

## **Partnership between Public and Private Higher Education Institutions in**

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### **Abstract**

The prominence of new approaches such as the New Public Management (NPM) and Alternate Service Delivery (ASD) in the post-cold war era altered the dynamics between state and non-state actors with respect to the delivery of traditionally-public services. As a result, Public Private Partnership (PPP) emerged as a phenomenon. Since then PPP has become one of the very important developmental tools with a number of different models pertinent to different sectors. It is generally regarded as an effective means to bring resources and expertise of public and private institutions together towards common goals. As such the private and public participants as well as the general public and other stakeholders harvest benefits from the effective utilization of PPP. Although PPP is much more popular in sectors such as infrastructure development and health services, it is also becoming a common practice in the field of higher education. While a different combination of public and private institutions/organizations - where at least one of them is an academic institution - constitute PPP in higher education, Lee (2008) noted the various forms of partnerships between public and private higher learning institutions. Considering the different benefits that can accrue from PPP and the level of development and variety of challenges the Ethiopian higher education is facing, it can be argued that the effective development and utilization of PPP is of paramount important. However, the current state of PPP in the Ethiopian higher education is underdeveloped. This paper, by looking at primary data, collected through interviews, explored the potential benefits and challenges of partnership between public and private higher education institutions in Ethiopia.

**Key words: New Public Management, Alternate Service Delivery, Public Private Partnership**

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### **Introduction**

Since higher education has been opened to private investment in the 1990s, a plethora of institutions had mushroomed in few years. Through time those strong enough - financially and administratively – remained in the business while the others vanished. Currently, private higher education accounts for 15.2 % of the total undergraduate student population (MOE, 2016). In addition, private higher education stands out in certain areas such as access to female students—at undergraduate level, female students account for 43.7 % in the private sector, compared to 33.1% in the public institutions (MOE, 2016). This is an evidence to the significant contributions private higher education institutions are making in addressing crucial issues. However, private higher education, as is the case in its public counterpart, is encountered with multitude of challenges. Assuring quality of education, establishing efficient good governance, making meaningful contributions to the betterment of their local communities are among the major areas of struggle.

Partnership with concerned government, non-government and private bodies is among the major approaches that can be geared towards overcoming challenges and enhancing higher education development. More importantly, this paper argues that partnership between public

and private institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia can be beneficial mechanisms in addressing the common challenges and goals of the sector. Therefore, public private partnership (PPP) among higher education institutions is portrayed as a strategic tool. Institutions need to establish and effectively utilize PPP by coordinating their efforts and resources towards their success and the betterment of higher education in general.

With this central thesis, the following sections present, first the emergence and theoretical foundation of PPP, then discuss relevant literature specifically pertinent to the use of PPP in higher education and lastly discuss some of the major benefits of such partnership in the context of the Ethiopian higher education.

### **PPP: the Concept**

The phrase ‘Public-Private Partnership (PPP)’ covers a wide scope of ideas that can be practically interpreted in different ways. Its major concern, however, is the provision of various public services through combined and coordinated efforts of public and private entities. In other words, PPP refers to the working together of public and private sectors for the purposes of designing, planning, financing, constructing and/or operating projects which would otherwise be regarded as traditionally belonging in the domain of the public sector.

There are different definitions and modes of application for PPP. This depends on the specific sector where the PPP is applied and what it attempts to achieve. Reviewing literature Forrer et al (2010 p. 476) have defined PPP as:

Public-private partnership is ongoing agreements between government and private sector organizations in which the private organization participates in the decision-making and production of a public good or service that has traditionally been provided by the public sector and in which the private sector shares the risk of that production.

There are three basic conditions that have to be fulfilled for this conception of PPP to work: (1) the relationship between the private and public counterparts should be long term than a onetime interaction; (2) the private sector participates not only in the production and delivery of the services but also in decision making; and (3) there has to be negotiated allocation of risk between the partnering parties, than leaving the risk entirely to the public partner.

### **Emergence of PPP**

Although state and non-state actors have a long history of working together towards various societal goals, a more structured partnership is rather a recent phenomenon brought about by the changing conception of the role of state. The economic shifts in the late 1970s and 1980s produced important lessons in market friendly reforms which at the same time reshaped the notion of the role of the state. The practice of involving the private sector in the delivery of public services, and the growing partnership between the two sectors can be traced to different events, concepts, theories and developments. These include, but not limited to, the end of the cold war, the fall of the communist world, the 1970s economic crisis, the policies of Margaret Thatcher (in the United Kingdom) and Ronald Regan (in the United States), liberalization [and neo-liberalization], New Public Management, deregulation of public services and de-bureaucratization, privatization ... etc. More specifically, as Borins (1995) noted, the paradigm shift in public administration to focus on New Public Management

(NPM) and alternative service delivery (ASD) has contributed a lot to the emergence and development of PPP.

### **New Public Management (NPM)**

Originating from the neo-liberal understanding of the relationship between state and economy, NPM advocates the application of business and market principles and management techniques in the public sector in the same way it is applied in the private one.

The goal, therefore, would be slim, reduced, minimal state in which any public activity is decreased and, if at all, exercised according to business principles of efficiency (Drechsler, 2005). NPM is based on the understanding that all human behavior is always motivated by self-interest and, specifically, profit maximization. Epistemologically, it leans more on the quantification myth, i.e. everything relevant can be quantified; qualitative judgments are not necessary. It is popularly denoted by concepts such as project management, flat hierarchies, customer orientation, abolition of career civil service, de-politicization, total quality management, and contracting- out (ibid).

NPM came from the Anglo-America tradition, and it was strongly pushed by most of the International Finance Institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. It was originated from the 1980s with the dominance of neo-liberal governments (especially Thatcher and Reagan) and the perceived crisis of the Welfare state. But, it came to full fruition in the early 1990s. NPM was part of the neo-classical economic imperialism within the social sciences where there was the tendency to approach all questions with neo-classical economic methods (Borins, 2000).

Though NPM was practiced in different ways in different countries depending on their specific situations and political experience, according to Borins (1995), the following can be taken as the common characteristics:

- Providing high-quality services that citizens value;
- Demanding, measuring, and rewarding improved organizational and individual performance;
- Advocating managerial autonomy, particularly by reducing central agency controls;
- Recognizing the importance of providing the human and technological resources managers need to meet their performance targets; and
- Maintaining receptiveness to competition and open-mindedness about which public purposes should be performed by public servants as opposed to the private sector or non-governmental organizations.

The New Public Management can be interpreted as an agreement between the public and their elected representatives on the one hand, and the public service on the other. The public and politicians expect high-quality public services and better performance from public sector organizations, what the former US Vice President Al Gore called ‘government that works better and costs less’ (Gore 1993, cited in Drechsler 2005). To get the quality and better performance, they give public servants more managerial autonomy, as well as the human and technological resources (i.e., training and information technology) to meet their goals. In addition, the public and politicians are willing to reward strong performance, for example,

through performance pay. The last component of the NPM paradigm is a way of enforcing this agreement. If public servants do not improve their performance at the expected level, politicians and the public will introduce competition within the public sector, or pass to on activities to the private sector or NGOs.

Given the convergence of multiple strong triggers for change, countries launched comprehensive public sector reform programs. Their programs included privatization, structural reform separating operating agencies from policy ministries, financial management reform, and initiatives to improve service quality. These reforms were generally named ‘reinvention of government’ which mainly has resulted in the change of the role of state in service delivery. Particularly backed up by the emergence of globalization the role and involvement of states in service delivery has been reduced to facilitation in most countries. The state became enabler: coordinates and facilitates the situation for the private sector to provide the service with minimum effort and complexity (Boston et al., 1996).

Though many NPM-inspired reforms were perceived quite successful, there were also several problems related to NPM. As a result, the concept of NPM started declining because of different challenges and gave a chance to rise the concept of Alternate Service Delivery (ASD).

### **Alternate Service Delivery (ASD)**

Alternate Service delivery (ASD), which is popular in many public sector reform programs in the larger NPM movement, is another important theory that needs to be considered in the development of PPP. In simple terms, ASD means different things to different people. Ford and Zussman (1997) defined ‘Alternate Service Delivery’ as a creative and dynamic process of public sector restructuring that improves the delivery of services to clients by sharing governance functions within individuals, community groups and other government entities.

ASD is not exclusive. It includes privatization as well as reorganization and reengineering of mainstream government. It is not just about deficit reduction, devolution, and central agency controls; but it does involve rethinking roles and functions. It depends heavily for success on a strong policy foundation and on a client service focus (Borins, 2000).

Many writers tried to define ASD in different ways. Based on the kind of alternative chosen for the delivery of public services, there are different approaches (forms) to be considered which Hatry (1983) has summarized it as: contracting for service, franchises, grants/subsidies, vouchers, volunteers, self-help, use of regulatory and taxing authority, user fees and charges to adjust demand, encouraging private organizations to take over an activity (“divestiture”), De-marketing/ reducing demand for service, obtaining temporary help for private firms, joint public private ventures.

With the popularization of ASD in many countries, the involvement of the private sector in the delivery of public services has increased very significantly. This is attributable to the recognition of some fundamental reasons. Allen et al. (1989) summarized the major reasons for greater use of the private sector as follows:

1. to obtain special skills or supplement staff for short periods;
2. to meet demands beyond current government capacity;
3. to reduce costs;

4. to improve service quality;
5. to provide clients with more choice of providers and levels of service.

Generally, recognition of the problems associated with the realization of NPM and the parallel development and enrichment of ASD has popularized the new service delivery option-public-private partnership. This approach puts a clear distinction between the two, the public and the private sectors but calls for their partnership. Thus, though PPP had its roots back in 1970s, it became very common at different scale and levels with the increase in global competition.

### **Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in Higher Education**

The principal purpose of PPP is the need to bring forces together to address problems that are too big and complicated for one sector to solve alone. Meanwhile, it can also be noted that PPP brings benefits to both public and private sector actors and the general public at large, as it also distributes risks involved between the partners. Even more, PPP helps cut large overhead costs and delays of going through bureaucratic procedures (Bui, 2013; Byrd, 2013). However, PPP faces different challenges. For one thing, there are views upholding the idea that the involvement of the private sector in the provision of education (particularly at lower level) would result in loss of control of the government on basic public services, which in turn results in opening up the possibility for more class segregation between those who can and cannot afford better education. In addition, teachers and unions see PPP as a threat to the stability of jobs and loss of influence, respectively (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio & Guáqueta, 2009). PPP is also sometimes seen as injustice on the tax payer, based on the assumption that it gives the advantage of money making to the private partner, using public money (Bowman, 2000).

Generally, Vijayalakshmi (2013, P. 4) has affirmed that the four common models of PPP, which are often applied in other sectors like construction and infrastructure development, can be extrapolated to the higher education sector. These are:

- *Basic infrastructure model*: The private sector invests in infrastructure and the government runs the operations and management of the institutions in turn, making annualized payments to the private investor.
- *Outsourcing model*: Private sector invests in infrastructure and runs operations and management and the responsibility of the government is to pay the private investor for the specified services.
- *Equity/Hybrid model*: Investment in infrastructure is shared between government and private sector while operation and management is vested with the private sector.
- *Reverse outsourcing model*: Government invests in infrastructure and the private sector takes the responsibility of operation and management.

Practically, also, partnerships take different forms. In addition to the various consortia established by public universities, often in a form of a private company (e.g. the Open University of Malaysia, which offers distance education, is established by a consortium of 11 public universities which also set up a private firm to run the Open University), Lee (2008) has identified the following common forms of PPP particular to the higher education sector.

- (a) State/provincial governments and private companies: as a result of decentralization, provincial/state governments are partner with private companies to set up HEIs (e.g.

provincial universities of China, deemed universities of India, state universities of Malaysia).

- (b) Public universities and private companies: with the purpose of generating revenue, public universities are partner with private companies to establish market relevant ventures. For example, in China, private colleges are affiliated with public universities (since 1999) and they are privately financed, and they benefit from the academic resources and reputation of the public universities. Branch campuses and offshore campuses of a public university are opened in a joint venture with a private firm in the host country. It is also a variation to this form of partnership.
- (c) Public universities and private colleges: where private colleges are not allowed to confer degrees (e.g. Malaysia), they make arrangements (sort of franchised programs) with public universities, often in a form of credit transfer.
- (d) Non-profit private universities: semi-public institutions that are financed by the state for infrastructure development but run on a fully cost recovery basis, which comes from student fee. A different version of this partnership is where institutions are built by companies, individuals, associations, etc., and handed over to the state to operate.

In addition to these, Lee (ibid) describes other forms of PPP where the two sectors engage in activities of mutual goals in higher education, with less institutional structure. These include: public subsidies to private institutions (e.g. Japan, India); Public university staff teaching in private universities on part time basis as a way of assisting the private institutions (e.g. Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos); students of private institutions studying on government loan or financial aid; outsourcing of student services in public universities; partnerships in research (e.g. innovation parks and business incubators).

### **Evaluating PPPs**

A partnership project needs to be translated into a set of measurable performance indicators. By setting such indicators, stakeholders of the project can determine if the set goals are achieved. Indicators should be determined in a manner that incorporates and gives meaning for major and relevant stakeholders (Marriott & Goyder, 2009). For instance, if the expected outcome of a partnership project is improving learners' performance, then students would be the major stakeholders since there is a change in performance which can be measured by their score in achievement tests, may be used as indicator. Despite the fact that the interests of other relevant stakeholders, such as teachers and employers may also be taken into account.

Nonetheless, there are challenges to setting common indicators that can be used across various PPP projects. An evaluation of PPP would begin with the objectives set by the involved parties, often that of the government agency that initiates the partnerships. However, unclear partnership goals are typical. For the various partnership arrangements, large array of goals are also possible (Hodge & Greve, 2007). Although it might be possible to identify some very generic parameters such as number and size of projects, return in revenue, number of beneficiaries, sustainability of impact, value for money, satisfaction of stakeholders, alignment with strategic priorities, etc., the specific outputs and outcomes expected from each project are different, and hence, require different measurement (Yuan et al, 2009; Liu et al, 2015; Koontz & Thomas, 2012).

Reaffirming this, Cheung (2009, p. 184) concluded that the key performance indicator in PPP is "project dependent". In his study, strong opinions were reflected by the majority of

respondents from both the public and private sectors that contract terms/operating parameters and provide the best performance indicators for a PPP project. This is in line with Entwistle and Martin's (2005) suggestion that contracts can be used to measure outputs of a project. Here, Koontz and Thomas (2012) warn that due care must be given not to mix outputs and outcomes. They suggest that it is important for indicators of every PPP project to be established with a careful consideration of both output and outcomes because mistake in determining the right measurement results in missing the opportunities for improving performance.

### **Rationale for PPP in Higher Education**

Different kinds of benefits accrue to different stakeholders from the effective use of PPPs. Crucial benefits are realized by government, and the public at large, from engagement in PPPs. Summarizing such benefits, the State Government of British Columbia (2003) identified: improving service delivery, improving cost-effectiveness, increasing investment in public infrastructure, reducing public sector risk, delivering capital projects faster, having clear customer focus, improving budget certainty, recovery of user charges, better use of assets, and higher productivity by linking payments to performance.

What is more, the private sectors involved in PPP get access to more secured and lasting contract based investment opportunities. Private sector partners bring innovative capacities in their managerial and technical sectors and benefit from the efficiency created in through partnerships. Yalokwu (2003) has looked at the reasons to PPP engagement which include:

- growing demand for customer-driven quality education;
- unprecedented high taste by industries and other employers for highly competent professionals;
- pervasive influence of globalization and its emphasis on democratic governance and private sector participation in development efforts;
- capital intensive nature of higher education and calls for joint venture for optimum financing;
- the need for higher education as indispensable for economies on fast-track growth; and
- existence of keen competition in the private sector

### **Why PPP in Ethiopian Higher Education?**

Following literature and the conceptual analysis of potential work, the following major possible benefits are identified for various stakeholders in the Ethiopian higher education.

#### **Benefits for Higher Education Institutions**

**Resource Sharing:** resource limitation is among the major operational challenges of higher education institutions both private and public. By sharing resources, institutions can strengthen their capacities and maximize cost efficiency by reducing redundancy of resources and facilities. Laboratory facilities and equipment are among the common examples identified by respondents where such resource sharing partnerships could be very effective. One respondent said “there are expensive laboratory equipment that might be used once or twice in a semester; institutions can reduce avoidable expenses by sharing such resources. Of course, later when we have the capacity it might not be such a bad idea for every institution

to have all needed facilities and equipment.” Another respondent made the point that online library resources are very expensive to buy/subscribe, but at the same time they are sharable. It would be wise for partner institutions to subscribe to different publications and then to share among themselves.

**Opening joint programs:** by opening joint programs institutions share not only the expertise of one another but also the possible impact of prestige. Exchange of students and teachers within particular programs enhances the quality of programs. Sometimes enough expertise and /or a critical mass of students might not be available in one institution. Such a scenario calls for partnership between institutions to join forces and pursue the provision of programs.

**Sharing of expertise and experience:** public and private institutions may have different combination of expertise. Sharing these expertise creates opportunities for strengthened capacity to address their common challenges and pursue common goals. Sharing of available experts, such as in having arrangements for their staff to engage in more than one institution at different capacity has been mentioned repeatedly as a potentially beneficial partnership arrangement. On the other hand institutions may also have different experience in program management, research, students’ service, projects management, etc. One respondent pointed out “because private institutions are profit oriented they are more likely to have accumulated experience of establishing efficient systems. It is no secret that our public institutions have serious challenges in proper resources utilization and cost minimization. The management and organizational experiences of private institutions are valuable in this regard for public institutions to learn from.” This is even more important in the face of the growing government expectation that public institutions need to be more efficient in their use of resources and enhancing their income generating capacity towards self-sustenance.

**Joint research:** As in the case of other areas, there is a considerable limitation of research capacity among both private and public institutions. Therefore, bringing efforts into a united front would benefit all partners, as well as funding agencies and government, in maximizing research output. This includes but not limited to combining resources and researchers in the efforts of one another. Rather partner institutions can design, apply for funding and undertake joint research projects. This will help them to create synergy in terms of their contribution to the overall research demand of the country.

**Joint community service efforts:** With effective partnership, institutions will have the chance to avoid redundancy of efforts and instead coordinate their activities in community services. Complex and multifaceted challenges naturally require coordinated efforts. It is common to see that higher education institutions are engaged in community services but in very fragmented manner. One respondent noted: “community services efforts are not well coordinated even at institutional level. As a result, different schools and departments waste resources and fail to effectively address the big challenges they are trying to tackle. The same is the case across institutions. In some cases you perceive different institutions working on the same thing while some important issues are not focused at all. This can be reduced if coordinated efforts are put to effect by the institutions.”

### **Benefits to the Government and Other Stakeholders**

PPP benefits not only the institutions engaged in partnership. The government and other stakeholders also gain from effective PPP. The following are major elements should be considered in the paybacks.

**Sharing Burden:** while it is traditionally the responsibility of the government to provide services like education, PPP distributes the burden to the public and the private actors. Through the involvement of the private institutions, the resource and coordination burden on the government and its respective agencies will be reduced. Through PPP, institutions can establish a system of keeping each other to the use of resources, to maintain quality education, etc. – this is less work for the government. Partnership also provides opportunities for public institutions to be more effective in income generation. Therefore, the resource burden on the government is reduced by the same rate.

**Better Quality Education:** among the major benefits of PPP in higher education is the creation of the mechanism to improve quality of education. This is a benefit to all stakeholders of higher education-the government, employers, funding agencies, donors, parents, and the public at large.

**Coordinated Contribution:** higher education is identified as one of the major pillars of Ethiopia's development agenda. Higher education institutions need to work in coordination among themselves as well as with institutions of other sectors. PPP is a very effective mechanism to ensure this goal of higher education institutions.

**Innovative and Problem Solving Research:** one of the major focus areas of PPP is research undertakings. By combining resources and expertise as well as coordinating efforts public and private institutions can be more effective addressing practical problems through research. More innovative research is also possible more so in coordinated manner than in standalone institutional effort.

**Wider Access and Educational Opportunities:** through effective partnerships, institutions will have the capacity to address more areas of study with new programs and areas of training. In the meantime opportunities would expand and access grows.

**More Qualified Graduates:** If PPP promotes quality, encourages innovative and problem oriented research, etc. One of its final outcomes will be well trained graduates who fit for the labor market as well as to the overall development agenda of the country.

### **Challenges for PPP**

Currently the state of partnership between public and private institutions in the Ethiopian higher education is very minimal. There are indeed some emerging strides particularly linking certain fields of study with the industry and hence with the private sector. This has been mostly as a result of government direction that emphasized on technology transfer and enhancement of the engineering and science fields with in the broader development strategy. However, the partnership relations among higher education institutions is largely limited to those that take place with foreign institutions instead of the local ones-regardless of the public private dichotomy. The limited partnerships that exist between the public and the private institutions are restricted in areas that require capital intensive inputs where institutions share facilities and equipment in their teaching. An attempt to scan the websites of major private

institutions to see with which institutions they partner has resulted in no useful information since the websites are either outdated or no information is available in the area of partnership. Some institutions also do not have a functioning website.

One of the major challenges in PPP is the existence of public–private division both in the government policies and in the institutions themselves. Higher education policies, in general, demonstrate a strong favor to public institutions although the private institutions are in principle identified as partners in the development efforts as well as in the educational goals set out by the government. The attitudinal difference between the public and the private institutions is also reflected by employers, higher education researchers and the general public. This particularly becomes a concrete challenge to PPP as it manifests mostly in terms of the leadership of public institutions looking down on the private institutions. One respondent noted that public institutions did not show encouraging interest to work with their private counterparts, while he also acknowledged the predisposition of the private institutions to be linked with any foreign institution than a local public one. He explained that this tendency among the public institutions was perhaps because of the low regard the leaders of the public institutions had to those in the private sectors which was also reinforced by the governments approach. For example, he noted: “the process of opening a new program should be noticed. Regardless of how prepared the institution is, if it is a private institution, HERQA will put all kinds of restrictions and delays the process of granting recognition. The public institutions do not have to go through the same process. This tells something about how the government agencies are biased to favor the public institutions.” Pressed if that is not justified in the profit motivation and some unethical practices by some private institutions, he acknowledged the problem but suggested that there had to be another mechanism than a double standard. He is conscious of the negative impact such “discrimination” might have on the public attitude towards the private ones.

Another respondent took the position that the preference of private institutions to be associated with foreign institutions was driven by marketing strategies. “It is better to brag on TV to be working with some nameless institution from the US or Europe than to be working with all the public universities in the country. There is some prestige the foreign name attracts.” However, there is also doubt among respondents about the extent to which these ‘partnerships’ are genuine. Mostly they end up at the level of signing memorandum of understanding without any further practical steps taken.

Another limitation to PPP is that there is low practice in areas where partnerships could have taken strong hold, such as research and community services. This is an issue both among the public and the private institutions. Therefore, an institution is unlikely to seek partnership in an area where it and other (potential partners) have very limited practices. Moreover, there is lack of policy platform that encourages partnership between the public and the private institutions. Overall, the diverse challenges to PPP in the Ethiopian higher education can be summarized in the following responses from the participants of this study:

- lack of government focus for the issue and absence of encouraging policy field;
- leaders of both public and private institutions are reluctant (though for different reasons);
- letter marketing return expected (by private institutions) of partnering with foreign institutions;

- absence of forward looking academic leadership; focus on immediate goals;
- the problem of institutions looking at each other as competitors and not as partners working to reach big social/national goals

### **Final Notes**

Both theoretically and in consideration of the Ethiopian case, one can see that there are a number of benefits from partnerships between the public and the private institutions. Also, given where higher education is in its overall development and the numerous challenges, it is plain to observe an enormous need for coordinated effort through partnership. Currently; nevertheless, there is a very limited practice of partnership between the public and the private institutions. There is a noticeable division between the two sectors. A platform for public institutions is different from the private ones although this one is much weaker in activities. There is no common venue for these two categories to come together and discuss common issues, set common goals, form partnerships to gear their resources and activities in unified direction.

### **Limitations and Need for Further Study**

This is a work in progress as part of a bigger study, meant to trigger discussions on the issue. It is limited on data sources and takes a single point of departure. For better understanding, a more comprehensive research looking at multiple aspects of PPP, including partnership with industry, with the use of data from multiple sources is needed.

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