

## ***Shorter Notices***

**Malcolm Harper.** *Public Services through Private Enterprise: Micro-Privatisation for Improved Delivery.* New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2000. 371 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 450.00.

Malcolm Harper has introduced the concept of “Micro-Privatisation” in this book and views it as a better approach for improving the delivery of public service. In his opinion, a nation’s economy should be under state control due to technical, economic, financial, and political reasons. However, the government has to hand over a part of its services to a private intermediary to ensure the timely delivery of services to the public and to create conditions for efficiency. He names this approach as “micro-privatisation”.

Malcolm Harper has given 24 case studies on micro-privatisation to defend his argument. These case studies are the meat of this book. These are classified in 7 categories, i.e., urban services, utilities, agricultural services, health, welfare, parking and transport, and education. Each case study attempts to illustrate the human side of the transition from public to private provision. Out of 24 cases, micro-privatisation has proved to be profitable in 18 cases; while in 6 cases, there is just coverage of marginal cost in the provision of the service while the remaining 5 cases are running in losses.

Malcolm Harper has also pointed out the ways for increasing the effectiveness of micro-privatisation. He recommends maximum involvement of the community or clients in the process. Moreover, the process should be transparent and able to create competition between enterprises. By following this approach, the development of local monopolies can be easily avoided. Micro-enterprises should be allowed to cover their costs and make a reasonable profit, and public services should be marketed rather than provided free of charge. The users of services must be dealt with as customers. (Zafar Mueen Nasir)

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ed.).** *Asian Economic Crisis, Consequences and Policy Lessons.* New York: United Nations. 1999. 186 pages. Paperback. Price not given.

The book consists of papers presented at a seminar organised in June 1998 by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. The major thrust of the papers in the book is to promote a better and wider understanding of the causes of the Asian Crisis and the lessons that could be drawn to avert such crisis in the future.

The Crisis has been examined from different perspectives in the book. The major causes have been discussed in detail. These include the rapid deregulation and liberalisation of the financial sector without appropriate measures to safeguard the economies. Foreign exchange market players, such as bank lenders, hedge funds and mutual fund operation's, and speculators also played a role in sowing the seeds of the Crisis and then aggravating it through herd reaction.

Overall the book is good reference material on the Asian Economic crisis. (Zafar Mueen Nasir)

**WHO Expert Committee on Malaria.** *Report of a WHO Study Group.* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2000. 100 pages. Paperback. SFr.15.00. Technical Report Series No. 892.

Malaria is thought to kill between 1.1 and 2.7 million people worldwide each year. Of these about 1 million are children under the age of 5 years, and over 2400 million remain at risk. This report of a WHO Expert Committee examines the efforts made since 1992 in the implementation of the Global Malaria Control Strategy. The importance of malaria has also been recognised in this report. A significant amount of money is allocated every year for the Roll Back Malaria Project. The report focuses on four basic technical elements: to provide early diagnosis and promote treatment of malaria; to plan and implement preventive measures; to encourage early detection or prevent epidemics; and to promote the regular assessment of a country's malaria situation. It also evaluates the relationship of various malaria control programmes to health-sector reforms, such as the organisation and health financing reforms. Disease management, which is a fundamental and indispensable element of malaria control, is also discussed. The study also makes recommendations on how to predict, prepare for, control, and prevent malaria epidemics, which continue to threaten large areas of the world. The use of the anti-malarial drug 'chemoprophylaxis' and selective vector control in the prevention of malaria are listed. It is stated that accurate epidemiological information is critical for assessing the extent of public health problems, and for planning and evaluating disease control programmes. A number of standardised case definitions of malaria morbidity and mortality and a limited number of indicators have been developed, which would represent a step forward. In order to make programme activities effective, and adaptive to changing epidemiological situations, the study emphasises the need for operational research at the national level. (Rashida Haq)

**World Health Organisation.** *Reduction of Maternal Mortality.* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999. 40 pages. Paperback. Price in developing countries: SFr 9.80.

A maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of the termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes. This report, formulated by international experts, highlights the complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth which cause the death of more than half a million women every year and leave many others with serious and life-long health problems. The first of the ten chapters gives a brief introduction of maternal death. The second chapter explains human rights with reference to safe motherhood by giving four principal categories. It also gives three main actions that governments need to take to promote safe motherhood as a human right. The next three chapters focus mainly on the dimensions of the problems underlying the medical causes and the impact of maternal death. The most common causes of all maternal deaths are hemorrhaging, sepsis, hypertensive disorder of pregnancy, obstructed labour, and unsafe abortion. It is also clear now that poor nutrition contributes to poor maternal health and underlines poor pregnancy outcomes. It is also highlighted that maternal death has implications for the whole family, with an impact that rebounds across generations. Chapter six demonstrates that significant improvements can be achieved when key interventions are placed in the context of broader health programmes. Chapter 7 states that safe motherhood is perceived as a human right, underpinned by laws that support effective action to increase woman's access to the appropriate service. Families and communities have a major role to play in making that access possible and in protecting woman's health through improved nutrition and the prevention of unwanted pregnancy. It is also stressed that the health sector should be encouraged to provide good-quality services, including essential care for obstetric complications, to be available to all women throughout pregnancy and childbirth. The final message underlines the importance of monitoring progress, through the use of appropriate indicators and analysis of each maternal death to identify contributory factors that could have been mitigated or avoided. (Rashida Haq)

**Ruth Alsop, Elton Gilbert, John Farrington, and Rajiv Khandelwal.**

*Coalitions of Interest: Partnership for Processes of Agriculture Change.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000. 306 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 395.00.

The book is an attempt to bring about an improvement in the contribution of agriculture in the livelihoods of poor households in the semi-arid areas of rural India. In Rajasthan this process is carried out under the rubric of process monitoring, or the interaction and coalition between different stakeholders. The stakeholders include the government, farmers, external advisers, donors, and a local non-government organisation. The authors have argued that the reason for choosing a multi-stakeholder process as opposed to a project approach for agriculture development is

to increase the quality and coverage of services, particularly for the ill-served poor people. This is unlikely to happen through non-government organisations (NGOs) alone, as NGOs have close associations with the rural people but they lack the technical expertise to introduce beneficial technologies. On the other hand, the strength of the government lies in technology, but they are unable to respond to the requirements of low-income farmers. In addition, since the government has the role of the caretaker of public goods, it has to look at the means of increasing efficiency and coverage through alternative ways, to organise services such as decentralisation and devolution. Both forces of change imply stakeholder participation.

First, the authors list the performance gap arising out of misplaced policy concern and from inefficient implementation of policy decisions in the agriculture sector. These weaknesses include such factors as only government is the major provider of services for low-resource agriculture, and thus the provision of services remains weak; the government organisations lack budget, time, and skills to identify needs and implement actions to meet these needs; and the cost and time-frame are underestimated. Then the concept of coalition is analysed; also the tools and the practical mechanism which are needed to bring about the approximate consensus necessary to affect change through the interaction. Process monitoring is hailed as a key tool for these conditions. The evidence presented in this book also confirms that coalition is effective and opportunistic. But in Rajasthan, interaction and coalition are not intended to be an end in itself, but a part of a strategy to stimulate the provision of improved services by the government, and consequently, to increase agriculture contribution to rural household livelihoods.

Several scenarios presented in this book centred on multiple stakeholders' interaction, for Rajasthan may offer a useful insight for programme designers and planners elsewhere. It will attract a wide readership among those in the field of agriculture economics, rural development, and sociology, while being of equal interest to international and donor agencies, programme designers and non-government organisations. (Attiya Y. Javed)

**Marina R. Pinto.** *Metropolitan City Governance in India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000. 238 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 395.00.

Statistics show that the rapidly increasing urbanisation is a challenge to India and other developing countries of the world. But very little attention has been paid to the issue of urban local government. Urban governance links local governments to state and central governments vertically and brings several sectoral divisions and field agencies into play horizontally. This book is a timely contribution to an important issue of city management.

After discussing theories and views on local government including the democracy versus efficiency debate, the author studies the institutional designs in the

USA and Britain in relation to India. Then the four metropolises are profiled separately. The nature and degree of interlinkage of their municipal corporations are compared. The roles of the mayor/commissioner, state-local relations, and interactions with other functional agencies, development authorities, and non-government organisations are also discussed. Thus, the author has brought out the intergovernmental relationship very clearly through a description of the establishment and functioning of state agencies, which deal with civic problems, especially in the field of planning and civic infrastructure. She argues strongly for a participatory model that would reflect the empowerment of the people without the need of professionalism in the prompt and efficient delivery of services.

By examining the city management of four metropolitan cities, Marina Pinto highlights the importance of urban local government, which serves as a cradle for democracy. She makes a good case for a more participatory type of government and has based her research on questionnaires, field trips and interviews. The theoretical foundation of local government, various charts, and up-to-date statistics add to the value of the book. It will be useful to students, teachers, researchers, and policy-planner as well as other professionals in such fields as urban studies, local government, and political science. (Attiya Y. Javed)

**B. K. Sinha and Pushpendra.** *Land Reforms in India: An Unfinished Agenda.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000. 243 pages. Hardbound. Indian. Rs 395.00.

The successful implementation of land reforms is a techno-economic prerequisite of widespread agriculture development. That is why land reforms have been an important agenda of India's development strategy over the last five decades. However, there has been continuous debate on the form and contents of land reforms, though the focus of the debate has altered over time. Earlier, the focus was on issues like ceiling limits, size of land-holdings, and tenancy regulations. But, recently, the processes of liberalisation and globalisation have entered this debate. In the current decade, the very utility of land reforms has come to be questioned, and the argument is that land reforms, instead of being a force for progress, have become an institutional impediment to growth. The debate on market versus state, growth versus equity, and the peasant versus the capitalist mode of production in agriculture has also acquired a new dimension.

The editors of this volume have used contributions from a number of authors and have divided the volume into two parts. The contributors to the first part discuss some important issues relating to the implementation of land reforms. They provide a critical overview of land reforms in India between 1950 and 1995, particularly of policy initiatives in land reforms by the government in the context of liberalisation, rural development and poverty alleviation through land reforms, improving the management of land records, and the importance of environmental perspectives of agrarian reforms.

In Part II of this volume, the experience of implementing land reforms in three states, namely, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, and Bihar is reviewed. The first two are success stories while the third one is not. The authors of the papers in this section provide the historical background of land reforms, analyse the statistical information, and then highlight the successes and constraints in the implementation of land reforms as experienced in these three Indian states.

This volume will be essential reading for those in the fields of agriculture economics, rural development, and sociology. (Attiya Y. Javed)