less applicable in certain organizational settings. In this case, the cultural aspects of leadership seem to be ignored- it assumes the theory is applicable in different cultures (Berkovich and Eyal 2021). More importantly, some critics point that Transformational Leadership Theory tends to put more emphasis on the qualities and behaviors of leaders but ignores the role of contextual factors (Eaton 2022). The reality is that leadership effectiveness is affected by many other factors such as organizational structures, culture, and other related external influences.

Despite these shortfalls, the theory has and continue to gain prominence in leadership discourse. Probably one of the reasons for the growing influence of the theory is its emphasis on organizational effectiveness while not losing attention on employee wellbeing. Consequently, it speaks to the contemporary challenges of organizations and provides a framework that effectively helps analyses organizational leadership.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive review of literature on Public Sector Reforms in Africa, addressing challenges, suggested solutions, and the crucial link between reform efforts and effective leadership. Public sector reforms across African countries have been influenced by international institutions and have aimed at enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. However, challenges such as budget constraints and conceptual ambiguities have hindered their full implementation. Various scholars have proposed solutions ranging from New Public Management (NPM) to Public Value Management (PVM), emphasizing the importance of local context and political support.

The role of leadership in driving successful reforms has emerged as a central theme, with scholars advocating for transformational and servant leadership styles. The theoretical framework of this study incorporates Power and Influence Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory, both of which offer valuable insights into how leaders can inspire and motivate their teams to achieve reform goals. Despite criticisms of these theories, they remain relevant in understanding the complexities of leadership in the public sector and guiding efforts to drive meaningful change. Moving forward, the next chapter narrows down on public sector reforms in Malawi.

CHAPTER THREE

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS IN MALAWI

3.1 Introduction

Public sector reforms in Malawi have been a recurring theme since the nation's independence from British rule in 1964. With each successive government, the call for reform has echoed, driven by the need to enhance performance, efficiency, and service delivery to citizens. From the early days of nation-building to the present, Malawi has witnessed a series of reforms aimed at restructuring its public sector to better meet the needs and aspirations of its people. In this chapter, the study examines the history of public sector reforms in Malawi, spanning from the early years of independence to the present day. Drawing on scholarly analysis and historical insights, the study analyses the evolution of these reforms, categorized into distinct generations, each shaped by its unique socio-political and economic context.

3.2 Background to Malawi Public Sector reforms

Since independence from the British in 1964, the succeeding governments, Malawi always introduced public sector reforms in order to enhance performance and efficiency (Sikwese, 2009). In this view, Tambulasi and Kayuni (2013) while critically analyzing public sector reforms in Malawi, they have pointed out that these reforms were generally undertaken with the assumption that public sector services were not adequate or of poor standards hence reforms came in “to ensure increased effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and affordability...to raise the quality of public services delivered to citizens” (p, 253).

Taking the period since 1964, Sikwese (2021) classified Malawi public sector management reforms into five categories or what he calls “generations of reforms”. The first-generation of reforms are those that were implemented between 1964 and 1980; the second-generation reforms are those implemented from late 1980 to 1993; the third generation were implemented after the advent of multiparty political democracy from 1993 till April 2012, and the fourth generation constitutes the post April 2012 reforms to May 2014. The fifth category constitutes

reforms instituted post May 2014 Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections up to the present.

These reforms have not necessarily been identical but have undertaken different approaches with some being more comprehensive than others (Sikwese, Tambulasi, and Kayuni 2023). Even the name of the reforms has been changing from Civil Reforms to Public Service Reforms and this depended on those influencing and providing finances to reform exercise (Kamphambe-Nkhoma, Kachimera, & Lungu 2001).

According to Sikwese (2021) he argues that the introduction of a multi-party political system in 1994 fast-tracked the agenda for public sector reforms, as well as other factors such as globalization and the global financial crisis of 2008. The death of a sitting State President in April 2012, followed by the subsequent leadership change, as well as the prevailing challenging economic conditions before April 2012 also facilitated a renewed attention on an Economic Reforms Agenda and the call for better public service delivery (Sikwese (2021). The following sections provide a detailed overview of these reform periods.

3.3 The First Generations of Reforms (1964-1980)

What may be described as the first-generation public service reforms in Malawi occurred between 1964 and 1980, and during this period the focus was on restructuring the inherited colonial civil service to better suit the needs and aspirations of the newly independent nation of Malawi. Tambulasi et al (2013, p. 3030) specifically mentions that “the quest to abandon the British oriented civil service and create one that would be used to obtain and achieve local aspirations” was the major reason for the reform exercise. Ultimately, this period marked Malawi’s transition towards Africanization of public services through the process of deconstructing administrative structures that were remnants of colonial rule and aligning them with the prevailing local governance principles. The then called Nyasaland Civil Service inherited by the new Malawi government was originally designed to enforce colonial orders rather than address the social and economic needs of Malawians (Government of Malawi 2010). Therefore, there was an urgent need to establish a civil service that could facilitate rapid economic development and uplift the indigenous population out of poverty. In this case, initiatives such as the *Skinner Commission of Enquiry* were commenced to facilitate this transition. Specifically, the reforms were steered by the ambition to build a Civil Service that

would essentially serve the developmental goals of the newly independent Malawi, as stipulated in the *Statement of Development Policies* (1971-1980).

3.4 The Second-Generation Public Service Reforms (1980-1993)

The second-generation reforms, spanned over the period from 1980 to 1993, and these were implemented during the one-party rule of Dr. Kamuzu Banda and focused on addressing the economic challenges which the nation faced in the 1970s and as well as the shortcomings observed in the first-generation public service reform initiatives (Kamphambe-Nkhoma *et al.*, 2001). In this case, these reforms were introduced against a background of unpredictable economic conditions, characterized by periods of substantial growth followed by economic recessions. At global level, the period was well known for the negative effects of the energy crisis and pervasive economic uncertainty. In response to these challenges, international financial institutions like the Bretton Woods Institutions promoted broad reform prescriptions, these emphasized the need for leaner government structures and reduced reliance on the public sector for service delivery (Sikwese 2021). Thus, in general, these recommendations were influenced by various political and economic factors at local and international levels.

As already mentioned, the first-generation reform initiatives lacked a robust approach, hence they addressed public management issues in a piece-meal fashion without addressing causal factors. Consequently, this led to a lack of consistency and synchronization in public service delivery, as well as a disengagement between citizen needs and service providers. Subsequently, a series of considerable administrative and economic reforms were introduced, largely under the direction or influence of multilateral and bilateral institutions. These efforts were also guided by various reviews and commissions, including the Heber Civil Service Review Commission (Government of Malawi 1983), the World Bank Malawi Public Sector Review (Sikwese 2021), and the Chatsika Commission of Enquiry (Government of Malawi 1995).

3.5 The Third Generation of Public Sector Reforms (1993-2012)

The 1980s are generally referred to as the "lost decade" of development in many developing countries, including Malawi, despite efforts to boost economic growth (Sikwese 2021). Specifically, economic austerity measures introduced in Sub-Saharan Africa during this time led to extensive dissatisfaction among citizens regarding the provision of public services. In Malawi, these measures, combined with dictatorial rule, ignited considerable discontent and

dissatisfaction among the public, ultimately leading towards political unrest and a national referendum in 1993, which resulted in the transition to a multi-party system of governance (Chiweza 2010).

The change to multiparty democracy brought in a new phase of reforms popularly known as the *Third-Generation Reforms*. These third-generation reforms were applied under two different political parties over two five-year election cycles and these are: the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by Bakili Muluzi from 1993 to 2004, and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) led by Bingu wa Mutharika from 2004 to 2012. These reforms occurred against the background of economic problems caused by the partial application of structural adjustment programs, which were aimed at liberalizing the economy and supporting democratic governance (Dzimbiri 2011).

It was also during this period, attempts were made to restructure the public service, rationalize civil service organizations, and implement decentralization initiatives as stipulated in the Malawi Constitution. Despite these efforts, the poor performance of the Malawian economy, including currency overvaluation, caused challenges in service delivery, especially in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture (Sikwese 2021).

In response to these challenges, the major objectives of the third-generation reforms were to enhance macroeconomic indicators, improve efficiency in resource mobilization, and strengthen accountability and transparency in governance (Tambulasi *et al.*, 2013). Thus, key reforms concentrated on improving the performance of government branches, supporting civil society and private sector engagement, and setting up Malawi to address global socioeconomic and political challenges (Kamphambe-Nkhoma *et al.*, 2001).

3.6 The Fourth Generation of Public Sector Reforms (2012-2014)

The Fourth Generation of reforms, during the reign of President Joyce Banda from April 2012 to 2014, were introduced within challenging economic and political conditions. Specifically introduced during the second year of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS II), these reforms aimed at addressing macroeconomic challenges that had emerged hence affecting public service delivery. Although the country achieved economic growth under MGDS I, the country later faced reduced disposable incomes, power disruptions, and foreign exchange scarcity, leading to slowed economic performance (Sikwese, Tambulasi, and Kayuni

2023). This situation was worsened by overvalued exchange rates and rising inflation rates. Political leadership issues, including violations of human rights and press freedom, further strained the economy, resulting in donor budget withdrawals (Sikwese 2021).

To address these challenges, economic and political reforms were established, including the unveiling of the Organization Performance Assessment (OPA) framework in February 2013, which was aimed at holding government officials accountable for agreed-upon targets ((Sikwese, Tambulasi, and Kayuni 2023). The launch of the Malawi Public Service Charter in June 2012 stressed the commitment to service standards and core values such as accountability and transparency (Sikwese 2021). However, despite these efforts, the period was stained by the Cashgate scandal in September 2013, involving the loss of over MK24 billion, which underscored the need for further reforms in financial management systems (Banik and Chinsinga, 2016).

The challenges of previous reforms initiatives as aforementioned in the reform generations posed as challenge to successful institutionalization of reforms in Malawi. This forms the basis for the Fifth Generation of Reforms.

3.7 The Fifth Generation of Public Sector Reforms (2014- to the present)

It is generally agreed that the Cashgate Scandal of 2013 severely affected Malawi's political landscape, resulting in the loss of public confidence in the government and contributing to the defeat of the Joyce Banda led People's Party (PP) in the 2014 elections (Banik and Chinsinga 2016). The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) led by Peter Mutharika emerged victorious, and his party prioritized public service management reforms to enhance service delivery and protect government resources. In this case, the Fifth Generation of Public Sector Management Reforms were officially initiated in May 2014. Specifically, the reforms focused on local solutions to local challenges in public service delivery while at the same time learning from international experiences (GoM 2015).

Key reforms included the establishment of the Public Service Reforms Commission (PSRC) chaired by the Vice President Saulos Chilima, and it was tasked with identifying key reform areas as well as providing strategic leadership. This effort addressed previous challenges in reform management, such as lack of coordination and leadership. The PSRC emphasized

quick-win reforms to address inefficiencies and lack of accountability in the public service (GoM 2015).

The highly influential PSRC's "Making Malawi Work Again" report stressed institutional and governance issues, recommending reforms to enhance accountability, integrity, and citizen engagement. The report also emphasized the need for robust accountability mechanisms, alignment of reforms with economic management, and promotion of performance audit and integrity (GoM 2015).

To institutionalize these reforms, the Malawi National Public Sector Reforms Policy 2018-2022 was launched, aiming to create an efficient and effective public sector aligned with national development goals. The policy established structures like the Cabinet Committee on Public Sector Reforms to provide political direction and identified priority areas such as decentralization and institutional restructuring (GoM 2018).

Despite all these efforts, the dearth of service charters as a priority area in the policy raised anxieties about citizen-centered service delivery. It is acknowledged that effective implementation of service charters requires alignment with legal frameworks, cultural aspects, and international standards (Sikwese 2021). To be more precise, the Fifth Generation of Reforms aimed to address systemic challenges in the public service, highlighting elements of accountability, efficiency, and citizen engagement to improve service delivery and promote sustainable development.

3.8 Conclusion

All in all, the story of public sector reforms in Malawi is one of evolution and adaptation, marked by periods of progress and setbacks. From the early efforts to Africanize the civil service to the modern-day focus on accountability and citizen engagement, each generation of reforms has left its imprint on the nation's governance landscape. Reflecting on this reform effort, it becomes evident that the quest for a more efficient, responsive, and accountable public sector is an ongoing endeavor. While significant strides have been made, challenges persist, reminding us of the complexity inherent in reforming bureaucratic systems.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research-method that was used in the study. It explains the research design that was used in detail, describes the population that was studied, and outlines the sampling techniques that were used to collect the data. The chapter further specifies the data collection methods employed, how the data collected was analysed, and explains the ethical considerations pertaining to the study. Lastly, the chapter highlights the limitations that were encountered during the study.

4.2 Research Design and Sampling

According to Dulock (1993:154), a research design is “a blueprint or plan specially created to answer the research question and to control variance, for instance answering the research question or testing the research hypothesis is the central purpose of all research”. On the other hand Abu-Taieh (2000:106) argues that “the research design is intended to provide an appropriate framework for the study and a very significant decision in research design process is a choice to be made by the researcher regarding the research approach”. It is necessary for the researcher to create or build a specific design to answer the research question and control variance (Wahyuni 2012). Taking into consideration the research questions and objectives of this study, the research design adopted is qualitative and case study approach.

This study uses a qualitative approach and case study, because the questions that were asked when collecting data involved mainly “how” and “why”. A qualitative approach is generally regarded as necessary in research when the main objective is to probe into the depth and complexities of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena (Wahyuni 2012). Quantitative methods on the other hand focus on numerical data and statistical analysis hence ignores the quest to explore the underlying meanings or human motivations.

Similarly, a case study was used because, in general, it is an effective way to acquire in-depth knowledge about various situations and to study how people behave in those situations. This also applies to the implementation of public sector reforms. In other words, a case study approach was ideal for the researcher to analyse the different situations pertaining to how the implementation process has been done throughout the years, and how people have behaved in all those situations. This approach enabled the researcher to make well-informed conclusions on what has been causing the PSRs to fail.

All in all, a qualitative study is essential for leadership research of this nature in the public sector due to its capability to capture the complexities and contextual issues common in the public sector leadership. Contrasting quantitative methods that may potentially oversimplify intricate leadership dynamics, qualitative approaches acknowledges an in-depth exploration of the multidimensional perspectives of leadership within the public sector context. It is the holistic nature of the qualitative approaches (such as interviews, observations, and content analysis) that ensures a critical analysis of leadership behavior that is applicable to the public sector. Leadership in public institutions is influenced by elements that are unique such as influence of political environment which bring into the analysis the subjective experiences of leaders hence a qualitative approach suits the context.

4.2.1 Population of The Study and Sample Size

In the opinion of Bhandari (2020 p. 38) “a population is the entire group that you want to draw conclusion about and it doesn’t always refer to people; it can mean a group containing elements of anything you want to study such as objects, events, organisations, countries, species or organisms”. Silverman (2001), also argues that a study population means either individuals or institutions from where the research draws its sample. In this case, the study population is the whole public sector in Malawi. Taking into consideration the size of the public sector in Malawi and the resources required for this study, it was not possible to reach out to all public sector institutions, thus sampling was done to identify a case study.

According to Babbie (2004, p. 34) “Sampling is defined as a process of selecting representatives from the large population, which is a powerful and determinative mechanism of the total study” On the other hand Shipman (1988, p. 52) argues that, “sampling is a systematic way of choosing a group small enough to study and large enough to be representative of the population under study”. This study uses purposive sampling which gives

“the researcher the opportunity to choose a case because it illustrates some features or process in which the researcher is interested” (Silverman 2001, p. 204).

This study is a case study hence the organization that was chosen is National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens of Malawi. Hence the population for this study was comprised of officials (from junior to senior) at the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens working on public sector reforms. This institution was selected for the study because it is one of the statutory corporations that have been working on different public sector reforms for quite a long time. It was therefore significant for this study to review the trend of those reforms and their implementation. Additionally, most of the officials at the institution have been key stakeholders in the implementation of the various reforms. Therefore, these officials were in a better position than anybody else to provide accurate information and a big picture of what has been done so far with regard to public sector reforms implementation at the institution. In addition to the vast experience of the officials the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens is one of the institutions that has been working hand in hand with the Vice president of Malawi on PSR.

Table 1: Category of the participants and their roles

Participants	Roles
Senior managers	Representing the leadership in the organisation and to understand the management of PSR
Middle managers and General staff	To understand their views and roles on PSR

As mentioned above, the sample consisted of senior managers, middle management and general staff at the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens of Malawi which were purposively selected. The criteria for sampling were possession of vast experience of the public sector by the senior managers and civil servants as well as their awareness of the reforms that have taken place in Malawi. The total sample was comprised of 30 respondents, and all the respondents were interviewed individually. This was done because each individual's experience was unique and it was necessary for them to be interviewed separately.

It is important to note that purposive sampling was the method used to select the sample of 30 respondents. This was done in order to ensure selection of respondents who could provide accurate and adequate information. The sample comprised of 30 respondents because of the

availability of staff at the institution, which has three centres located in the 3 cities of the country Mzuzu, Lilongwe and Zomba. This ensured that each one of the three districts was represented by 10 respondents comprising senior staff, junior and general staff. This distribution enabled an equal representation of the sample. When selecting the respondents, it was ensured that there was equal representation of the whole population that all genders were represented and every rank from top to the bottom was also well represented. As mentioned above, this study used purposive sampling technique. “Purposive sampling is defined as one of the most common sampling strategies used by researchers” (Silverman, 2001, p. 300).

Apart from employees of National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens, other individuals who are experts on public sector reforms were engaged. These are mainly academics and researchers who have extensively conducted research or contributed to policies related to public sector reforms in Malawi. These were engaged so that they contribute ideas on the broader context of leadership in the public sector.

4.3 Data Collection

Mouton (1996, p. 232) describes data collection as “a process whereby a researcher gathers empirical data of a historical, documentary or statistical nature accomplished through various methods and techniques of observation such as interviewing, content analysis and document analysis” (p. 110). According to Layder (1993, p. 54), “there are different instruments that are used to collect data for example interviews”. The other data was also collected through review of reports that have been published on the progress of public sector reforms.

In-depth interviews were used to collect primary data because they provided detailed information whereby the respondents answered questions in greater detail than would have been possible through another method. And if there were additional information to be collected the researcher was in a better position to probe more. Although the method is time consuming, it facilitates collection of more information that is necessary for the researcher to better understand the facts that are being presented. It also enables the researcher to comprehend the opinions and attitudes of the respondents. In-depth interviews also provide the researcher an opportunity to make up new questions in order to find out the answers that he or she is looking for.

It was further important to review reports (secondary data) because the reforms are also being implemented in other government ministries and departments. These reports were helpful during data analysis because they enabled me to acquire additional information and a broader view on what is happening in other institutions. This perspective assisted the researcher to come up with significant findings that could be generalised.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is defined as “a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data” or in other words “Data analysis involves the drawing of inferences from raw data” (Paton, 2002, p. 240). Qualitative data analysis has five methods to help the researcher make sense of qualitative feedback from participants, depending on the researcher’s study goals and the type of data collected. This study used narrative analysis which is “a method used to interpret research participants stories like testimonials, case studies, interviews and other text or visual data with tools like Delve and AI-powered” (Amin, 2014, p. 361) This method was chosen because narrative analysis provides a researcher with valuable insights into the complexity of participants lives, priorities and challenges. Similarly, it also provides the researcher with a deep understanding of the participants’ actions.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Bryman and Bell (2007) explain that “The purpose of ethical considerations in research is to ensure that participants' rights are maintained and are kept from being harmed participating in the research” (p. 68). Ethical considerations are a series of guidelines researchers should follow when conducting research. The main ethical considerations in this study were the informed consent of the participants, their rights to withdraw, confidentiality (anonymity and privacy), protection from psychological and physical harm, debriefing and deception. These ethical considerations were adopted so that participants should know their rights and that they should be able to make informed decisions to participate voluntarily in the study or to withdraw from it anytime without being penalized. It was also necessary that the participants should be assured that everything that will be discussed will be confidential.

4.7 Study Limitations

The study was subjected to a few limitations where some respondents did not provide any feedback. But this did not have any impact on the research because it was only a few respondents that failed to provide feedback. Secondly it was sometimes difficult to access other

types of government information, but I made sure that this should not affect my study by clearly specifying to the respondents that the data will only be used for the research.

4.8 Conclusion

Finally, this chapter has discussed in great detail the research method that was used in the study, specified what the research design was, described the population that was covered by the study and mentioned the sampling techniques that were used to collect the data. The chapter has also discussed the data collection methods that were used, how the data collected was analysed, and explained the ethical considerations that were applied to the data collection process. Lastly the limitations that were encountered during the study have also been highlighted.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter has been guided by the research objectives outlined in chapter one. Specifically, these are the aforementioned objectives:

- a. Analyse the nature of public sector reforms that are implemented in Malawi (and specifically at National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens);
- b. Identify the factors that have affected the reforms' implementation (and specifically at National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens); and
- c. Examine if leadership can bring significant changes in the public sector reforms.

Section 5.2 discusses organizational structure of National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens to provide organizational context. Section 5.3 discusses the rationale for public sector reforms, whereas Section 5.4 highlights the public sector reforms that have been implemented in Malawi. This is followed by Section 5.5 which presents the factors that have affected the implementation of public sector reforms. Section 5.6 concludes by looking at how leadership can play a role in bringing about significant change in the implementation of the Public Sector Reforms.

As mentioned above, the chapter is sub-divided in alignment to the research objectives, however, section 5.3 presents a contextual discussion based on the empirical and secondary data findings.

5.2 National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens: Legal and Organizational Structure

The National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens (NH&BG) is mandated to develop and manage herbaria and botanic gardens in Malawi. The National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi derives its mandate from the Council for National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi Act No. 7 of 1987. The act provide for the development and management of herbarium

and botanic matter as national heritage of Malawi and to establish the council for National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi and further to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. (Council for National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi Act).

The history of herbaria in Malawi dates back to 1930 when the Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Pathology established the first herbarium in Zomba. This was later transferred to Chitedze Agricultural Research Station, Lilongwe. Another herbarium was established in 1956 in Zomba by the Department of Forestry and was later transferred to Chongoni Silvicultural Research Station, Dedza (Now Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife).

A university herbarium was established in 1966 at Chichiri Campus, Biology Department and inherited all specimens from the Agricultural herbarium. This herbarium was expected to develop into a broader independent botanical institution useful in the field of conservation, botanical research, education and technical services. The University and the Forestry herbaria merged to form the National Herbarium of Malawi in 1987. The National Herbarium is located in Zomba with regional Herbaria in Lilongwe and Mzuzu.

The NHBG houses over 90,000 plant specimens (including mushrooms, ferns, mosses, algae, lichens) collected all over Malawi and a carpological collection of about 200 accessions. The herbarium therefore is Malawi's plant data bank and hence is very important for plant identification, taxonomic research, reference and loan exchange of herbarium specimens between herbaria. Using information from herbarium specimen labels staff at the National Herbarium can provide phenological data of most plant species, their distributions, habitats and uses. Being a national centre of assemblage, growth, curation and classification of a comprehensive collection of all plants in Malawi the National Herbarium has contributed towards conservation of the biological diversity.

The major objectives of the NHBG is to conduct research on economic botany and to encourage sustainable utilization of plant resources. The National Herbarium also conducts vegetation surveys as part of Environmental Impact Assessments.

But all in all, NHBG is mandated to develop and manage existing herbarium and botanic gardens and establish other botanic gardens at other suitable places in Malawi for plant diversity and genetic conservation research, education and recreation.

The vision of the NHBG is “a centre of excellence in plant knowledge for human well being”. The mission is “to develop and manage herbaria and botanic gardens through research, conservation and environmental education of plant diversity for socio-economic development of the country”. The NHBG conduct in the implementation of its strategic plan is guided by the following core values or guiding principles; integrity, excellence, transparency and accountability, respect and tolerance, networking, mutual growth and creativity and innovation.

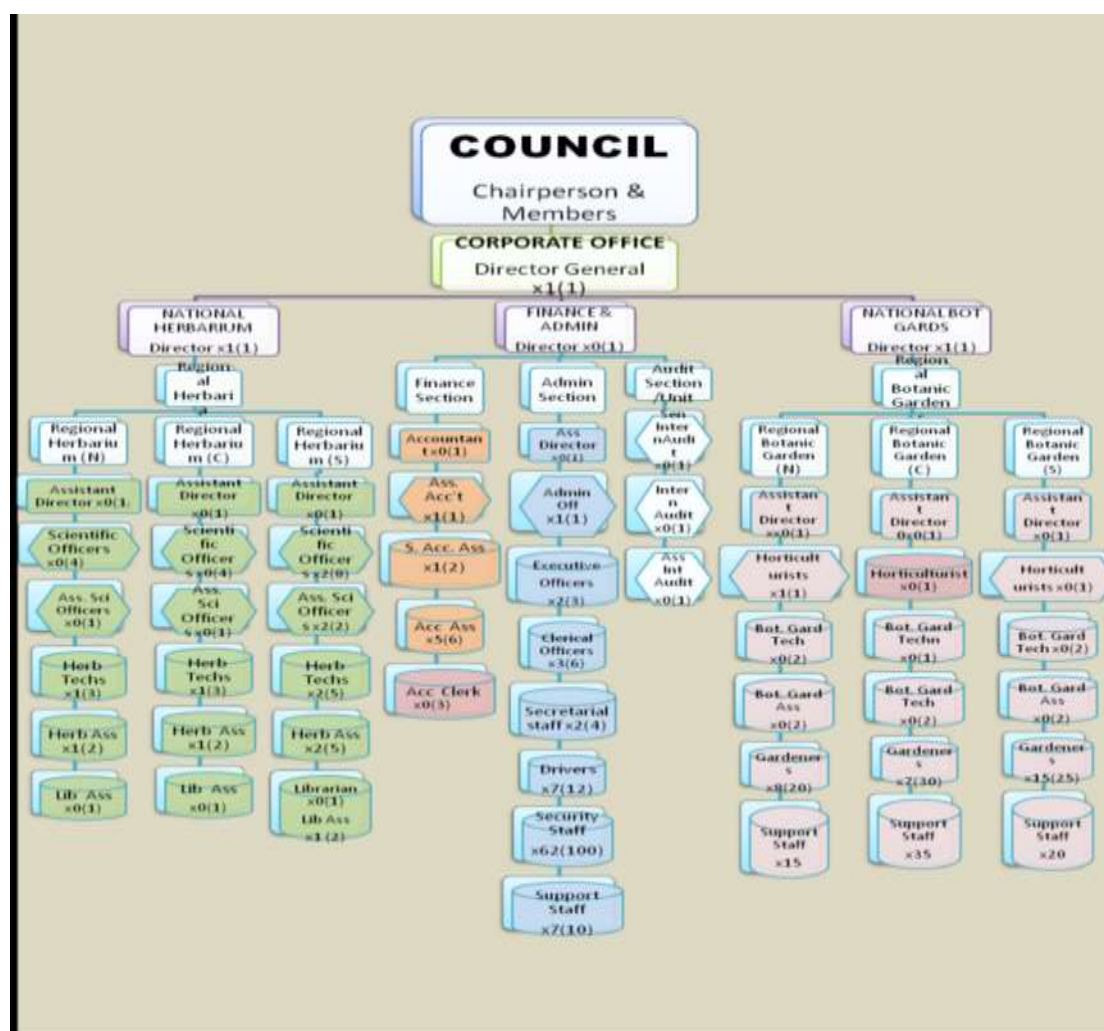


Figure 1: National Herbarium & Botanic Gardens of Malawi Approved Institutional Structure

5.3 The Rationale for Public Sector Reforms

In Malawi, this research established that Public Sector Reforms are still being implemented in all Public Institutions with the aim of modernizing the public sector and public services so that organizational rigidities that undermine public service efficiency and effectiveness can be eliminated. According to the public reform experts interviewed, this is contrary from the general public feeling that officially government gave up on the reform agenda and is no longer pursuing it. Almost all the public sector reform experts pointed out that the main goal of the reform is to improve the performance of the public sector and its delivery of public services to the citizens. Specifically, starting from November 2020, Ministries, Departments and Agencies signed what was called ‘Reforms Performance Agreements’. These agreements specifically outline commitments from Ministries, Local Councils, Parastatals Organisations and Constitutional Bodies under the theme of what is called “Creating a Better Malawi”. One expert mentioned that “The signing ceremony clearly showed Government’s commitment and transparency in relation to making the public service more efficient, effective as well as accountable to the citizenry”. This is reinforced by the *Malawi Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023* (p. 30) which states that “it signified the shift in focus from traditional implementation-based approaches towards new result-based approaches with more emphasis on outcomes and impacts as well as alignment to the pillars and enablers of MW2063”. Since the signing of these ‘Reforms Performance Agreements’, there has been a constant reminder by managers to their subordinates to ensure that the key result areas are well taken care of and the culture for reform is maintained throughout the organization. This is also the case at National Herbarium and Botanical gardens. Leadership constantly pushes the reform agenda in meetings and other planned activities.

The results from the individual in-depth interviews indicated that most of the respondents had knowledge of public sector reforms. Most of the respondents mentioned operational reforms which were ranked the highest, unlike the rest of the other categories of reforms such as financial reforms, capital reforms and legal reforms.

On the question of who the main actors in the PSR program were, respondents gave several responses. Some of the general government officials and middle managers perceived the senior managers as the main actors, whilst the senior managers viewed the Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) as the main actors. This implied that, according to the

positions held by the respondents, they viewed those holding higher positions than them as the main actors. According to one general government official,

The senior managers are the ones that we look up to because they give us guidance on what we need to do. They support us and give us the tools for us to execute our duties effectively (Interview with general government official).

The PSRMD is the one that is in charge we just act as middle men to ensure that our departments are doing the right things. Whatever transpires we take to our respective departments and ensure that it is done because at the end of the day we need to provide feedback on the progress we are making on the implementation of PSR (Interview with senior management official).

Similarly, when asked the reason why specific reforms were chosen, the majority of the respondents said it was because of the need to improve service delivery. On the same question, a smaller number of the respondents did not clearly state why the PSRs were chosen to be implemented, and how these reforms are going to benefit the institution. This implies that a majority of the staff in the Ministries Departments Agencies (MDAs) know about public sector reforms and why they are important. But there are still a few officials who do not know why PSRs are important and are unaware of the reason for their implementation.

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents said that the processes and procedures that were followed to select the reforms were done through various meetings between staff members and different stakeholders. And a minority of the respondents said that they heard about the selection of the reforms from their bosses during internal meetings.

According to a middle management official, she said:

We were told about the reforms through the people we report to like our line managers because they are the ones who have the privilege to attend the vital trainings that are conducted at a higher level. So whenever they have attended the trainings they take us through whatever they have discussed and what is expected from us. (Interview with middle management government official)

This briefing was done because it was not all staff members that were invited to attend the meetings with the stakeholders. Additionally, there is evidence that the PSRs have made an impact. A majority of the respondents said that the reforms were in progress, whilst a few said that they had not seen changes yet.

The official government report hails the reforms as a success by arguing that:

There is commendable progress in the implementation of reforms with various degrees of achievements due to capabilities, capacities and commitment from different Ministries. While reforms implementation by some Ministries is still at process level towards the achievement of the targeted outcomes and results, it is commendable that selected Ministries, i.e. the Ministry of Local Government have completed some of their reform areas in this first cycle of implementation (Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023, p. 19).

When asked about the duration of the reforms, the majority of the respondents said that the PSR program was an ongoing process which is in progress. But a few respondents did not seem to keep track of the reforms. However, a few of the respondents made an assurance that the PSR have made an impact. On the expected outcome of the reforms, the majority said that the success of the PSRs will help the whole country, while a few said that it was the politicians who were going to benefit from the success of the reforms.

On the suitability of the reforms, the majority of the respondents said that they were suitable and important for the organization, whilst a few said that they were not sure if the reforms were suitable. This indicates that the majority of the respondents know the importance of the reforms and the reason why the PSRs are being implemented, but a few are not aware this value and see the reforms as being politically influenced.

5.3.1 Discussion: Critical Analysis of Public Sector Reforms Rationale, Implementation and Implication on Leadership

The findings regarding the rationale for Public Sector Reforms (PSRs) in Malawi reveal a deep contrast between the official narrative and the observations of both public reform experts and government officials. Although official reports emphasize the commitment towards the reform agenda by highlighting efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability in the public sector through

the much touted "Creating a Better Malawi" scheme, the interviews with public sector reform experts present a different picture. The general public often see that there is no commitment on the part of government to pursue the reform agenda. All this discrepancy ultimately raises fundamental questions about the transparency and communication strategies pursued in dissemination information concerning the said reform agenda to citizenry. In particular, the emphasis on 'Reforms Performance Agreements' since November 2020 suggests a shift towards a more result-based approaches in order to be aligned to Malawi development goals (Malawi 2063). However, none of the respondents made an attempt at linking the reform initiatives to the broader national goals. It seems the perspective of most respondents on reform is narrow and lack a broader national agenda perspective.

Another critical issue from the findings, relating to leadership, demonstrates the hierarchical perceptions of the key actors in the PSR program. The findings reveal conflicting views among general government officials, middle managers, and senior managers. The naming of senior managers as the key actors by lower-ranking employees may suggest a rigid top-down approach to reform implementation. The implications are probably multiple on the whole reform agenda. For instance, this has implications on perceptions on employee engagement, ownership of the whole reform process itself, as well as the usefulness of communication channels between different categories of employees. This ultimately puts into question the effectiveness in the public sector leadership itself which among other things needs to thrive on proper and effective communication for effective service delivery.

Building on the above observation, the study shows variations in the awareness and understanding of PSRs among staff members. This may emphasize the need for targeted communication strategies. While a good number of respondents show a clear understanding of the reforms, a notable minority lacks awareness of the reasons behind the reform implementation. This also puts into question the effectiveness of communication channels as well as the training methods that are undertaken to guarantee a better understanding of the reforms at all levels of the organization. This is a critical area for any leader who is serious about introducing change in an organization.

The official argument that PSRs are making an impact calls for an exploration of the tangible changes observed and the criteria used to evaluate success. In the case of National Herbarium for instance, it was not very clear what specifically had changed or brought about

transformation in the organization apart from the usual narrative that it is working. Thus, the acknowledgment of progress in the official report needs to be critically examined. In this case, the study's finding that some respondents attribute the success of reforms to politicians rather than the organization's benefit clearly calls for further interrogation of possible politicization of the whole reform process and its expected impact on organizational effectiveness. In other words, it is apparent therefore that public sector leadership is affected by political factors which should not be ignored.

5.4 The Nature of Public Sector Reforms Being Implemented

The study also wanted to know how respondents at National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens understood public sector reforms. In general, the majority had a fair understanding of what was meant by public sector reform. For instance, according to one middle management official, public sector reforms are:

deliberate changes to the structures, systems and processes of public sector organisations with the objective to get the organisations to run better
(Interview with a middle management government official).

It is important to mention that the public sector reforms are being implemented in the following overarching thematic categories:

Legislative and Policy Reforms; Institutional Reforms; Operational/Functional Reforms; Financial Sustainability Reforms; Digitalization/Automation Reforms; Capacity Development and Leadership Building Reforms; Administrative Reforms; Infrastructure Development and Management Reforms (Malawi Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023, p. 30).

The reforms are very pertinent in the Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and they were chosen to suit different institutions. Consequently, one may find that PSRs in one Ministry or Statutory Corporation may not be the same as reforms being implemented in other Ministries or SCs. One respondent at the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens stated that:

The reforms that are being implemented here were chosen because they are very key in the improvement of service delivery and transforming our institution because we deal with different stakeholders and customers as a result these reforms that are being pursued here are going to assist to serve

our customers better (Interview with Middle management official, National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens).

Other interviewees mentioned that the reforms that were being implemented at their institution were categorized into four:

The PSR that are being implemented here are operational reforms, legal reforms, capital reforms and financial reforms (Interview with middle management official, National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens).

It is the Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) that is using a combination of different methods to coordinate reforms and monitor the implementation of the reforms. As already mentioned above, the middle managers' perception in the implementation of public sector reforms is that the senior managers in the organisation are the main actors, whilst the senior managers' perception is that the main actors are government officials who are championing the reforms (Interview with Middle and Senior management government officials). In relation to procedures followed to select the reform areas one middle manager stated that "The processes and procedures that were followed to select the reforms was through various meetings between staff members and different stakeholders from the government" (Middle management officials).

However, further discussions with other employees provided mixed responses. A majority mentioned that the reforms are not very clear as they tend to change over time for different reasons. For instance, they pointed out that since the attainment of independence there have been a lot of reforms that have been implemented in the public sector including National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens. They further pointed out that each one of the governments that have ruled the country during this period have had their own type of reform packages. The time-frame for the implementation of the current reforms is towards the Malawi 2063 goals.

Therefore, as stated by some of the respondents,

This is an outgoing process and the implementation of the reforms is still in process...the reforms are going to transform the systems and structures of the Ministries Department and Agencies including National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens and in the long run transform the entire country

even though there were mixed reactions that the reforms process is highly politicized (Interview with Middle management government officials).

The reforms are perceived as ongoing hence the perception of being endless. Although there is a positive perception of the future of reforms that they are going to benefit the MDAs including National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens, there is also a perception that the goals of reforms keep changing depending on who is in control of government. There is also a general perception that reforms at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens largely depends on the views and ideas of political leadership's interests.

5.4.1 Discussion: Critical Analysis of The Nature of Public Sector Reforms Being Implemented and Implications on Leadership

The findings show an understanding of public sector reforms (PSRs) among respondents at the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens reflecting a generally fair comprehension of planned changes aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. The main question is whether this understanding translates into active engagement and commitment among employees influenced by leadership. In other words, the nature of public sector reforms (PSRs) outlined in the findings above raises key implications for leadership within the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens and, more broadly, for the public sector in Malawi.

The types of reforms as outlined in the Malawi Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023, gives a comprehensive framework. However, a process of contextualizing these reform areas seems to be problematic. The process of selecting the reforms areas through various meetings between staff members and different stakeholders from the government doesn't give an impression of a systematic process. Based on the interviews, current and potential customers were not part of the selecting process. Taking into consideration that the process was also led by central government puts into question the issue of leadership of the process. In the end it may be possible that the identified categories may not really align with the specific needs and challenges faced by institutions like the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens. Related to the same observation, the coordination and monitoring of reforms by the Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) raise questions about the division of responsibilities between central coordination and agency-level implementation institutions like the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens. The efficacy of this coordination mechanism leaves a lot to be desired taking into consideration factors such as communication channels, feedback loops,

and the level of autonomy granted to National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens. It is very possible that such an arrangement encourages a harmonized and cohesive approach to reforms and this may actually hinder innovation at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens.

Another observation is that the mixed responses in relation to the clarity and stability of the reform process calls for a critical analysis. Why perceptions of clarity vary among employees and the impact of changes over time is puts into question the adaptability and sustainability of the reform strategy.

Ultimately, these findings carry critical implications for leadership within the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens and, more generally, for the public sector in Malawi. A reasonable understanding of PSRs among interviewees reinforces the role of effective communication from leadership. It is generally accepted that leaders play an essential role of ensuring that the objectives and benefits of reforms are effectively communicated to all employees of the organization. When interviewees were asked, they did mention that leadership has been engaging them quite often on public sector reforms in general.

Another issue is the level of autonomy of agency leadership in the reform process. The role of the Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) in coordinating and monitoring reforms puts into question the level of autonomy granted to individual institutional leadership. In general, effective leadership involves striking a balance between the needs of central verses agency-level leaders facilitate innovate public sector reforms. The findings show that the level of autonomy is not what is currently desired in order to facilitate innovation at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens.

What may be regarded as ‘the elephant in the room’ is the perceived politicization of reforms which poses a challenge for leadership in sustaining the reform agenda. Just like any other public sector institution, leaders have to navigate political influences to ultimately ensure that public sector reforms remain relevant to organizational goals and national development objectives. The perception of employees at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens clearly shows that they perceive political leadership as central but this is out of their immediate realm of control. The understanding that the goals of reforms may change depending on the political leadership reinforces the need for leadership at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens, and broadly every public sector institution, to provide a long-term vision. Thus, effective leaders must constantly communicate a consistent vision for reforms beyond political cycles.

5.5 Factors that Have Affected the Public Sector Reforms Implementation

Findings shows that there have been some internal and external factors that have affected the implementation of public sector reforms at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens and in the Ministries Departments and Agencies in general. Such factors include lack of adequate funding and resources to successfully implement the reforms. According to a senior management government official interviewed,

The PSR is a good initiative the MDAs are going to be transformed and the country will develop tremendously but the problem is that most of these government institutions have financial constraints and not enough human resources or even the right people with the expertise to execute some duties (Interview with Senior management government official).

Another respondent at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens specified what needs to be done to ensure the successful implementation of the reforms:

For these reforms to be successfully implemented there is need for the government to pump in adequate financial resources to fund the projects in the MDAs and the posts that are vacant need to be filled with people that are well qualified. Apart from that we need also awareness and sensitization from the committee that is responsible for overseeing the PSRs. We need guidance and support to also feel that we are relied upon to do this. They have to be engaging us from time to time so that we don't lose direction and we should be assured that we are doing the right things (Interview with General Government official).

Additionally, pandemics such as COVID-19 also affected the implementation of the reforms in MDAs because it restricted effective operations. In general, some of the solutions proposed by the *Malawi Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023*, (p. 311) were:

The implementing agencies should adopt new ways of conducting business such as virtual meetings, implementing agencies to draw business proposals and present them to Treasury and other Private Investors through a Public Private Partnership arrangement and intensify efforts to fill vacancies, restructuring and capacity development.

A critical analysis of respondents shows that a majority said that lack of adequate funding had hindered the successful implementation of the reforms, whereas a minority of them said that it was lack of resources that had affected the implementation of the reforms.

The government needs to allocate a lot of resources for us to execute our duties effectively and we do not have any issues pertaining to the implementation of the reforms apart from these financial and resources constraints (Interview with middle management at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens).

This shows that these factors, among others, had made the reforms not to succeed in most government institutions including at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens.

5.5.1 Discussion: Acritical Analysis of Factors that Have Affected the Public Sector Reforms Implementation and Implication on Leadership

The findings on factors affecting the implementation of public sector reforms (PSRs) uncover critical challenges that have implications for leadership within the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens and across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). The following critical analysis explores these factors and their impact on leadership. The identified financial constraints and resource shortages show a critical leadership challenge. All organizational leaders whether in public or private organizations must steer their organization through the ‘jungle’ of limited resources while at the same time ensuring the effective implementation of their reform initiatives. This implies that leaders need to prioritize initiatives while at the same time advocating for increased funding as well as allocating resources strategically to overcome the impact of constraints on reform success. The findings do not show that leadership at the institution took time to use these strategies. The attitude of leadership was to solely focus on goodwill of central government to provide the required resources for reform.

Another observation that is that the shortage of individuals with the necessary expertise raises questions about human resource management and leadership. In general, leaders must address gaps in expertise by constantly identifying skill needs as well as promoting training and development of their current staff and also possibly advocate for recruitment. Based on the interviews conducted, it became apparent that leadership in the organization (and this also seems to be the case in most public sector organizations) does not strategically address the human resource aspect of reform implementation. Consequently, implementation is a problem.

It is commonly agreed in change management literature that during reform period, leaders must ensure that employees feel supported, informed, and more importantly engaged. The evidence collected so far shows that leadership has not been providing guidance or fostering a supportive environment or maintaining open lines of communication.

The suggestion of adopting PPPs may show a potential strategy for leadership to explore alternative funding opportunities. Leaders in the public sector need to learn how to initiate partnerships, present business proposals, and also engage private investors. PPPs are often mentioned in Malawi public sector reform reports but not much is done to demonstrate implementation.

5.6 The Role of Leadership to Bring Significant Changes in The Public Sector Reforms

The role of leadership in every institution is to influence and direct people toward certain goals that they plan to achieve over a certain period of time. Change is inevitable so leaders are entrusted with the power to guide their followers to adapt to change and ensure that their institutional goals are achieved. Similarly, leaders need to set good examples to their followers. Respondents at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens were asked what they thought was the role of leadership in the reform exercise and one of the respondents said that, “the role of leaders is to instill a mindset change amongst the officials and to demonstrate persistence and commitment to the whole implementation process” (Interview with Middle management officials).

Other selected respondents said that:

The leaders in the MDAs will help in the successful implementation of PSR because they are in the best position to influence people to action (Interview with Senior management officials).

As leaders, we can motivate our subordinates because we are at a better position to influence and we have a huge role to play in as far as the implementation of the reforms is concerned in the MDAs (Interview with a Senior Management Government Official).

On the other hand, there is good relationship between leaders in the MDAs and PSRMD overseeing the implementation of public sector reforms because they are working together and they have the same agenda for public sector

reforms even though there were differing views that they had different agendas (Interview with General staff government officials).

All these responses clearly demonstrate an appreciation of the role of leadership in the reform agenda. Officially, *Malawi Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023* also talks about the role of leadership by saying that there are strategies developed to track the progress on the implementation of PSR reports and these include Quarterly Progress Reviews and Verification (Validation) exercises. Such exercises need effective leadership otherwise they are likely to yield nothing in the end.

Findings also pointed towards the role of leadership in enhancing accountability. Accountability in the workplace is very important, and employees need to be accountable for their own actions, behaviour, performance and decisions. When employees are accountable it means that they have increased commitment to work and employee motivation, which lead to higher productivity.

When asked who specifically in leadership is accountable, the majority of the respondents said that it is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is held accountable for the success and failure of public sector reforms, whilst a few of the respondents said that everyone is held accountable. For instance, one respondent said:

Everyone not only our leaders are held accountable for the success and failure of the reforms. The PSRMD provides adequate information to our leaders through various engagements with them and our leaders are the most influential because they provide guidance on what we should do (Interview with Middle management government official).

Another respondent said:

We look up to our leaders that is why the CEO is held accountable because he is entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that the reforms are successfully implemented but we still need to work together as a team. (Interview with Middle management government official).

Despite all these measures and observation on the role of leadership in reform process, one of the reasons for failing to achieve some targets in the public sector was “resistance to change

and unwillingness to participate in reform activities by some officers and other stakeholders due to perceived loss of personal benefits or perceived competition” (*Malawi Public Sector Reforms Progress Report 2020-2023*, p. 309).

When asked to comment on the relationship between the leaders and other government officials from the Public Sector Reforms Management Department the majority of the respondents said that they had different agendas whilst very few of the respondents said the agenda was not clear and a minority of the respondents said they were working together and majority of the respondents said that sometimes they work together to ensure that the PSRs are successful. This meant that most of the respondents felt that the agenda of the leaders were different from those of the PSRMD officials. While the leaders at National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens want to see things change, the PSRMD officials overseeing the reforms were influenced by the politicians and who just want to win votes. Thus, the majority of the respondents said that the reforms have been mostly affected by government politics. This politicization of the reforms has made it hard for the institutions to implement the reforms effectively.

Lastly, in terms of provision of adequate information on PSR to the staff, all of the respondents confirmed that they went through different workshops on the reform program. Others were informed about the program during internal meetings. Although the most influential officials may seem to be those from the PSRMD, the majority of the respondents said that their leaders are the most influential officials, while a few respondents said that both groups of officials were influential. This means that people will always look up to their leaders to provide guidance on how things should be done.

All in all, most of the respondents said that it was financial and resource constraints that had affected the successful implementation of the reforms. And from the above analysis it can be concluded that the perception is that leaders in the MDAs have an influence on the successful implementation of the reforms.

5.6.1 Discussion: The Role of Leadership in Public Sector Reforms Implementation

The role of leadership in bringing about essential positive changes within the context of public sector reforms (PSRs) is acknowledged. This critical analysis discussion section examines the key themes that emerging from the findings and further explores into the implications for leadership effectiveness.

Almost all respondents acknowledge leadership's role in facilitating a mindset change and portraying a commitment to the change implementation process. This reinforces the leaders' function as change agents within the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens and across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). The challenge to leadership is effective and strategic communication that drives change and ultimately inculcate a culture of adaptability and commitment.

The perceived alignment or divergence of interests between the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens leaders and officials from the Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) presents a complex dynamic relationship. Future studies may need to explore the nature of collaboration between MDAs leaders and PSRMD officials as well as assessing the impact of differing interest on reform outcomes. More importantly, it should investigate how leaders steer through political influences within the reform process. This aspect was not covered by this research.

Accountability emerged as one of the essential elements of leadership within the reform context. Research established that leaders at the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens, just like many MDAs, do not have a well-established accountability structures that directly relate to the reform agenda. It is not surprising therefore that others attributed accountability to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or others distributed it across all levels of leadership. This missing element of proper accountability system in relation to reform agenda probably affects leadership in the reform exercise.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research findings. It started with outlining the rationale for public sector reforms, then gave the key highlights of the public sector reforms that are being implemented in Malawi. The chapter then analyzed the factors that have affected the implementation of these public sector reforms. The chapter has concluded by looking at the role of leadership in terms of whether it can have any impact on the implementation of the public sector reforms in the government institutions.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together all that has been discussed from chapter one and provides a summary of the whole study. It summarizes the key findings that were identified during the study and provides recommendations that can assist the leaders in public institutions in the task of implementing the public sector reforms. Finally, the chapter closes by providing directions for possible further studies on public sector reforms and leadership in Malawi.

6.2 The Rationale for Public Sector Reforms

In Malawi, ongoing Public Sector Reforms (PSRs) face a perception gap between the official narrative and expert observations. While government reports highlight a commitment to enhancing efficiency and accountability, public reform experts note a public belief that the reform agenda has been abandoned. The introduction of 'Reforms Performance Agreements' signifies a shift towards result-based approaches, yet the failure to link these initiatives with broader national goals questions transparency in communication.

Hierarchical dynamics among government officials reveal challenges in leadership and employee engagement, with the naming of senior managers as key actors indicating a potential top-down approach that hampers communication effectiveness. Variations in staff awareness underscore the need for targeted communication strategies and comprehensive training methods at all organizational levels.

The study emphasizes the necessity of critically examining reported success in PSRs, questioning tangible changes and evaluation criteria. Ambiguities in success narratives, particularly in organizations like the National Herbarium, signal potential politicization, urging a thorough examination of political factors influencing public sector leadership. In essence, the study highlights the importance of transparency, effective communication, and a

comprehensive understanding of the broader national agenda for successful public sector reforms and effective leadership in Malawi.

6.3 The Nature of Public Sector Reforms Being Implemented

The study explores the understanding of Public Sector Reforms (PSRs) among respondents at the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens. Findings reveal a generally fair comprehension of PSRs and their ongoing nature. However, the selection process for reform areas lacks transparency, with limited involvement of current and potential customers. Coordination by the Public Sector Reforms Management Department (PSRMD) raises concerns about division of responsibilities and potential hindrance to innovation at the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens.

Mixed responses regarding the clarity and stability of the reform process suggest challenges in adaptability and sustainability. Leadership implications arise from the need for effective communication, autonomy for agency-level leadership, and the perceived politicization of reforms. Leaders must navigate political influences to maintain the relevance of PSRs to organizational goals and national development objectives, emphasizing the importance of providing a consistent, long-term vision for reforms beyond political cycles. Overall, the study underscores the critical role of leadership in guiding the ongoing PSRs at the National Herbarium and Botanical Gardens and across the broader public sector in Malawi.

6.4 Factors that Have Affected the Public Sector Reforms Implementation

The study identifies internal and external factors impacting the implementation of public sector reforms (PSRs) at the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens and across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Key challenges include insufficient funding, resource shortages, and limited expertise, affecting the success of reforms. The critical analysis highlights leadership implications:

- a) Financial Constraints- The study underscores the critical challenge of navigating financial constraints, emphasizing the need for leaders to prioritize initiatives, advocate for increased funding, and strategically allocate resources. However, the findings reveal a reliance on central government goodwill, lacking proactive strategies by institutional leadership.
- b) Human Resource Management- The shortage of expertise raises concerns about human resource management. Leaders should address skill gaps through strategic

identification of needs, training, and recruitment. The study indicates a lack of strategic human resource planning in the organization, hindering effective reform implementation.

- c) Employee Support and Engagement- Effective leadership during reforms involves supporting, informing, and engaging employees. However, the evidence suggests a lack of guidance, a supportive environment, and open communication from leadership, potentially impacting employee morale and commitment.
- d) Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)- The suggestion to explore PPPs as an alternative funding strategy indicates a potential avenue for leadership. Leaders should proactively initiate partnerships, present business proposals, and engage private investors to leverage external resources for successful reform implementation.

In conclusion, the findings highlight critical leadership challenges, urging leaders to adopt proactive strategies, address human resource gaps, and foster an environment conducive to employee support and engagement. Moreover, exploring innovative funding avenues like PPPs could enhance the effectiveness of public sector reforms.

6.5 The Role of Leadership to Bring Significant Changes in The Public Sector Reforms

The study emphasizes the crucial role of leadership in driving positive changes during public sector reforms (PSRs). Respondents recognize leadership's responsibility in instilling a mindset change, demonstrating commitment, and influencing successful implementation. The discussion section delves into key themes:

- a) Change Agent Leadership- Acknowledging leaders as change agents, the study highlights the need for effective and strategic communication to drive a culture of adaptability and commitment. Leadership faces the challenge of facilitating mindset changes within the National Herbarium, MDAs, and PSRMD.
- b) Alignment and Divergence- The perceived alignment or divergence of interests between leaders and officials from PSRMD introduces complexity. Future studies should explore collaboration dynamics, assessing the impact of differing interests on reform outcomes, and how leaders navigate political influences within the reform process.
- c) Accountability Structures- Accountability emerges as a critical element requiring attention in leadership. The study finds a lack of well-established accountability structures related to the reform agenda at the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens.

Accountability is distributed across leadership levels, emphasizing the need for a robust system to enhance leadership effectiveness in reform exercises.

6.6 Recommendations

1. **Enhanced Communication and Transparency-** Improve communication strategies to bridge the perception gap between official narratives and public sentiments on PSRs. Leaders should proactively communicate the link between reform initiatives and broader national goals. Transparency in reporting success and a clear understanding of the national agenda should be emphasized.
2. **Leadership Training and Engagement-** Provide comprehensive leadership training programs to address hierarchical challenges and foster effective employee engagement. Leaders should actively involve subordinates in the reform process, ensuring a bottom-up approach to complement any top-down strategy. Strategies to enhance leadership adaptability and communication effectiveness are crucial.
3. **Strategic Human Resource Planning-** Develop and implement strategic human resource plans to address expertise gaps. Leaders should identify skill needs, promote training, and consider recruitment where necessary. Establishing a proactive approach to human resource management will contribute to the successful implementation of ongoing reforms.

6.7 Areas for Future Research

1. **Collaboration Dynamics-** Explore the dynamics of collaboration between leaders in MDAs and officials from PSRMD during the implementation of public sector reforms. Investigate the impact of differing interests on reform outcomes and the strategies leaders employ to navigate political influences within the reform process.
2. **Innovative Funding Strategies-** Conduct research on the feasibility and impact of alternative funding strategies, such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), in supporting public sector reforms. Assess leaders' roles in initiating partnerships, presenting proposals, and engaging private investors to leverage external resources for successful reform implementation.
3. **Accountability Structures in Reform Initiatives-** Investigate the effectiveness of accountability structures related to the reform agenda within public sector institutions. Examine the distribution of accountability across leadership levels and propose recommendations for establishing a robust accountability system that enhances leadership effectiveness in reform exercises.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Question Guide for general staff and Middle Management Government officials

GENERAL STAFF AND MIDDLE MANAGEMENT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Background: The public sector reforms that have been implemented in Malawi

1. In your own understanding what is public sector reforms in the context of Malawi?
2. What are the public sector reforms that are being implemented in your institution?
3. Who are the main actors in the public sector reforms?
4. Why were those public sector reforms chosen?
5. How are those public sector reforms going to help the institution?
6. What processes and procedures were followed to select such reforms?
7. What has been the impact of the public sector reforms so far?
8. For how long have these public sector reforms been implemented?
9. What do you think is the future of public sector reforms?
10. Who are the reforms going to benefit?
11. In your view are these reform packages suitable for this organisation?
12. What is your role in these public sector reforms?

Factors that have affected the public sector reforms implementation

1. What are the internal and external factors that have affected the implementation of public sector reforms?
2. What should have been done to ensure that the reforms are successfully implemented?
3. What issues have been raised with pertaining to the successful implementation of Public sector reforms?

Types of leadership that can bring significant changes in the public sector reforms

1. What has been the role of leadership in these reforms?
2. How has leadership specifically helped in the Public sector reforms?
3. Do you think that the leaders in your institution and other government officers/ leaders have the same agenda for public sector reforms?
4. How do you assess the relationship? Do they work together?
5. Are there any measures put in place to track the progress on the implementation?
6. Who is held accountable?

7. Did any government official or those responsible for providing policy guidance provide adequate information to staff why public sector reforms are important?
8. Who do you think is most influential between leaders within a government institution or those responsible for providing policy guidance?
9. From leadership perspective what issues have affected the reforms?

Appendix 2: Question Guide for Senior Government officials

SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS;

Background: The public sector reforms that have been implemented in Malawi

1. In your own understanding what is public sector reforms in the context of Malawi?
2. What are the public sector reforms that are being implemented in your institution?
3. Who are the main actors in the public sector reforms?
4. Why were those public sector reforms chosen?
5. How are those public sector reforms going to help the institution?
6. What processes and procedures were followed to select such reforms?
7. What has been the impact of the public sector reforms so far?
8. For how long have these public sector reforms been implemented?
9. What do you think is the future of public sector reforms?
10. Who are the reforms going to benefit?
11. In your view are these reform packages suitable for this organisation?
12. What is your role in these public sector reforms?

Factors that have affected the public sector reforms implementation

1. What are the internal and external factors that have affected the implementation of public sector reforms?
2. What should have been done to ensure that the reforms are successfully implemented?
3. What issues have been raised with pertaining to the successful implementation of Public sector reforms?

Types of leadership that can bring significant changes in the public sector reforms

1. What has been the role of leadership in these reforms?
2. How has leadership specifically helped in the Public sector reforms?
3. Do you think that the leaders in your institution and other government officers/ leaders have the same agenda for public sector reforms?
4. How do you assess the relationship? Do they work to together?
5. Are there any measures put in place to track the progress on the implementation?
6. Who is held accountable?
7. Did any government official or those responsible for providing policy guidance provide adequate information to staff why public sector reforms are important?

8. Who do you think is most influential between leaders within a government institution or those responsible for providing policy guidance?
9. From leadership perspective what issues have affected the reforms?