

The Role of Public Management in the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals

Fredrick Kariithi Githui & Dr. Jane Wangari Njuru

Abstract

Public management plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable development goals (SDGs). Efficient public administration is crucial in attaining the SDGs as countries address challenging matters such as poverty, gender equality, climate change, environmental degradation, healthcare, quality education and affordable energy. While there is a global dedication to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), the importance of public administration in effectively addressing intricate sustainable development difficulties remains a significant concern. Government policies and programs ought to be implemented by the public administration. Nevertheless, numerous obstacles hinder the implementation and integration of the SDGs in public management systems that promote public interest and ensure equality, representation and responsiveness to citizens. The research design employed was a phenomenological approach, seeking to assess the role of public management by uncovering the experiences of individuals involved in sustainable development. To achieve a better coverage of the population within the sample, a stratified random sampling method was employed. The target demographic included public managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Stratification ensures that stakeholder groups are represented in proportion to their importance. The findings suggest that although sustainable development goals have been included in public management practices, there is a need to enhance their alignment across all dimensions. The formulation and implementation of policies strongly influenced the progress made towards achieving sustainable development goals. These recent discoveries not only enhance our comprehension of the role of public management in attaining sustainable development goals, but they also provide policymakers and practitioners with a clear direction.



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About Author (s)

Fredrick Kariithi Githui (Corresponding author), School of Business, KCA University, Nairobi, Kenya.
Dr. Jane Wangari Njuru, School of Business, KCA University, Nairobi, Kenya.

1.1 Introduction

Public management plays a vital role in advancing the global pursuit of sustainable development goals (SDGs). As nations strive to address complex challenges related to poverty, gender equality, climate change, environmental degradation, healthcare, quality education and affordable energy, effective public management becomes indispensable in achieving the SDGs (Mutiarani & Siswanto, 2020). This introduction provides an overview of the crucial role of public management in promoting sustainable development, highlighting key concepts, challenges, and strategies. The paper draws upon recent literature and empirical evidence to support the arguments presented.

Public management refers to the activities and processes employed by governments and public institutions to plan, implement, and evaluate policies and programs aimed at delivering public services and achieving public objectives. The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, constitute a comprehensive global framework encompassing 17 goals and 169 targets, addressing social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Public management practices are crucial in ensuring the effective implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, as they involve coordinating multiple actors, mobilizing resources, and aligning policies with sustainable development principles (United Nations, 2015).

Effective public management is essential for achieving the SDGs due to several reasons. Firstly, it facilitates the integration of the SDGs into national development plans and policies. Governments need to align their strategies and actions with the SDGs to create an enabling environment for sustainable development. Public management practices such as policy formulation, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement help incorporate the SDGs into national agendas, ensuring their integration across sectors and levels of governance (Pintér, Kok & Almassy, 2017). Secondly, public management plays a vital role in mobilizing resources and financing sustainable development initiatives. The implementation of the SDGs requires substantial financial investments, and effective public management is critical in attracting public and private sector resources. It involves innovative financing mechanisms, partnerships, and transparent budgeting processes to ensure the efficient allocation and utilization of resources towards SDG priorities. Public management practices such as public-private partnerships, impact investing, and performance-based budgeting can enhance resource mobilization and maximize the impact of investments in sustainable development (Haque et al., 2020). Furthermore, public management is instrumental in promoting accountability, transparency, and participatory governance, which are crucial elements of sustainable development. Effective public management systems facilitate citizen engagement, inclusion, and access to information, enabling stakeholders to contribute to decision-making processes and hold governments accountable for their actions. By fostering transparency and accountability, public management practices strengthen public trust and legitimacy, promoting the effective implementation of the SDGs. However, several challenges hinder the effective role of public management in achieving the SDGs. These challenges include institutional capacity gaps, bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited resources, and the need for multi-stakeholder coordination (Binns et al., 2017). Overcoming these challenges requires enhancing public management capabilities through capacity-building initiatives, knowledge sharing, and technology adoption. Additionally, fostering collaboration and partnerships among governments, civil society, and the private sector is crucial for harnessing collective efforts and expertise in achieving the SDGs.

In conclusion, public management plays a critical role in advancing sustainable development by integrating the SDGs into national agendas, mobilizing resources, promoting accountability, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration. As nations strive to achieve the SDGs, it is

imperative to strengthen public management capacities, overcome challenges, and adopt innovative strategies that enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of public management systems (Biglari, Beiglary & Arthanari, 2022). By doing so, governments can maximize their contributions to sustainable development and create a prosperous and inclusive future for all. The research objectives for this study are; to explore the perceptions and experiences of public managers regarding the integration of sustainable development goals (SDGs) within public management practices. To examine the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaboration in public management for achieving sustainable development goals. To identify and analyze the governance and institutional factors that influence the integration of sustainable development goals within public management systems.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite the global commitment to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), the role of public management in effectively addressing the complex challenges associated with sustainable development remains a critical concern (Arimoro & Elgужja, 2019). Public management practices are essential for translating policy commitments into tangible actions and outcomes. However, numerous obstacles hinder the effective implementation and integration of the SDGs within public management systems. This problem statement aims to identify and analyze the key challenges that impede the role of public management in the achievement of sustainable development goals (Darma et al., 2023). Firstly, inadequate institutional capacity and governance structures pose significant challenges to public management's effectiveness in advancing sustainable development. Many countries lack the necessary administrative and technical capacities to implement and monitor the SDGs effectively. Insufficient expertise, limited resources, and bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder the formulation and implementation of policies aligned with the SDGs (Martínez-Córdoba et al., 2023). Additionally, weak governance structures, corruption, and lack of transparency impede the accountability and coordination necessary for successful sustainable development initiatives. Secondly, the mobilization of financial resources for sustainable development presents a significant challenge within public management systems. Despite the recognition of the importance of financing the SDGs, many countries face difficulties in attracting and allocating adequate resources (O'hare & Hall, 2022). Insufficient public funding, limited access to international financing mechanisms, and the absence of innovative financing strategies hinder the realization of sustainable development objectives. Public management must address these challenges by adopting effective resource mobilization strategies, enhancing public-private partnerships, and exploring alternative financing mechanisms (Vorontsova et al., 2020). Furthermore, the lack of effective multi-stakeholder coordination and participation within public management systems hampers the achievement of sustainable development goals. The SDGs require collaborative efforts among governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and communities. However, siloed approaches, fragmented decision-making processes, and limited stakeholder engagement hinder the integration of diverse perspectives and the collective action necessary for sustainable development (Yasmin & Kamal, 2021). Strengthening mechanisms for multi-stakeholder collaboration, promoting inclusive policy-making processes, and ensuring meaningful participation are crucial to overcoming this challenge. Lastly, monitoring and evaluating progress towards the SDGs present significant challenges within public management systems. Comprehensive and reliable data collection, analysis, and reporting are essential for evidence-based decision-making and tracking progress. However, many countries face data gaps, inconsistent methodologies, and limited capacities in data management. Insufficient monitoring and evaluation systems hinder the measurement of progress, identification of gaps, and timely corrective actions necessary for effective sustainable development implementation.

In conclusion, the role of public management in achieving sustainable development goals is hindered by challenges related to institutional capacity, resource mobilization, multi-stakeholder coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of public management systems in promoting sustainable development. Policymakers and practitioners must focus on capacity building, governance reforms, innovative financing mechanisms, inclusive decision-making processes, and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to overcome these obstacles. By doing so, public management can effectively contribute to the realization of the SDGs and create a sustainable and inclusive future for all.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Public Administration Theory

The theory of public administration offers an all-encompassing framework for comprehending the dynamics of public management practices, decision-making procedures, and the operation of public organizations (Frederickson et al., 2018). It comprises a variety of theories that both contribute to the field of public administration studies and have the potential to shed light on the part that public management plays in the accomplishment of sustainable development objectives.

2.1.1 The New Public Management (NPM)

The New Public Management (NPM) is a paradigm that evolved in the 1980s and 1990s within the field of public administration. According to Hood (1991), New Public Management addresses the failures and inadequacies of public sector performance and emphasises on the implementation of market-oriented strategies, performance evaluation, and results-based management in public institutions. It is a response to the perceived bureaucracy of traditional public administration models, which aims at greater efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability in the delivery of public services (Islam, 2015). Specifically, it aims at enhancing financial control, creating value for money, and increasing efficiency and accountability in the delivery of public services. NPM places a significant emphasis on market-oriented strategies, which is one of its most important components. This entails implementing market-like mechanisms into the public sector, such as user choice, user competition, and outsourcing (Hyndman & Lapsley, 2016). Proponents of the NPM say that it can improve both the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of service delivery if market concepts are incorporated into the model. One way to motivate public organizations to improve their performance and cut expenses is to use competitive tendering processes, for instance.

The evaluation of performance is yet another essential component of NPM. The NPM embraces the measurement and assessment of performance in public institutions. Indicators and goals of performance are devised to determine how effectively and efficiently public services are delivered. Because of this, a larger emphasis may be placed not just on the inputs and processes, but also on the results and the outcomes (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020). By assessing performance, public managers can identify areas in need of improvement and make decisions motivated by data to improve the provision of services. Accountability is emphasized in the NPM principles as well. Public managers are expected to deliver outcomes and are held accountable for the performance of their departments (Hood, 2001). This can be accomplished through the use of tools such as performance contracts, remuneration that is contingent on performance, and public reporting. Accountability ensures that public managers are responsible for the outcomes of their decisions and actions, therefore, establishing a culture of accountability and responsiveness in public administration (Kann-Rasmussen, 2023). Accountability also guarantees that the public knows who is accountable for specific tasks and responsibilities. The implementation of NPM principles can potentially have a beneficial effect

when applied to the context of sustainable development. For example, performance-based budgeting helps to ensure that financial resources are directed toward the most important sustainable development goals (Eriksson & Andersson, 2023). It gives governments the ability to distribute funding according to the efficiency and significance of various programs and policies in terms of accomplishing sustainable development goals. Assessments that are outcome-oriented are another NPM principle that assists in evaluating the impact that policies and programs have on the achievements of sustainable development. Because of this, policymakers can make decisions based on accurate information and alter their plans to maximize the influence on sustainable development (French et al., 2023). Another essential feature of NPM that has the potential to contribute to sustainable development is public-private partnerships, also known as PPPs. PPPs have the potential to improve resource mobilization and address difficulties connected to environmental sustainability if they make use of the knowledge, resources, and innovations offered by the private sector. PPPs make it possible for public and private entities to work together on the delivery of infrastructure projects, services, and other activities that support the achievement of sustainable development goals (Williamson & Roles, 2023).

The New Public Management (NPM) paradigm emphasizes public administration on market-oriented strategies, performance evaluation, and accountability. It aims to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the public services that are provided. In the context of sustainable development, the application of NPM principles like performance-based budgeting and outcome-oriented assessments has the potential to improve both the distribution of resources and the efficacy of public policies (Scott et al., 2023). In addition, public-private partnerships have the potential to address issues relating to sustainability by drawing on the knowledge and resources available in the private sector. The NPM offers a structure for public management practices that, if adhered to, can aid in the accomplishment of sustainable development goals.

2.1.2 Institutional Theory

The study of public administration theory is a broad topic that incorporates a variety of perspectives, all of which contribute to a better understanding of the actions and procedures carried out by organizations operating in the public sector. Institutional Theory, which focuses on how formal and informal institutions impact organizational behavior and practices (Scott, 2014), is a prominent theory within this domain and is one of the most important theories in this field. In the context of public management's role in the achievement of sustainable development objectives, Institutional Theory gives useful insights into how institutional elements influence the integration of sustainable development goals within public management systems (Andrews et al., 2017). This is important since public management plays a role in the achievement of sustainable development goals. This theory contributes to the analysis of the difficulties and possibilities that public managers encounter when attempting to align their activities with the principles of sustainable development, as well as the role that institutions play in either facilitating or impeding such alignment. Understanding the role that public administration plays in the accomplishment of sustainable development goals is aided by the insights that can be gleaned from institutional theory. Researchers acquire a greater knowledge of how public management practices are molded by formal laws, regulations, and informal norms when they examine the influence of institutional components (Andrews et al., 2017). This is accomplished by evaluating the influence of institutional components. These realizations provide a conceptual framework for investigating the incorporation of performance evaluation, collaborative processes, and market-oriented strategies into public management systems. For instance, researchers can investigate how institutional characteristics help or impede the adoption of techniques that are focused on sustainability in

public administration (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989). In addition, the Institutional Theory elucidates how institutional elements play a part in the achievement of sustainable development objectives through public management techniques. According to Andrews et al. (2017), it helps identify how formal and informal institutions impact the decision-making processes and behaviors of public administrators. Policymakers and practitioners can develop methods to promote the alignment of public management with the goals of sustainable development if they understand these institutional processes. According to Salamon and Anheier's research from 2020, institutional arrangements that stress transparency, accountability, and stakeholder involvement can make it easier to incorporate sustainability goals into public management systems. When applied to study, Institutional Theory enables a thorough investigation of the underlying processes and contextual factors that form the function of public administration in the accomplishment of sustainable development. Researchers can investigate the dynamic interplay between formal rules, informal norms, and the adoption of sustainable development practices within public management systems when they apply this theory and put it into reality. According to Andrews et al. (2017), having a more in-depth understanding permits the identification of obstacles, facilitators, and opportunities for promoting sustainable development goals through effective public administration.

In conclusion, Public Administration Theory is an umbrella term that includes a variety of theories, such as the Institutional Theory, that offer conceptual frameworks and analytical tools to comprehend the part that public administration plays in the process of achieving sustainable development (Thornhill & Van Dijk, 2010). The importance of the influence of formal and informal institutional variables on public management practices is emphasized by institutional theory. Researchers will be able to examine the adoption of techniques geared toward sustainability, performance assessment methods, and collaborative procedures within public management systems if they investigate these elements and look into them further (Farmer, 2015). To have a better knowledge of how public administration can help achieve sustainable development goals, one must first have an awareness of the dynamics of the institutions involved.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study applied qualitative research methodology, the goal was to explore and understand the role of public management in the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs). Qualitative research was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena, capturing the experiences, perceptions, and meanings attributed to the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research design employed was a phenomenological approach, seeking to uncover the lived experiences of individuals involved in public management and sustainable development. Phenomenology is well-suited for exploring the essence of human experiences and understanding how individuals make sense of their reality (Moustakas, 1994). By delving into the rich narratives of participants, this approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between public management practices and the pursuit of sustainable development.

3.2. Sampling

The sampling in this phenomenological research involved a purposeful selection of participants with rich and varied experiences relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Participants in this study included professionals engaged in public management, policymakers, and experts in sustainable development. The sample size was determined by the principle of saturation, where data collection continues until no new insights or themes emerge from the analysis (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection methods included in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit detailed responses, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives on the intersection of public management and sustainable development. The interview process fostered a flexible and conversational approach, enabling participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, outlining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Participants had the right to withdraw at any point without repercussions. Anonymity was preserved in reporting findings to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.5. Research Limitations

Despite the depth of insights gained, qualitative research has inherent limitations, including potential subjectivity in interpretation and challenges in generalizing findings to broader populations. Acknowledging these limitations enhances the transparency and credibility of the research outcomes.

4. Findings

Table 1: Key Themes in Public Management for Sustainable Development

Theme	Description	Examples/Implications
1. Integrated Policy Framework	Alignment of policies with SDGs, fostering a cohesive approach	Streamlining efforts, maximizing impact across sectors (Basu et al., 2020)
2. Adaptive Governance Structures	Flexibility in governance models to address dynamic conditions	Successful implementation in response to emerging challenges (Monkelbaan, 2019)
3. Stakeholder Engagement for Holistic Impact	Active involvement of diverse stakeholders for a comprehensive impact	Inclusive decision-making, fostering ownership and commitment (Nonet et al., 2022)
4. Strategic Resource Allocation	Directed allocation of resources for sustainable impact	Transparency in resource management as a key component of effectiveness (Sisto et al., 2020)
5. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms	Robust systems for assessing public management initiatives	Continuous improvement and optimization aligned with SDGs (Malaolu & Ogbuabor, 2017)
6. Community Empowerment and Inclusivity	Prioritizing community involvement and empowerment	Increased likelihood of achieving lasting impact, acknowledging diverse perspectives (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016)

Theme 1: Integrated Policy Framework

The study revealed a consistent theme regarding the effectiveness of public management in the integration of policies for sustainable development. Respondents consistently highlighted instances where an integrated policy framework, aligning with the SDGs, contributed significantly to the achievement of developmental objectives. This integration facilitated a cohesive approach, streamlining efforts across various sectors for maximum impact (Basu et al., 2020).

Theme 2: Adaptive Governance Structures

Effective public management, as per the study findings, demonstrated an ability to adapt governance structures to dynamic socio-economic and environmental conditions. Instances of successful implementation were characterized by flexible governance models that could respond to emerging challenges and ensure the continued relevance of sustainable development initiatives (Monkelbaan, 2019).

Theme 3: Stakeholder Engagement for Holistic Impact

The study identified that the effectiveness of public management was closely tied to the degree of stakeholder engagement. Projects that actively involved diverse stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and NGOs, demonstrated a more holistic impact on sustainable

development. The findings underscored the importance of inclusive decision-making processes for fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders (Nonet et al., 2022).

Theme 4: Strategic Resource Allocation

Effective resource management emerged as a critical factor in achieving sustainable development goals. The study found that successful instances of public management were characterized by strategic resource allocation, ensuring that financial and human resources were directed towards initiatives with the highest potential for sustainable impact. Transparency in resource management was also identified as a key component of effectiveness (Sisto et al., 2020).

Theme 5: Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

The study highlighted the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in gauging the effectiveness of public management initiatives. Successful cases featured regular assessments, data-driven evaluations, and feedback loops, allowing for continuous improvement and optimization of strategies aligned with SDGs (Malaolu & Ogbuabor, 2017).

Theme 6: Community Empowerment and Inclusivity

Effectiveness in public management was closely linked to community empowerment and inclusivity. Findings indicated that sustainable development initiatives that prioritized community involvement and empowered local populations were more likely to achieve lasting impact. This theme emphasized the need for public management strategies that prioritize inclusivity, acknowledging the unique perspectives and contributions of diverse communities (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study, employing a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the role of public management in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reveal several key themes that shed light on the intricacies of effective governance for sustainable development. One prominent theme emerging from the study underscores the significance of an integrated policy framework. Respondents consistently pointed to instances where public management successfully aligned policies with the SDGs, fostering a cohesive approach across various sectors. This integration proved instrumental in streamlining efforts, minimizing redundancy, and maximizing the impact of developmental objectives. The findings suggest that a harmonized policy environment contributes significantly to the overall effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives (Irtyshcheva et al., 2022).

The study emphasizes the adaptability of governance structures as a crucial factor in effective public management for sustainable development. Successful instances were characterized by governance models capable of responding to dynamic socio-economic and environmental conditions. This adaptability ensured that sustainable development initiatives remained relevant in the face of emerging challenges. The study suggests that the ability to navigate and respond to evolving circumstances is paramount for sustained success in achieving SDGs (Rahman, 2021). A key revelation from the study is the close linkage between effective public management and stakeholder engagement. The findings highlight that projects actively involving diverse stakeholders – including local communities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – demonstrated a more holistic impact on sustainable development. The study underscores the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders, and recognizing their unique contributions to the development agenda (Li et al., 2018). The importance of strategic resource allocation emerged as a critical factor in achieving sustainable development goals. Successful instances of public management were characterized by the strategic allocation of financial and human resources toward initiatives with the highest potential for sustainable

impact. The transparency in resource management, as indicated by the findings, contributes not only to the efficient utilization of resources but also to building trust among stakeholders (Hague et al., 2020).

The study highlights the paramount role of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in gauging the effectiveness of public management initiatives. Regular assessments, data-driven evaluations, and feedback loops were identified as integral components of successful cases. These mechanisms enable continuous improvement and optimization of strategies aligned with SDGs, ensuring that public management remains responsive and adaptable to evolving circumstances (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019). A consistent theme throughout the study is the interconnectedness between public management effectiveness and community empowerment. Initiatives that prioritized community involvement and empowered local populations were identified as more likely to achieve lasting impact. The findings underscore the need for public management strategies that prioritize inclusivity, acknowledging the unique perspectives and contributions of diverse communities in the pursuit of sustainable development (Onyango & Ondiek 2021).

In conclusion, the phenomenological approach employed in this study provides valuable insights into the nuanced dimensions of public management that contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. The identified themes collectively emphasize the importance of an integrated, adaptive, and stakeholder-engaged approach, supported by strategic resource allocation, robust monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms, and a commitment to community empowerment and inclusivity. As governments and organizations seek to advance sustainable development agendas, these findings offer practical guidance for refining and enhancing public management strategies to ensure a meaningful and lasting impact on global sustainability efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delved into the intricate dynamics of public management's role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a qualitative phenomenological approach. The findings unveiled essential themes that collectively underscore the critical factors contributing to the effectiveness of public management in the realm of sustainable development.

The first theme illuminated the significance of an integrated policy framework, emphasizing the need for policies aligned with SDGs to foster a cohesive and streamlined approach. The adaptability of governance structures emerged as another crucial theme, highlighting the importance of flexible models capable of responding to dynamic socio-economic and environmental conditions.

Stakeholder engagement emerged as a consistent theme, emphasizing the pivotal role of diverse stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and NGOs, in achieving holistic sustainable development. This underscored the importance of inclusive decision-making processes that fostered a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders.

Strategic resource allocation was identified as a critical factor, emphasizing the need for directing financial and human resources toward initiatives with the highest potential for sustainable impact. Transparency in resource management was also recognized as a key component in building trust among stakeholders.

The study underscored the paramount role of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, emphasizing their contribution to continuous improvement and adaptation of strategies

aligned with SDGs. Lastly, the interconnectedness between public management effectiveness and community empowerment was a pervasive theme, highlighting the necessity of initiatives that prioritize inclusivity and empower local populations.

As nations and organizations navigate the complex landscape of sustainable development, these findings provide practical guidance for refining public management strategies. By embracing integrated policy frameworks, adaptable governance structures, stakeholder engagement, strategic resource allocation, robust monitoring, and community empowerment, public management can play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development agendas.

In essence, this study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on effective public management for sustainable development. It calls for a comprehensive and collaborative approach that transcends traditional boundaries, recognizing the interconnectedness of policies, governance, stakeholder involvement, resource allocation, and community empowerment. By incorporating these elements, public management can become a potent force in realizing the global vision of a sustainable and inclusive future for all.

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