

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP AND NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT

By: DR. UZODINMA A. ADIRIEJE

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Public-Private partnerships or PPP relate to perceptions and practices affecting public private sector relationships in ensuring national/global health, development and well-being of the society, and the conceptual aspects of such relationships, including the role of the key players in collaborating to make these partnerships successful or otherwise.

In Nigeria and other developing countries, sustainable access to healthcare and other socio-economic services and products can be accomplished through public-private partnerships, where the government delivers the minimum standard of services, products and or care, the private sector brings skills and core competencies, while donors and business bring funding and other resources. Such collaborations will be especially productive in promoting poverty alleviation through micro-finance, enhancing health through partnerships as has been the case with polio eradication and other child immunization efforts.

In the efforts to achieve sustainable PPP, the objectives would be to highlight perspectives on development from leaders in civil society, government, business and the media, share information on development alternatives, provide forums for informed debate on related issues, seek to accomplish better understanding of the nature of relationships between governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and introduce conceptual frameworks for understanding such relationships. PPP objectives would also include bridging the information gap between the public and private sector organizations, analysing their capacities and opportunities, and suggesting mechanisms for improving the relationships between the government and the governed/citizenry.

Intrinsic in the aforementioned objectives of typical public-private partnerships is the mission to contribute to the economic integration of a country or region, accelerate its economic growth and sustainable development, engender and sustain private sector participation (PSP) in traditionally public sector projects, and expand local access to international markets, thereby ensuring the country's deeper integration into the global economy. For Nigeria in particular, this could be done within the official NEPAD structure, ECOWAS, other regional economic communities in Africa, governments, private sector, civil society and other stakeholders.

The overall objective would also include the mobilization of private investment for infrastructural development, socio-economic growth and poverty elimination. It would also include increasing the effectiveness of public-private collaboration, such as helping those seeking to develop and provide healthcare products and services, and improving access the several local products that are targeted towards achieving disease eradication, controlling other health problems and accomplishing adequate standard of living within the country.

In order to achieve a sustainable PPP for ensuring the most effective, productive, compassionate, result-oriented and efficient use of resources, it is imperative that the members or subscribers to the partnership must adopt a single framework of action that provides the basis for co-coordinating the work of all partners; put in place and maximally utilize a single national or community coordinating body with a mandate from various sectors or stakeholders, and agree on a single national monitoring and evaluation (M & E) mechanism to ascertain and maintain accepted standards. Such an arrangement will enhance the coming together of several stakeholder such as federal, state and local governments; profit-oriented businesses and not-for-profit organisations, community development associations, UN and other transnational agencies, civil society groups and faith-based organizations; to work towards sustainable development and poverty reduction within the communities and the country as a whole.

It is obvious that the synergy of a PPP of this composition could – and indeed should – produce recommendations from series of meetings, researches, seminars and or workshops on public private partnerships in their areas of concern; using one or more common perspective, and working within fairly common environmental conditions. It would also provide a basis for offering and sharing existing information on PPP, and for follow-ups. This way, the partnership could support member-organizations that build capacities within citizen organizations through management training and advice, conducting researches, collecting data on health development issues, applying policy analysis through dialogue, and promoting enabling environments.

A potential outcome of this engagement is a private sector-led initiative, which could serve as catalyst for investment in community and national development projects, leading to more collaboration among the wide array of stakeholders in tackling the social, political, financial, technical and other obstacles that stand in the way of the projects being implemented. It will also empower the partnership with a brokering role between prospective investors and other stakeholders including government and local communities. This will ultimately eliminate or reduce to the barest minimum, the social, economic, political, financial and capacity constraints that impede the development of infrastructure within the community or country.

Several commentators, including this writer, hold a strong view that public and private sectors are complementary, and that effective public-private partnership is only possible through mutually designed, analysed and accepted instruments of cooperation and collaboration. This writer in particular, believes that such instruments are effective in all sectors of human endeavour including health, profit and not-for-profit, education, housing, micro-finance, community-based development projects, etc. For Nigeria in particular, achieving the PPP paradigm would mean deliberate and sincere effort to understand the nature of prevailing efforts in this regard within the country, identify their key challenges and opportunities, and seek to know how they can contribute to stronger national and family-level health, economic and social systems.

For rural and poor urban communities in particular, PPP projects of interest would include interest transportation by rail, road and waterways, electricity and energy,

telecommunications, agriculture and food preservation/processing, housing and water. In accepting such projects for the PPP arrangement, it must be noted that most of them would be expected to have predictable cash flows and provide investors in the partnership with an acceptable return on their investments. Therefore, care must be taken to ensure that projects so selected, have undergone rigorous due diligence processes by the relevant organs of the stakeholders, and have been chosen as the best projects with well-conceived business plans, realistic financing plans and anticipated investment returns that is favourably disposed to the purchasing powers of the poorest of the poor. Costly services and products will ultimately become unaffordable to the majority of the people, and ensure that projected patronage and income remain mere dreams.

In undertaking any PPP project, it must be understood that partnerships rarely occur without external impetus. PPPs must, therefore, be facilitated through processes aimed at translating the desires of stakeholders into the form of partnerships so desired. Even after formation, the continued existence of any PPP needs to be deliberately institutionalized, using various mediating processes or programmes deemed necessary for the implementation of partnership agreements. Such processes or programmes need to be rooted in local circumstances and comprehensively understood by representatives of all stakeholders.

Anticipated outcomes and problems

It must be noted, however, that greater output shall be realized if PPP agreements or contracts are structured in ways that do not place the poor majority in any social, economic and or political disadvantage. Also, combining the partnership with credible and group-accepted innovative approaches to funding and mobilization has the potentiality of increasing the overall access to essential services based on PPP structures already in place. For trail blazers and champions of community participation and human development evangelism, a deficiency of clearly stated mechanisms of action and or the absence of credible avenues for monitoring and informing interested parties on the progress and status of approved PPP projects, should be seen as an avoidable anathema.

In conclusion, in order for government to deliver the minimum standard of services, products and or care required for a PPP to thrive, it must put in place, laws, regulations and institutions or enhance existing ones, as well as improve the enabling environment for private sector participation (PSP) in the provision and development of infrastructure to occur. Stakeholders' commitment to the PPP would be accomplished by focusing on micro, small and medium-sized operations, involve community leaderships like community development associations, town unions, non-governmental organizations, local, state and/or regional governmental authorities including private company operators.

Included among these potential partners are municipalities, government agencies and ministries, public and private companies, and trade associations as potential partners. It is incumbent on all stakeholders to orient PPP activities around orientation, match-making, implementation and institutionalization for effective and sustainable outcomes.

Dr. Uzodinma A. Adirieje
Programs Director/CEO
Afrihealth Information Projects/Afrihealth Optonet Association
7/9 Enoma Street, Okota-Isolo, P.O. Box 4127, Oshodi 100010, Lagos, Nigeria
Phone/Fax: 234.1.452.0333, Mobile: 234803.4725905, 234805.6580180
Email: afrihealthoptonet_ng@yahoo.com
Web: <http://afrihealthoptonet.kabissa.org>
<http://uk.geocities.com/afrihealthoptonetassociation/AfrihealthOptonet.html>