Foreword

Subnational governance and development have seized the attention of governments, practically everywhere for various reasons, among which are the desire to arrest the growing chasm between citizens and political institutions within the nation state, to give people ample opportunities to build sustainable livelihoods, to promote better service delivery and to increase participation in the political economy for more effective problem-solving. This compendium of essays is not merely propitious given that they reflect the conceptual and practical sensibility of the debates that are being waged around the themes, but they expose the challenges that confront policymakers in their attempts to chart an alternative path. There is little doubt that subnational governments – regional/local/municipal/city – represent a crucial space for meaningful interaction between public officials and citizens, yet in some cases there is little political will to strengthen these institutions. Nonetheless, where subnational governments are given the requisite power and authority that allow them to be efficacious administrative and political institutions, they function as sites of innovation and creativity thereby engendering growth and development of geographic spaces. They also function as a legitimizing force for the nation state.

This handbook makes a valuable contribution to the governance and development debates and by its singular focus on the problematic of the subnational level of government fills the void in current research and policy literature by exposing theoretical and practical ideas about institutions, actors and processes. It brings new analytic lenses to the discourse concerning the organisation of subnational government and the management of development as single case or comparative studies drawing on a range of experiences in varied socio-economic contexts.

It provides public officials at the national, regional and local levels of government, business leaders, managers of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), policy researchers, teachers and students of development studies, public policy and management as well as the general public with information on the trends in research and practice on the evolving relationship between national development and subnational (local) government.

The handbook provides various perspectives against six important themes underpinning subnational governance and development. Students of public management at the subnational level will find this collection most helpful when comparing the challenges for this level of government in their jurisdiction.

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