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Practices, Challenges and Prospects of Private-Public Universities Partnership Ethiopia by Moti Mosisa Gutema, Dilla University

Abstract

This paper focuses on Practices, Challenges and Prospects of Private-Public Universities partnership in Ethiopia with particular reference to the selected three Public and six Private Universities. To this end, interviews were conducted with the deans and presidents of the selected private universities, the public relation offices and concerned bodies of the selected public universities, and ministry of education. Thus, the study revealed that the reluctance and passiveness of both public and private universities and the failure of ministry of education to act as a catalyst in between the actors resulted in poor and unsatisfactory nature of partnership for many and, the absence of it for some. Moreover, as quality of education is not only the effort and functions of a single agent, but needs co-functioning and proper conceptualization of system approach; the missing-link between the actors has made the actors to miss the potentials and opportunities of partnership. Hence, the paper recommends that the focus has to be given, and integrated approach has to be developed to build synergy in between the actors - so that they strive to their own common goals.

Keywords: System Approach, Quality of Education, Public, Private and Partnership

Introduction

The term 'public-private partnership' (PPP) describes a relationship in which public and private resources are blended to achieve a goal or set of goals judged to be mutually beneficial to both the private entity and to the public (Louis, 2012). It is a link where two or more parties (One public and any other parties) having common and compatible goals, sharing of risks and rewards of multi-sector skills, plus expertise and finance to deliver desired policy outcomes agreed to work together for a particular purpose and/or for some period of time (Collaboration Roundtable, 2001, Collaboration Roundtable 2005, cited in Jose and Luis, 2009). It is becoming the most preferred alternative to delivering service and prevalent in all parts of the world and is an increasingly promoted policy tool for development in education sectors of developing countries (Brans, 2011). In describing the imperativeness of the Public- Private Partnership, National Association of Public Administration and American Society of Public Administration in INTO (2013) stated that:

> "…there is a single operating principle: the use of partnerships and collaboration among sectors with the objective of developing the resources and capacity to address our public needs in an environment of scarcity…."

Moreover, the World Bank in its report in 2009 stated that "…a dynamic private sector has expanded the access to and quality of education through a variety of public-private partnerships…" Hence, in the social and sustainable development spheres, partnerships between public and private actors are becoming more widespread, and suggesting that a new paradigm for collaboration, action and impact is rapidly emerging (WEF, 2014). Specifically, involving private organizations in activities like providing education services has expanded the education market and new forms of public-private engagement. The participation of private sectors in education has

increased dramatically over the last two decades across the world, and the main rationale for developing public private partnerships (PPPs) in education is to maximize the potential for expanding equitable access to schooling and for improving education outcomes (WB, 2009).

In Africa, most private higher education institutions (pHEIs) started after 1990, although the precursors existed much earlier (Mabizela, 2007). Studies indicate that the rate of their expansion and participation is increasing at an alarming rate, and, they have been functioning as partner and collaborating agents for public universities in achieving their mutual commitment (common goals) (Aziz et al, 2013; Amponsah and Onuoha, 2013; Okwachi et-al 2005; John et al, 2010, Gudo, 2014). Accordingly, in Ethiopia multiple private universities are accredited and delivering higher education services in parallel to public universities. Hence, this study focuses on assessing the practice, challenges and prospects of Public-Private Universities Partnership in Ethiopia.

Statement of the Problem

The official website of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education reveals that presently more than 64 Private University Colleges are registered for the purpose of teaching and learning. They have together enrolled more than 90,005 undergraduate students which constitutes 17 percents of total enrollment in the country, and 3158 postgraduate students constituting 12 percent of total enrollment, while, the government owned universities are 34 in number having an enrollment capacity of 26, 117 for Post graduate , and 503,569 for undergraduate students. Moreover, the Proclamation for Higher Education No. 4 sub 1-9/2009, states that all private and public universities mission and vision must relate to teaching, research and community services aspects. Even though the private universities have the motive of profit making, their missions and objectives are as set by ministry of education.

Developed countries as found in Western Europe have a long history of private universities as alternative higher education service providers. Moreover, they have established a high reputation elite universities that enroll only the most privileged, as a result of high quality teaching and providing graduates for the labor market. But, the situation is completely different with regard to private universities in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Eastern Asia and Africa. For instance in Ethiopia, the image of graduating from public university is not the same with that of the private one. This is due to the assumption that; private sectors always admit students with lower point than the public one; and different studies' result also reveal that private universities face problems like, lack of adequate finances needed for growth, lack of well-resourced infrastructures, lack of qualified staff,   low students intake, and low remuneration and welfare packages for employees (Okwach, 2005). Moreover KNSFU (2015) stated that the absence of partnership leads to the absence of partnership in dissemination and utilization of research findings and innovations, difficulty in sharing scarce resource, absence consensus regarding policies on strategic areas of the economy, missing the advantages of identifying community needs and enhance the capacity for community involvement and improvement (KNSFU, 2015).

In recommending the way of overcoming these deficiencies of private sector institutions, KNSFU (2015) stated that,

> "…the partnership between public universities and private universities can lead to sharing of resources, consultation on curriculum development and consensus on student credit transfer. And, also, the linkages and partnerships will therefore lead to progressive

innovative institutions whose mandates are informed and enriched by the experiences, expertise and resources of these partners. On the other hand, the partners gain by tapping the intellectual and creative energy of the universities. There is need for a paradigm shift that ensures that universities and collaborating entities mutually reinforce their strengths"

Therefore, the public universities must take their responsibilities of mentoring and partnering with private universities so that they could strive together in achieving their missions by working cooperatively, sharing the scarce resources, and realizing their interdependence as they share both the risks and benefits drown from their success and failure.

Moreover, Public and private universities are the twins instruments for ministry of education to achieve its vision and missions in higher education (both in terms of quality and quantity). And, these institutions must combine their efforts and work together as a partner; but this partnership and collaboration among these institutions needs the facilitation and the creation of conducive environment by ministry of education. Hence, taking the obligation given to Ministry of Education by Higher Education Proclamation No 88, sub No 7/September, 2009, which sates "… the Powers and Duties of the Ministry extends to the level of facilitating cooperation and information exchange among institutions …" the government (ministry of education) must support both the private and public universities in order to make them to work together.

Hence, although public private partnership is imperative for ministry of education as a general and, for both private and public universities as specific actors of the ministry, there is no sufficient study conducted on the areas of the practices, challenges of public-private university partnership. Consequently, this research tried to answer the following questions; like a) Is there any partnerships among private and public universities b) What are the challenges limiting public and private universities partnership c) What are the prospects of private- public universities partnership d) What are the roles played by ministry of education in co-coordinating and activating the partnerships.

Methods

In achieving the objectives of the study, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. In collecting primary data; three public Universities and six private University Colleges were selected. Methodologically, Ambo University, Dilla University and Addis Ababa University were selected using Quota, Convenience and purposive sampling respectively. While, the private sectors ; Lead-star university, Rift Valley University (2), Addis Ababa Medical College were selected using stratified sampling and then simple random sampling, and Paradise University College, Info-Link College and Micro-Business University College were selected using quota sampling. Concerning the techniques of data collection used, intensive interviews were conducted with all the deans/presidents of the selected private universities, and public relation and other concerned bodies of public universities. Moreover, to assess the role of Ministry of Education in activating the partnership, the General Director for Higher Education and Experts for Private Higher education were interviewed.

Conceptual and Legal Framework

The Proclamation for Higher Education No. 4 /1-9/September, 2009 states that all Higher Education institutions (both private and Public) have the objectives of: a) Preparing

knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in numbers with demand-based proportional balance of fields and disciplines so that the country shall become internationally competitive; b) Promoting and enhancing research focusing on knowledge and technology transfer consistent with the country's priority needs. c) Ensuring that education and research promote freedom of expression based on reason and rational discourse and are free from biases and prejudices; d) Designing and providing community and consultancy services that shall cater to the developmental needs of the country; e) Ensuring institutional autonomy with accountability; f) Ensuring the participation of key stakeholders in the governance of institutions; g) Promoting and upholding justice, fairness, and rule of law in institutional life; h) Promoting democratic culture and upholding   multicultural community life, and Ensuring   fairness in the distribution of public institutions and expanding access on the basis of need and equity.
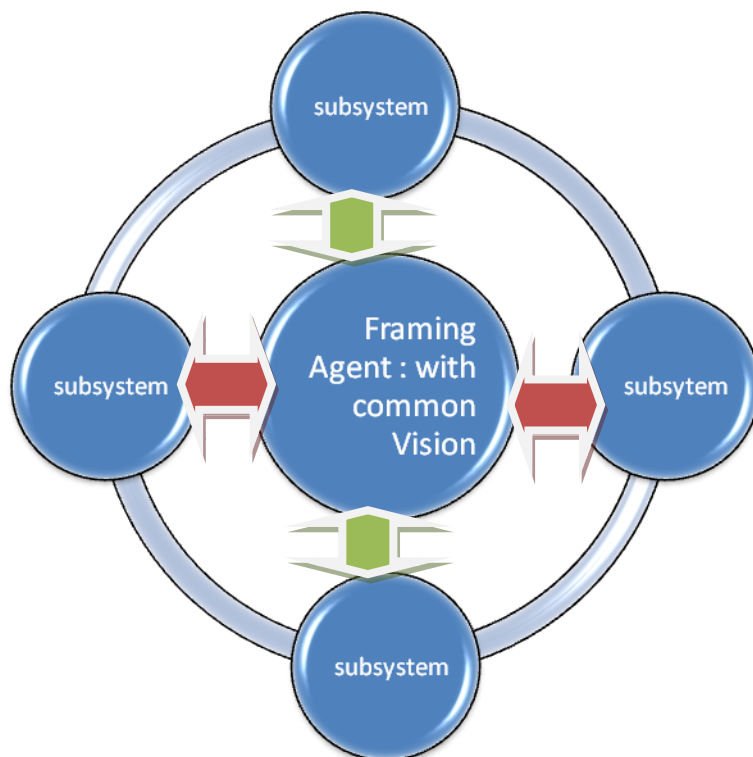
From the above proclamation, it is possible to understand that the private and public universities are instituted with common objectives and mutual commitment, where, the effective functioning of one agent helps and supports the performance of the other. Hence, their effort in working together has to be encouraged very well.   Moreover, the same proclamation (Proclamation for Higher education)   No. 88/7 September, 2009 states that"... Powers and Duties of the Ministry of education is to facilitate cooperation and information exchange among institutions.....". Hence, even if the institutions are responsible to initiate the partnership, ministry of education must act as an integrating agent in coordinating the partnership.

System/Synergy Approach to common Goals Achievement

System Approach to goal achievement is drown from organizational system approach's analysis, where, Systems means taking a comprehensive view or a complete look at the interlocking sub-systems that operate within an organization or defined as a set of elements which are joined together to achieve a common objective. And, it has the following characteristics;

- Unity of goal: all the components of the system run to achieve the same goal. In other words, in system approach, there is no difference of goal and direction. The same goal, but different efforts.
- Interdependency: In system approach there is extreme interdependence among the components. All the components share both the risks and the benefits of the system as a whole not as a single actor. Not only this, the success of one component has its own impact up on the other part and the failure goes also in the same way. The credit or blame comes belongs to the system as a whole, not the part/sub-system.
- Resource sharing: In a system's approach to goal achievement, the recourse available belongs to the system as a whole, not one component. So, the resource available will be shared among the components in a way that the mission and vision of the system will be achieved efficiently and effectively. In system's approach to goal achievement, there is no conflict over the resources, because all the components know that each system will use the resource of the system in achieving their common goal.
- Common Framework: In any system's approach, there are different subsystems and components, and these systems are tied together; *one*: by the goals that they have in common; second; by the framework and guidelines guiding their performance and their unity towards their effort to achieve their common objectives.

■ Framing agent: The last principle of system's approach to performance is that, the components need an agent who leads and coordinates them together to achieve their goal. This agent is responsible to make them to come together, to discuss, to share their resources, and to have common consciences.

Developed by the Researcher (2015): Building successful partnerships
From the above diagram it is possible to understand and draw the following descriptions:
- Sub-systems integrate and work together if only if there is common objective and an integrating agent.
- System cannot exist without common goal, and common goal cannot be realized unless the sub-systems agree to work together as a system.

Analysis and Discussion
Description of the Universities selected

Table: 1 Universities and student enrolment at undergraduate & post graduate level

No	Government Universities	Non-Government Universities Colleges	Total	%
Total No.	34 Univ.	64	98	
Undergraduate	503,569	90, 005	5 93,574	17.8
Post Graduate	26,117	3158	33,882	12

Analyzed from Annual Report of MoE, 2014/2015

The above table indicates that presently excluding the colleges even providing degrees, there are 64 private university colleges (meeting the classifications provided by Proclamation for Higher Education No. 9/ September, 2009), constituting the potential of enrolling 90,005 undergraduate and 3158 postgraduate students. And, the 34 public universities contain 503, 569 undergraduate

and 26,117 postgraduate students. Out of the 34 public universities three of them were selected for the study and out of the 64 private university colleges six of them were selected as a case study.

The Practices of Partnership among the Selected Universities

a) Addis Ababa University and Surrounding Private Universities

Addis Ababa University which was established in 1950 as a university college of Addis Ababa is the oldest and largest higher learning and research institution in Ethiopia. Since its inception, the university has been the leading center in teaching, research and community service. With the enrollment of 33 students in 1950, now AAU has 48, 673 students (33, 940 undergraduate, 13, 0000 graduate and 1733 PhD students) and 6064 staff (2408 academic and 3, 635 support). In its 14 campuses, the university runs 70 undergraduate and 293 graduate programs (72 PhD, 221 masters), and various specialization in health science. Over, 2220000 students have graduated from AAU since its establishment (AAU Bulletin, 2014).

Addis Ababa University has a network of research, teaching and learning and community service partnership with both local and international universities and organizations. From its inception to present, the university has been delivering sandwich courses for Masters, Doctorates, and for researches. It is one of the largest and known universities of Ethiopia, followed by Jimma and Haramaya University. Nationally, the university is a partner for both governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutes. But compared with the university's trend in creating partnership with other organizations, the University's previous effort to work with private universities is very stumpy. For instance, according to the public relation office of AAU, out of the active 64 Private university colleges in the country, the university has tried to cooperate and partner only with two universities (Unity University and St. Mary University). Even, this partnership was initiated and started by the private universities. Hence, the university's Partnership approach with private universities is *waiting for help approach* to partnership. This means, Addis Ababa University has not been proactively writing a letter or asking them to come and to work together. Rather, the private universities come and ask for help and the university responds to their need.

Hence, the partnership that the university is exercising can be divided in to two types. Formal partnerships: in which the cooperating parties are obliged by memorandum of understanding and, exercise their responsibilities. Whereas, the informal one is the case in which each of the partnering parties initiate the need based partnership to work together or to share the scarce resource in achieving the organizations' objective. Hence, Addis Ababa University has a formal partnership with St. Marry University and Unity University on the agenda's like : a) Joint Research Projects b) Curriculum review of participating parties c) Sharing experience and best practices d) Promoting students and Faculty exchanges and Undertaking Joint capacity building programs.

Moreover, the partnership between these universities has been analyzed by using stages of partnership development in running with the same/complimenting objective. Hence,) in having a partnership out of the four stages of partnership (Partnership Exploration, Partnership building, partnership Realization, and partnership Phase-out / Renegotiation with each other) the private universities took the initiatives, and asked Addis Ababa University. And, then Addis Ababa University accepted their request for partnership and, they had a memorandum of understanding

with each other. But, regarding the third stage of partnership (Realization of the partnership), there has not been any effort tried by both parties to enforce their pointy of agreement, and nothing has been done. In other words the agreement waits either the due date (since the partnership is for the coming five years) or the committed party will initiate the enforcement of point of agreement. The respondents stated that they are busy with other business and, they will try to enforce it when urgent need or necessary needs enforce or make them to move to the next step.

In addition to the above private universities, Lead-Star University College has also tried to create a partnership with public universities like Adama Science and Technology University, Arsi University, and Wollega University. By similar case, partnership here is also initiated by Lead-Star University (Private university), and they agreed to work together. But, having a partnership on some selected teaching and research areas, the points of their agreement is yet not functional. The problem is that, both of them have signed and agreed to work together, but, neither of them had tried to enforce their agreement. Nevertheless, all the selected other private universities (Addis Ababa Medical University College, Rift Valley University) are not partners for any of the public universities formally, except their request for materials and library help whenever they need.

b) Ambo University and Surrounding Private Universities

Ambo University is also one of the foremost higher learning institutions with significant contributions in the country's overall development by building the capacity of development agents through short, medium and long term trainings in various fields since its establishment in 1939. After passing through various developmental stages, it has recently become independent with a status of a university organized into five colleges, three institutes and two schools with 38 academic departments. Currently, the University is effectively running 38 undergraduate programs in various fields and 11 PG programs. Now, the university is providing the service using more than 800 highly competent local as well as expatriate staff (AU bulletin 2014) .

The partnership between Ambo University and that of surrounding University Colleges is informal. In other words, there is no any formal partnership which Ambo University is engaged in with memorandum of understanding, where, both parties committed to take their part. Hence, the relationship is informal, where any of the partner approaches the other based on their need, even, sometimes without any formal letter. For, instance, both Rift valley university and Micro-Business university college students' use lab-rooms, and libraries of Ambo university. But, there is no any agreement on the area of teaching, research, and community service to achieve the broader goal of the sector.

c) Dilla University and Surrounding Private Universities

The history of Dilla University can be traced back to the year 1996 with its name, Dilla College of teachers' education and Health sciences. The then Dilla College constituted two faculties: Faculty of teachers' Education and Faculty of Health Sciences. However, in 2001, the College was included in the then newly emerging University – Debub University. In 2004 Dilla College once again went through another phase and sprung in to a full- fledged University by the councils of ministers regulation No 129/04. When Dilla college begun its activity as a college it had 12 departments with a total student population of less than 400, in a campus that was originally

constructed for another purpose. Now the University is operating in 3 campuses with one college, one institute and 13 schools which offer 40 under graduate and 7 post graduate programs with a student population of around 17,000 in regular and continuing Education programs.

Paradise and Info-Link colleges are the two private universities operating in Dilla town. These universities are working with Dilla University in different but, in informal ways. The partnership and collaboration is not a formal partnership, where, there is binding formal document and agreements. Most of the time , the private universities (Info-Link Colleges , Paradise University Colleges)   ask for any material, laboratories and library needs, and Dilla University cooperates their request.

Challenges of Public- Private Universities Partnership

This research tried to address the reasons behind the absence of strong partnership among the selected private and public universities. Accordingly, the response of the respondents can be classified in to three parts; problem from Ministry of Education, Problem from Public Universities and problem from Private universities. These factors are summarized in the following ways.

- The Absence of Established Partnership Framework: The respondents from both private and public universities stated that, there was/is no any framework for facilitating partnership. And, they argued that   the absence of framework made them to be reluctant, and not to function in the area of partnering. This is due to the fact that the responsible agent (Ministry of Education) is not functioning in bringing them together by acting as a channel, and developing a framework document which facilitates conditions for their partnership.
- Focusing on Abroad Partnership: All the interviewed respondents (from both private and public universities) focus on partnering with international organizations and international/aboard universities. The public universities stated that this is due to the fact that, they (Public Universities) are overwhelmed with a number of doctorate programs and big projects which needs the partnership and collaboration of foreign countries' institutions.

One of my respondents from public universities said:

" ....after all you need to create partnership when you think of that you will be benefited or gain any financial or material support from that partner. Hence, we focus on international partnership than the local one because the foreign countries' institutions have the capacity to feed up our needy"

Moreover, the private universities stated that some public universities are not positive for them as they share extension (night and weekends) students from public universities. Even, some of the university managers (private universities) stated that some public universities consider the existence of private universities as a threat not as a partner for their own sector. Hence, we search for partners from abroad than that of the internal universities. Therefore, it is possible to say that the existing partnership is foreign based than that of the local one.

- Passive Nature of Both Parties: And, also, the public universities respondents stated that they have never rejected any private sector coming to them for partnership; some comes only for their own short term need, and majorities of them are reluctant even to contact us. In contrary to this, the private universities respondents stated that the public universities

always consider themselves as self-sufficient and they do not need anything from us; hence, they (public universities) are very reluctant to contact and to work with us. Hence, both of them claim each other for failing to have a partnership; so it is possible to conclude that the reluctance of both parties resulted in the poor nature of partnership.

- Need-Based not Vision Based   Partnership: The respondents from public universities stated that most of the time private universities come and contact us(public universities) only to feed their short term lack and their motivation to be partnered for the long term objective like research and community service is very low. Hence, the absence of long term passion and vision based partnership also, resulted in the absence of motivation from public universities. One of the respondent from public universities said: *"...the private sectors always come to us when they need either material or service support from us. The come ...they get what they want and they never come again ..."* Hence it is possible to conclude that the present trend is need based than vision based.

Moreover, the private accepted their blame from public universities. And one of the public universities respondent said "………it is true that we want to communicate with public universities whenever we need either material or service help from public universities….". And the public universities stated that they are not working with local private universities due to the fact that they need partnership with foreign countries organizations. Hence, it is   possible to conclude that the partnership going on is need based than that of vision based.

- Absence of Commitment in Realizing the Initiatives: Moreover, the universities engaged in partnership with memorandum of understanding; like Addis Ababa University, Lead-Star University College, Unity and St. Marry University are not in a position to implement and initiate the implementation of points of agreement. This is due to the fact that the commitment of the partnering parties is very low. One of the public universities respondents stated that"... *We agreed to work together and we have selected some thematic areas for our partnership, and after agreement we kept silent, because we were (the university) busy with other issues, and they (private universities) have never returned to us also to make the partnership effective.* Therefore,   due to the absence of the agreeing parties to make the agreement effective, partnership has never developed in a way it has to be.
- Luck of Awareness: Beyond the passiveness, the respondents from private universities stated that they do not even know that partnership could work to realize their vision.

One of the private Universities Dean said:

"....as a management committee and, I personally, we have never thought of that we could create partnership with public universities, and get these all advantages you are saying. Hence. ..... after this we may thing over ... and discuss by management level...."

Therefore, the absence of awareness about the significances of partnership among the public and private higher educations' is another reason for the absence of partnership among the actors.

The Role of Ministry of Education

It has been stated that Ministry of Education is obliged by Higher Education Proclamation No 88, sub No 7/ September, 2009 to facilitate cooperation and information exchange among institutions. Hence, the government (ministry of education) must support both the private and public

universities by acting as a channel in between them. To assess what has been done by ministry of education to facilitate partnership, General Director for Higher education research and education, and Expert for private universities stated that, the ministry always strive to create and extend collaboration among private and public sectors in higher education. But, the fact is that there is no framework developed by ministry of education in guiding the relationship between both actors. Moreover, they (the respondents from ministry of education) stated that the cause for not developing a framework is that, previously the government has let them to work together in a way that they can achieve the missions and Vision of ministry as a general, and their own in particular. But, some of the private universities mis-used the freedom given to them. Hence, the ministry of education wrote a letter and warned all private and public universities, and restricted any kind of partnerships. Moreover, the officers stated that, the negligence and non-commitment nature of the some of the private sectors and, the absence of the framework in letting down the private sectors to cooperate and partner to each other were some of the main reasons for the past problems. But, presently the ministry is on the way to coordinate acting team, and to develop a framework for the proper performance of the sectors so that the mission and Vision of the ministry can be achieved.

Conclusion

It is imperative that Partnership has to be considered as means to achieve the common vision set for more than one actors. Hence, this study tried to assess the Practice, Challenges and prospects of Public- Private Universities Partnership in Ethiopia using some selected private and public universities. And the following conclusions are drowning from the study.

Firstly, regarding the practices of Public-Private partnership, out of the selected public universities, it is only Addis Ababa University which has signed a formal partnership with private universities. Even, the formed partnership is created by the initiation of the private universities, and yet not effective due to different reasons. While, Dilla University is helping the private universities (Paradise University College, Info-Link) whenever they need libraries, laboratory instruments and materials support from the university. But, their partnership is informal and its is based on waiting for need and waiting for will based; Which is without any document and memorandum of understanding by which the parties would take of mutual commitment and strive to work.

Secondly, regarding the challenges of partnership among the private and public universities, the selected universities raised similar reasons. The reason raised by the respondents are; lack of awareness on the importance of partnership, lack of commitment from both parties, the absence of collaborative structure, the silence of ministry of education, focusing on the abroad partnership, self-sufficiency attitude of public universities are the reasons for the absence of strong partnership among the actors..

Lastly and the researcher recommended that, using the existence of unity of goal, the public and private universities must use system approach to realize it, and follow the *principle of interdependence* where the components share both the risks and the benefits of the system as a whole not as a single actor. Moreover, *principle of Resource sharing* (where the resource available will be shared among the components) will be achieved effectively and efficiently.

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