

Public-Private Partnership (PPP): Some Reflections on Ethiopian Higher Education

By Ayenachew Aseffa ¹

Abstract

Public- Private Partnership (PPP) is a post-cold war phenomenon developed with the advent and popularization of theories like New Public Management (NPM) and Alternate Service Delivery (ASD). It has become one of the important developmental tools and many countries have also gained significant results by effectively using public-private partnerships in higher education.

In addition to the various practical benefits public-private partnership provides both to the public and the private sectors, to the government, to the general public and others, in Ethiopia there are a number of reasons for such partnerships to be established, developed and utilized. More over, the level of higher education development in Ethiopia provides a very wide opportunity for public- private partnerships. Yet, the state of public-private partnership in Ethiopian higher education is very low and unorganized and thus requires lots of effort from all stakeholders².

¹ Department of Public Administration and Development Management (PADM), Faculty of Business and Economics, Addis Ababa University.

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Introduction

In the period before the collapse of communism, in most third world countries (including Ethiopia), states have been given the full responsibility of providing education for the people. In other words, virtually all levels of the education pyramid were exclusively dominated by governments. Specially, governments have been absolutely involved in the funding and management of tertiary education institutions. However, with a rapidly increasing demand for tertiary education, the government alone could not satisfy the need and sustain continuous provision of high quality education. This was the situation where there was no any other better option than allowing and encouraging the establishment of private higher education institutions (Ayenew, 2005).

Most third world countries have, therefore, opened their door to private individuals and organizations to invest in the sector in pursuit of complementing government efforts at higher education provision. Yet this policy change has not come from internal dynamics of the sector; but was rather a consequence of the collapse of the communist world. This change has involved powerful global tendencies, which limit the financial role of state and led to more privatization and internationalization in overall development policy. Hence, it had to be viewed as one part of the large-scale neo-liberal economic change in the post-communist period. In this regard, central and south Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa provide ample examples. Hence, private higher education institutions these days have become among the fastest growing sectors in many countries of the world. It has long dominated higher education systems in many Asian countries including Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This shift was also high in Latin America where at least half of higher education students were enrolled in private higher education institutions in Brazil,

Mexico, Columbia, Peru and Venezuela. The experience was also the same in Africa (Levy, 2002).

By the same token, post-1991 Ethiopia has experienced the proliferation of higher education institutions. Though unevenly distributed, a number of colleges have been opened throughout the country. With a conservative estimate, private higher education institutions account for 24% of total enrollment in Ethiopia (Ayenew, 2005). Hence, growth of the private sector would definitely narrow the gap on the supply side as contrasted to the demand side. Obviously, in a situation where public education institutions are insufficient to guarantee access to schooling or good quality instruction, demand-driven private schools of all types normally fill the gap and offer their services to the community (Kitaev, 1999).

Yet, mere expansion of higher learning institutions by itself does not guarantee that education will make the expected contribution to sustainable development. It rather requires proper long-term planning and ensuring high quality of education that can be sustained. This can be attained by a proper coordination of all the concerned parties which contribute directly and indirectly. More particularly, partnership between the public and private higher education institutions is crucial for the attainment of the above mentioned strengths. Hence in most countries of the world, public- private partnership has become one of the very important areas of focus. This paper thus seeks to examine such partnerships in the context of the Ethiopian higher education. Its emphasis is on the reasons, benefits and practices of the partnerships.

2. Methodology

This paper is based on the use of both primary and secondary data. The responsibility for establishing and maintaining partnerships is that of both private and public institutions (along with the government and other role playing institutions). In Ethiopia, the private higher education sector is just more than a decade old with lots of limitations and problems. By implication, the private institutions more than the public ones have to be concerned with partnerships to build their capacity and solve their problems. Hence, this paper takes a look at the issue of partnership more from the side of the private institutions.

Eighty five academic and administrative employees of four major private higher education institutions, namely Unity University College (now Unity University), Admass University college, St. Mary's University College and Zhega University College (now City University College), have been the primary target respondents. Highest administrative bodies (vice presidents, deans, associate deans, external relations and department heads) of the institutions, officials from Ministry of Education (MoE) and Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQAA) have also been addressed with structured and semi-structured interviews. On the other hand secondary data were extracted from different reports, study papers, policy documents, forums, and other archives.

3. Definition

The term 'Public-Private Partnership (PPP)' refers to a wide scope of ideas that can be specifically interpreted in different ways. With a major concern to the provision of various public services, there are different definitions of the concept of public-

private partnership. The overall idea of the definitions is that PPPs are partnerships between the public sector and the private sector for the purposes of designing, planning, financing, constructing and/or operating projects which would be regarded traditionally as falling within the remit of the public sector.

PPP takes a variety of forms, with varying degrees of public and private sector involvement and varying levels of public and private sector risk. In fact, risk transfer from the public to the private sector is a critical element of all PPPs. The goal is to combine the best capabilities of the public and private sectors for mutual benefit (Farlam, 2005).

4. Development

Though state and non-state actors have worked together for centuries to solve societal problems, explicit demands for “partnerships” between the two sectors have become much more prominent in recent years because of changing ideas about the role of the state. The economic crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s and the apparent lessons from successful market-friendly economies have combined to produce what some people term a redefinition of the role of the state. The involvement of the private sector in public service delivery and popularization of the concept of partnerships between these sectors is historically related with different events, concepts, theories and terms like the end of the cold war, the fall of the communist world, the 1970s economic crisis, the policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan, liberalization [and neo-liberalization], New Public Management, deregulation of public services and de bureaucratization, privatizationetc. More specifically, 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 (Borins, 1995).

5. New Public Management (NPM)

NPM is the transfer of business and market principles and management techniques from the private into the public sector, symbiotic with and based on a neo-liberal understanding of state and economy. The goal, therefore, is a 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. that 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, depoliticization, total quality management, and contracting- out (ibid).

NPM comes 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 originates 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 is part of the neo-classical economic imperialism within the social sciences, i.e. 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 want high-quality public services and better performance by 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 it, they are willing to 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 performance, politicians and the public are willing to introduce competition within the public sector, or move 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 to decline because of different challenges and has given a rise to the concept of Alternate Service Delivery (ASD).

6. 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 with 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 writings 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 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”), Demarketing/ 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 increased very significantly. This is attributable to the recognition of some fundamental reasons. Allen et al (1989) have 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 popularized the new service delivery option --- public-private partnership. This approach puts a clear distinction between the two the public and private sectors but calls for their partnership. Though PPP had its roots back in 1970s, it became very common at different scale and levels with the increase in global competition.

7. Reasons for Partnership in Ethiopian Higher Education

There are different beneficiaries and benefits in the use of PPP. Some of the important benefits to governments and tax payers derived from such projects are summarized by the state government of British Colombia (2003) as; 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.

In a similar way, PPP benefits the private sector involved as well. PPP gives the private sector access to secure long-term investment opportunities. Private partners can generate business with the relative certainty and security of a government contract. Payment is provided through a contracted fee for service or through the collection of user fees – and the revenue stream may be secure for a long time. Private sector partners can benefit from PPP by achieving efficiencies based on their managerial, technical, financial, and innovation capabilities. They can also expand their capacity and expertise which can then be leveraged to create additional business opportunities. For example, a company can market its experience in other areas once it has established a track record of working successfully with the public sector

Moreover, specifically coming to higher education in Ethiopia, Yalokwu (2003) identified the following points as the reasons for public-private sector partnership:

- a) Growing demand for customer-driven quality education;
- b) Unprecedented high taste by industries and other employers for highly competent professionals;

- c) Pervasive influence of globalization and its emphasis on democratic governance and private sector participation in development efforts;
- d) Impact of the industrialized economies on developing countries;
- e) Capital intensive nature of higher education and calls for joint venture for optimum financing;
- f) The need for higher education as indispensable for economies on fast-track growth; and
- g) Existence of keen competition in the private sector

8. Benefits of PPP

Parallel to the benefits described theoretically, there are also various practical benefits different stakeholders may realize if PPP is applied in Ethiopian higher education. Private and public higher education institutions (HEIs), the government and the general public are the major stakeholders that would benefit most from PPP in higher education. Based on responses from a questionnaire involving 85 respondents, the important benefits are summarized as follows:

a) Benefits to Private HEIs

The benefits to private HEIs include:

- *Sharing experience.* Private HEIs can get immense experience from their more experienced public counterparts. Most of the public institutions have been in the business for relatively longer time, which gives them a lot of experience and from which the private institutions can take tips.
- *Sharing expertise.* Some public institutions have a good composition of expert staff, although some experts might be a very few of their kind. In such a case, it becomes difficult for private institutions to fully hire these

experts. So, through viable partnership relationships with the public institutions they can share this expertise. This may even take place in a form of joint appointment of staffs so that the institutions share both the cost and the benefits of having these experts.

- *Sharing resources.* Private HEIs can also share resources with the public ones. The Ethiopian government is currently allotting huge amount of money for the expansion of public HEIs. Hence, these institutions are building up their capacity at a faster rate. At the same time, these institutions also get donations of books, machineries, laboratory equipment, teaching utilities and other important resources. Hence, if the private institutions build up an effective partnership, they will have a chance to share these resources. which otherwise would be very costly to acquire by themselves.
- *Undertaking joint research.* Through partnerships, private institutions will have a better chance for undertaking research. By getting better manpower and finance, it would be easier to undertake joint research, which in fact is a benefit for both the public and the private institutions.
- *Opening new programs.* Private HEIs can open new fields of study in partnership with public institutions. This would increase their acceptance and add to their prestige. They may also have student exchange programs.
- *Enhancing contribution.* With effective partnerships and with a view to deriving the above-mentioned benefits, the overall contribution that private institutions are making to the sector and in the overall development of the country would be increased. This will be possible through improved quality of education, more engagement in research and opening important fields of studies. Therefore, partnership is a means to build up

capacity with which the institutions can achieve their long term and ultimate objectives.

b) Benefits to Public HEIs

The following will be the main benefits to public HEIs:

- *Sharing expertise.* Some private institutions have a better composition of staff including some experts with high specialization in their field. Through partnerships, the public institutions can share the manpower of the private ones. This can also take place in a form of joint appointment of staffs so that they share both the cost and the benefits of having such experts.
- *Sharing resources.* Some private institutions have better and modernized facilities. Because of special link with institutions and donors abroad, some private HEIs have better access to books, laboratory equipments and teaching supplies. Therefore, the public institutions can share these resources with the private ones by building effective partnerships.
- *Sharing experience.* There are also opportunities for public institutions to share experience with their private counterparts. These days public institutions are generating revenue to reduce the budget burden on the government. This makes them akin to the private institutions, which are basically profit-oriented institutions. Hence, the private institutions would have better experience to share particularly in this area.
- *Joint activities.* Through partnerships public and private HEIs can be engaged in joint research, opening joint programs and student exchanges, which in fact are advantages for both types of institutions.
- *Enhancing contribution.* With effective partnerships and in light of the potential benefits as mentioned above, the

overall contribution that higher education can make to the overall development of the country would be increased.

c) Benefits to the Government:

As an important stakeholder, the government will derive the following benefits from PPPs:-

- *Shared burden.* Traditionally, the responsibility of providing services, like education, was fully left to the government. Yet, where there is effective partnership, this responsibility would be shared with the private sector thereby reducing significantly the burden on the government. This will reduce the time and resource that the government will spend on routines and help it to focus on the major responsibilities of policy setting and creating a conducive and enabling environment. Simply put, this would in turn give an opportunity to the government to focus more on other areas of development if it succeeds in building a partnership that can supply education in a sustainable and reliable manner.
- *Reduction of budget.* The more partnership is used (as mentioned above) the more self-reliant the public institutions would become. In other words, as public HEIs generate their own revenue, the amount of budget required from the government can be reduced significantly.
- *Ensure high quality and standard.* It is government's direct responsibility to ensure that the public gets high quality education. Through partnership, the government can get strong support from both the public and private institutions to make sure that high quality education is provided.
- *Innovative research results.* One of the areas where PPP can be used in higher education is in research and

development. One of the potential advantages in this regard is that the outcomes of the research could help the government in supplying input for policy setting. It can also help the government in introducing scientific and systematic methods of solving problems in general.

- *Collaborative effort.* PPP fosters a collaborative effort of the sector to make contributions towards sustainable development.

d) Benefits to the Public

The main aim of better education in general is to solve social problems of different kinds and enhance the overall wellbeing of the public. Hence, it is unquestionable that the public will benefit from PPPs that will contribute to better education. More specifically:-

- *Better quality of education.* If PPPs work in improving quality of education, the public can have easier access to high quality education.
- *Wider opportunity for education.* As PPP is used to open new and diversified fields of study, people will have better opportunity to join the kind of field they want to study.
- *Practical research and development.* When more practical research is undertaken, more of the public problems will be subjects of study. In the long run, the public will benefit from the outcomes of these practical investigations.
- *Well educated citizens.* The country will generally have better educated citizens, which will foster good governance, faster economic growth and development.

e) **Benefits to Other Stakeholders**

On top of the preceding, the following benefits of PPP will accrue to other major parties:

- *Employers*: employers will have a better chance to access well educated and competent candidates in the labor market with sufficient number. They can also have a chance to give training to their staff and introduce them to new systems and ideas.
- *NGOs and development partners*: NGOs and other development partners will get a better support from the higher education sector.
- *Donors*: If there are PPPs it would be easier for donors to donate funds for research and other educational activities through the partnerships rather than contact each of the institutions independently.

9. PPP Practices in Ethiopian Higher Education

In the higher education sector, public- private partnerships could be established in improving quality of education, sharing skilled manpower and expertise, undertaking joint research, sharing resources and facilities, sharing managerial experience, running joint programs, community services, student exchange, and finance. In this regard, there is more or less a consensus on the necessity of partnerships and in identifying the major areas for partnership among the private and public institutions.

9.1 Level of PPP

Yet private HEIs do not have a significant, institution-wide, long-term, multi- dimensional and sustainable partnership with their public counterparts. What currently exists is just a limited and insignificant amount of partnership that can only be considered a start.

When the institutions face a certain problem they look for partnership that will help them out, but once the problem is solved, the partnership will have minimum opportunity of survival. These single use partnerships do not count to the very meaning of PPP, which is normally characterized by continuity and sustainability.

Interviews with officials of the private HEIs has identified that only St Mary's University College and Unity University College have partnerships with public HEIs locally. Even these are not well established at an institutional level and, not surprisingly, even most members of the institutions do not know much about them.

St Mary's University College has partnerships with Nazareth and Debre Birhan Teachers colleges and Hawassa University (only in the area of teachers' training, and in sharing man power and books). Similarly, Unity University has partnership with General Wingate Technical and Vocational Institute and Addis Ababa Building College, through its School of Architecture and Urban Planning, in sharing facilities. Compared to the total size of the institutions the existing partnerships are very insignificant being limited only to specific departments (schools) and some areas of partnerships.

9.2 Opportunities for PPP

The macro-environment, characterized by the country's major development endeavor, clearly implies that there is a very huge demand for high quality education as an input into the total effort. Education plays a key role in development by providing qualified manpower in all sectors, identifying different innovations and new systems through research and development and helping institutions utilize their resources efficiently. All in all, the contribution of education to this effort is paramount. In

recognition of this, the government is largely working on the improvement of education services. The number and size of the public HEIs is also increasing. This is an indication of the need for stronger partnership between the private and public HEIs of the country.

On the other hand, from the micro-point of view, institutions experience the various problems at different levels. They also has their own strengths and weaknesses. This makes partnership an imperative so build on strengths and alleviate the weaknesses.

9.3 Challenges of PPP

Though there is a significant amount of opportunity for PPP, it does not mean that it is all smooth. There are challenges hindering the practice of PPP in the higher education sector. The following are some of the challenges that have been identified by respondents as to why PPP is still at a low level:

- Public institutions are not ready to work in partnerships.
- Leaders of private HEIs are reluctant. They do not have the commitment to forge partnerships.
- The government policy is not conducive. Though it states that private HEIs are partners, it is not clearly specified and gives no motivation.
- Short-term profit- oriented concern of leaders of private HEIs is a problem.
- Stiff competition among institutions causes them to see each other as rivals.
- Attitude of leaders of the institutions is more of winning the competition than achieving long-term objectives of education.

- A positive bias by the government towards public HEIs; and this leaves the private ones behind.
- Absence of shared national vision.
- Absence of proactive academic leadership.
- Focus of the private HEIs on partnerships with institutions abroad as a significant marketing tool rather than forging partnerships on the domestic front.

The author's efforts to get information about the Private Higher Education Institutions Forum was not successful. But, it is possible to observe that the forum is not strong enough to deal with various issues of the sector. Obviously, it is difficult to expect private HEIs to work together with the public HEIs while they do not have such type of strong relationship amongst themselves. It is, therefore, necessary that they first have to stand together for their interest so that it would be possible to forge partnerships with the public sector. Moreover, the strategies of the private institutions do not clearly identify who their partners and competitors are. And the current large scale expansion of the public HEIs is perceived as a threat by the private institutions. With the existence of such perception, it is difficult to think of partnerships between them.

10. Conclusion

Taking consideration of the wide range of responsibilities and activities HEIs should perform; the potential opportunities for PPP; and the multitude of benefits PPP can generate to various stake holders, PPP has to be established in various areas. In support of this, there is a general common understanding on the meaning and importance of PPP to the sector. Yet, this understanding is not clearly articulated as part of the formal organization and long-term strategies of HEIs, both public and private.

Currently, PPP is at a very low stage and not properly organized in the higher education sector. Sometimes, it is used as a means to solve problems by the institutions, but these are only short-term or just for one time use. Most of the partnerships that are said to be exist have not been formalized at institutional level but are rather ad hoc arrangements at faculty or school level that are not properly defined. On top of this, PPP faces challenges in many ways. At the end of the day, however, both the benefits and the responsibility of solving its problems as well as promoting PPP is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders.

11. Recommendations

- A common and shared vision should be established at national level to bring about a common understanding among both the public and private institutions regarding what is expected of the sector in general.
- A clear policy guideline has to be set describing how partnerships can be established; the procedure to be followed; responsibilities and accountabilities of different parties etc. Government should also openly encourage and support partnerships and give assistance for their sustainability.
- An independent institution for partnership should be established to facilitate partnerships and assist the institutions involved in partnerships.
- Continuous brainstorming discussions and workshops have to be organized to highlight the strategic importance of PPP and to bring about attitudinal change of leaders of both public and private HEIs.
- Private HEIs need to have a strong partnership among themselves to stand together for their interests and to work in partnership with other bodies. Unless they are well networked and work in partnership among themselves, it is very difficult to expect them to work in partnership with other public institutions.
- Common issues of the sector have to be considered in a balanced manner for both public and private institutions to increase the sense of partnership especially on the side of the private institutions.
- Leaders of private HEIs have to focus more on the long-term objectives of higher education in addition to their short-term profit orientation.
- Considering themselves as directly responsible partners of development, leaders of both public and private HEIs

have to take a positive initiative towards partnerships more than their competition.

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