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Public-Private-Partnership in Ethiopia: The BOT Modality in Utility Billing

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the use of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a strategy to address inefficiencies in utility billing services. This article aimed at assessing factors contributing for successful implementation of PPP in utility billing and the restraints faced in implementation of the PPP in utility billing. Four public utility institutions and one private concessionaire with its five branches and 52 respondents were selected purposively. It employed a mixed research approach (quantitative and qualitative). Similarly, quantitative and qualitative research data types were used. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were also administered to collect research data. All available government documents and relevant empirical studies on PPP were also used as secondary sources. The method of data analysis used in this study was mixed triangulation method. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency, percentage, cross tabulation, tests of proportionality, mean ranking, Kendall's coefficient of concordance and Mann U Whitney test were used in the analysis process for quantitative data. In addition textual analysis was used for qualitative data. As a result, the findings of the study capture that there is high level customer satisfaction and remarkable cost reductions. At the same time, political support, the existence of strong private concessionaire i.e. Kifya Financial Technology PLC and the responsibility and commitment of both partners are ranked 1 to 3 as factors contributing for the success of the PPP. Unlikely, lack of awareness on the issues of PPP and absence of relevant experienced and skilled man power in PPP were found as potential challenges in the implementation of the PPP in utility billing. From this, the study recommends that there is a need of clearly stated national PPP policy that enable establish a PPP Unit with its PPP focused Agency, facilitate policy dialogue and awareness creation programs on the existing legal formworks, increase the number of billing payment centers and scale up the services to all corners of the country.
Keywords: public-private partnership, Lehulu, Success Factors and Restraining Factors

1. Introduction

A wide-ranging of PPP approaches has been debated in the literature and defined PPPs from different angles. To this end, there is no precise and widely accepted definition of PPP and the concept of PPP is still contested. Accordingly, many researchers and authors have given different interpretations to Public-Private Partnerships. Some envisages it as an alliance formed between forces of profit and nonprofit in cooperation performing toward a common goal (Robinson et al, 2010).

There are also definitions of PPP based on its objectives. According to Zhang (2005), PPP is defined as an efficient approach in availing public infrastructure with lower risks, lower cost and also help to avoid project delay (Yuan, et al, 2010).

There are also arguments based on the functional role of PPP. Bogdanov (n. d.) explains PPP as, a form of decentralization of roles and responsibilities of public sector formed to assure efficiency involving the Private sector. PPP is a means of minimizing the role and power of governments in the economy by promoting a modified form of privatization (Bramwell and Lane, 1997). Linder (1999) complement this idea by describing PPP as a new approach replacing old time Privatization of public utilities.

The overall rationale that PPP has become fashionable and popular in all countries is the fact that governments tend to use private sectors finance and technical skills in the construction and operation of mega projects; where usually the public sector is indebted to provide but not capable to finance (Akintoye et al, 2003).

More remarkably, Kwak et al (2009) gave a general definition of PPP as cooperative arrangement between the public and private sectors that involve the sharing of resources, risks, responsibilities, and rewards with others for the achievement of shared objectives.

Concerning to the motives behind institutional missions, there are also different perceptions about PPP. The International Monitory Fund refers PPP as a concept having a confusing characteristic to be judged on the basis of what does and what does not PPP constitute (IMF, 2004). The Public sector also looks at PPP as an issue of good governance (FDRE, 2010) or sometimes seen to be a rent seeking tool (Jane and Laughlin, 2003). These issues related to PPP have been considered as a critical agenda by United Nations who has developed a tool kit for both public and Private sector to enhance cooperation and improve governance using PPP (UN, 2008).

With all these different interpretations and the prevailing controversies, global experience shows that

Public Private-Partnership is a widely spread concept and well applied in different economic sectors in the developed and developing nations. However, the level of the application and speed of adoption of PPP as a tool of development differs from country to country and from the economic sector to economic sector.

The ever growing mismatch between the public demand for new facilities and public sector capacities to generate resources has likely forced the governments to look for new funding method and resources (Hodge, 2005). Consequently, as it asserts by these scholars, public private partnership became increasingly popular phenomenon and a global trend.

In many developing countries, the state of infrastructure and public service delivery tends to be poor and inadequate to meet the rising demand. This reveals the constraints that governments in developing countries and especially in sub-Saharan Africa, face in terms of scarcity of funds, corruption, poor planning and project formulation, as well as inefficient capacities. To this end, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as one of the ways to overcome these constraints. The governments of these countries are able to finance critical infrastructure, improve project preparation, execution and management and deliver efficient services to the citizens by tapping into private sector finance (UNDP, 2015).

Despite the fact that, the concept of PPP has a long history in global arena, it is said to be a recent notion in Ethiopia. According to Tamrat (1991), the intention of the Ethiopian government for PPP officially appeared in the transitional period draft economic policy issued the transitional government of Ethiopia in 1991. This pledge for PPP has been well articulated in the national strategic document issued by the government of Ethiopia in 2010 (FDRE, 2010). In both documents the private sector is exceedingly emphasized by the government as an engine for national development and it is culminated by promising to facilitate consistent public-private dialogue with the government in its turn. There has also been a trend in which each sector has developed a policy framework of its own area of responsibility with a defined strategy to uphold the role of the private sector in infrastructure and service delivery (Tamrat, 1991; FDRE, 2010)

Accordingly, Proclamation No 649/2009 which replaces Proclamation No 430/2005 has established an Agency for Public sector Procurement and Property Administration which is responsible for any kind of public sector procurement. It mentions three modalities for infrastructure and service procurement which are Build, Owen, Operate and Transfer (BOOT) as well as Build, Owen and Operate (BOO). The other modality is concession based procurements that refers to leasing and franchising public facilities to provide public service on a user pay modality (FDRE, 2009).

The main task of agency is however tied up with control and neither does have provisions to enable it stretch to the implementation of project nor it does seem to have framework to delegate some of its duties to sectoral PPP units. According to proclamation No. 769/2012 of Investment Agency under its article six of part two allows PPP aiming to enhance the role of the private sectors in acceleration of the country's economic development (FRDE, 2012).

The government of Ethiopia has embarked up on reforming its service giving organizations with the objective of improving the public sector service delivery system since 1991. In this regard, the Ethiopian government has recognized the need for integrated public service delivery to encourage public service organizations improve their services by applying various programs to attain user satisfaction (Rahel, 2014).

Therefore, the Ethiopian Government has launched a one stop facility for payment of utility bills through Public-Private Partnership. The partnership is known as 'lehulu', an Amharic word meaning "for all". Lehulu will replace existing utility payment centers for an Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation (EEPCO), Ethio Telecom and Addis Ababa Water & Sewerages Authority (AAWSA). This PPP arrangement between the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and Electronic Services Initiative, i.e., 'lehulu' unified billing system, has taken up the initiative of bringing about the necessary changes to deliver a better quality of public service to citizens. It has undertaken a number of e-Government assignments to avail government services online and improve the access to the general public.

To this end, Common Service Center (CSC) is taken as one of the targets to be able to achieve the Ethiopian E-Gov Implementation Strategies of 2015 and 2020. CSC is unifying the different bill collection centers into one stop payment point to enable the citizens get the necessary services in an integrated and simplified way. This new service delivery model takes into account varying access point consolidation across the service value chain, while considering the varying channel needs and preferences for different citizen segments (FDRE, 2010).

In this article, regarding lehulu which is initiated as public-private partnership between the Ministry of Information & Communication and a private company named Kifiya Financial PLC for facilitating effective public service delivery as a way to achieve tangible benefits for both government and citizens. Thus, lehulu which is marked as a great shift in reforming the utility billing process through refining the traditional billing system into one stop billing center is taken as initiating factor for designing this article.

2. PPP in Utility Billing

Diverse management systems that observed in a contemporary world are traced to a variety of theoretical sources

that contributed to the change in the organizational orientation of the public sector. The two theoretical origins of the NPM employed in this journal are X-efficiency theory (Leibenstein, 1966) and Collaborative Management Approach (O'Flynn, 2009).

According to X-efficiency theory of PPPs proposed by Leibenstein (1966), government support public entities are intrinsically inefficient so that PPPs are necessary to trim down the sources of inefficiency in such organizations. Therefore, the involvement of the private sector allows public entities to respond to market forces and become more competitive.

Nowadays, different literatures on PPP have revealed a growing propensity by governments for collaborative efforts. Undeniably, collaboration is at the heart of New Public Management (NPM) (Kettl, 2005). While the NPM emphasizes market values, PPPs align more with an increased focus on networks, partnerships and collaboration.

Thus, as it is argued by Mohr (2004), PPP is a network of independent public and private actors who come together to form a cooperative and interdependent working relationship to provide improved management skills and financial solutions. Therefore, PPP has been welcomed as a useful tool designed to ease financial and technical constraints of governments in both developed and developing countries in the provision of infrastructures.

The PPP i.e. Lehulu is made between Kifya financial Technology PLC and Ministry of Information and Communication initiative is first in Ethiopia as well as in Africa in unifying the different Government Bill Collection centers in two simple and harmonized ways The Amharic word 'Lehulu' implies a dual meaning, 'for everyone' and 'for all services'. Lehulu is a network of centers providing a Unified Billing System that allows citizens to pay all Utility bills (Electricity, Water, and landline phone) in any one of the centers. This PPP modality is based on a 'Build, Operate, and Transfer' model to deliver bill payment services for the above listed utilities. Citizens have been provided with the convenient, quick and easy one stop service to pay their utility bills anywhere they prefer (Rahel, 2014 and Mesfin, 2012).

This single window service delivery initiative was intended to enable government services to be easily accessible convenient and less costly. Naturally, delivering multiple services in a single channel enables for breaking down barriers by linking services in a seamless manner.

There are several rationales for choosing the PPP model for Utility Billing in Ethiopia. Among these rationales, one is the Ethiopian economy is perceived to be one of the leading African emerging markets with double digit growth, the country's major public information service delivery channels are however widely recognized as being seriously underdeveloped. Secondly, public sectors such as Ministry of Communication and Information Technology nowadays are giving special attention to PPP business models and are starting to motivate the private firms to integrate and initiate to work with them (Mesfin, 2012).

Thirdly, private IT firms perform a tremendous amount of efforts and information intensive activities to alter the poor delivery of public information service. Fourthly, the undelivered and neglected public information services affect the daily lives of citizens. These people who are most dependent on the public sector's services remain one of the biggest challenges for the public system itself. Thus the role of PPP is assumed to be enormous (Mesfin, 2012).

The implementation of PPP in Ethiopia so far is limited (Asubonteng, 2011 as cited in Teshome (2014). It is mainly due to inadequate legal, financial and regulatory frameworks, inappropriate procurement practices, poor project documentation, poor support from ministries, and lack of local skills.

Evidently, the number of PPP initiatives in the Ethiopia's public service sector is very much limited. The most commonly known service specific exemplary initiatives in the last forty years have not been more than four i.e. lehulu, Addis Ababa Exhibition and Market development Enterprise, Africa Juice Tibla S.C and the newly emerging Addis Africa Exhibition and Convention center (UNDP, 2015).

Therefore, the issue of PPP in utility billing which has not been addressed well is the research gap discussed in this journal article. Thus, the main objective of this journal is to identify the success and restraining factors in implementing PPP in utility billing. Based on this, the journal article tries to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the success factors for the successful implementation of PPP in the utility billing?
2. What are the restraining factors faced by PPP in adopting and implementing the utility billing?

To answer these questions, both descriptive and explanatory research types were used and concurrent mixed method approach was employed. Questionnaires were distributed to 54 respondents from both the public and private purposively selected based on acquaintance to the subject, occupation and professional experience. The socio demographic composition of the respondents indicates that respondents from both sectors are well educated and well experienced. As a result, all the collected data was categorized and analyzed using Proportionality test, Mann-Whitney U test, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance, cross tabulation, mean rank, content analysis and narration.

3. Results and Findings

This section examines the success factors that contributed for successful implementation of the PPP in utility billing. The respondents from both partners were asked to rank how important they perceived the success factors that contribute for the successful implementation of the PPP in utility billing based on a five likert scales (1=Unimportant, 2=Least important, 3=Neither important or un important, 4=important and 5=Most important). Accordingly, the mean scores of the factors that positively contributed for the successful implementation of the PPP in utility billing range from a low value of 3.25 to a high value of 4.72. Therefore, this implies that all respondents agreed that all the factors are "Important" or "Most Important" for the successful implementation of PPP in utility billing.

Table.1. Overall Ranking of the Success factors of the PPP

Variables	Mean	Rank
Existence of favorable legal frameworks	3.25	7
Commitment and responsibility of public and private sectors	4.57	3
Good Governance (Gov. Efficiency and Responsibility)	4.30	5
Shared authority between public and private sector	3.70	6
Political supports	4.72	1
Well organized and committed public agency	4.32	4
Existence of strong Private Partner	4.62	2

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Notes: Number, N = 40

Kendall's coefficient of concordance = 0.326 level of significance 1%

For 'Mean scores': 1= Unimportant and 5= Most important

Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) was calculated, in order to check up whether the respondents from both partners ranked all the factors in a similar order. Kendall's (W) is a value between 0 and 1 and that is, 0 (no agreement) to 1(complete agreement). According to Schmidt (1997), as a rule of thumb, Kendall's (W) of 0.7 or higher at the 99% significance level, can be interpreted as 'strong agreement'

The Kendall's coefficient of concordance for ranking the above Success factors was 0.326, which was statistically significant at the 1% level of significance. This result suggested that there was a high agreement among the 40 respondents about which factors are more important for the successful implementation of the PPP in utility billing.

The most important factor as perceived by the overall respondents is the existence of Political support (mean value 4.72). This finding is consistent with the literature review (Cesar & Ada, 2008) that states, Government commitment in the form of political support is key factor in the success of any PPP Projects. This factor was ranked exceedingly due to strong political commitment from the top political leadership of the Ministry of Information and Communication which has taken the upper hand for successful implementation of the PPP in utility billing.

The second most important factor as perceived by the overall respondents is the existence of strong private partner (mean value 4.62). The findings from literature review (Abdul-Rashid et al. 2006) stated that strong and good private consortium or partners like Kifya Financial PLC is a key factor in the success of any PPP Projects. With a mean value of 4.62, this result is in line with the literature and indicates that the survey respondents view strong and good private consortium or partners as the second most important factor for the PPP in utility billing to be successful. Accordingly, the governments engaged in PPP projects make sure that the private parties are skilled and economically capable of taking up the projects.

Moreover, many of the respondents highlighted that PPP project relies on the capability of the organizations and individuals that administer them. Even though, strong political support is so important, this cannot be adequate without the existence of strong private partners. Therefore, strong and suitable private partner with technical competence must be available to manage complex PPP and possess the will to make investments on PPP projects.

Commitment and responsibility of both public and private partners was also perceived as the third most important success factor by the overall respondents with mean value 4.57. This result is consistent with the argument by Li et al. (2005) who claimed that commitment is one of the fundamental principles in partnership. Therefore, so as to insure the realization of the ultimate goals of the undergoing PPP, all parties have to commit their best resources to the PPP project.

Having well organized and committed public agency was also perceived as the fourth ranked most important success factor with mean value 4.32. This finding is consistent with Li et al. (2005) that describes, effective procurement cannot be separated from the stakeholders. This supports the institutional structure for a PPP project in that policymakers, government departments, and their agency are crucial for successful PPP implementation.

Good governance (Gov. Efficiency and Responsibility) (mean value 4.30) was also thought necessary to

ensure the success of the undergoing PPP. As claimed by the United Nations Economic commission for Europe (UNECE, 2007), inefficiency in governance has led to the failure in the implementation of PPP in many countries. However, the existence of good governance in the form of government responsibility and due support was taken as an engine for the successful implementation of the PPP under discussion.

Accordingly, all the above listed success factors have resulted in the effective implementation of the PPP in utility billing. Therefore, this PPP has recorded with better achievements in reducing the printing cost of the billing papers from 12 million to 2.5million birr per bill transaction due to integrating all utility billing in one billing sheet, Therefore, it confirms the theoretical foundation of this survey which depicts that collaborative management approach is a strategic solution to reduce transaction costs (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). Furthermore, it dramatically reduces service waiting time for all utility billing from an hour to be less than 10 minutes. Therefore, these are some the achievements made by the PPP than ever before in utility billing.

Moreover, this PPP has created remarkably high level of customer satisfaction due to accessing the utility billing service using different one stop service centers. According to the information gained from the finding of Rahal (2015), almost 85% of the customers have ranged their level of satisfaction from satisfied to strongly satisfied. Accordingly, this figure indicates that majority of the customers are well satisfied with the service delivery through PPP than ever before. Because 85% is significantly greater than 50% with z-cal value 6.47 at 1% level of significance.

Therefore, from the above information, the adoption of PPP in utility billing reduces the cost and service waiting time and creates strong level of satisfaction among customers. Furthermore, better satisfactions of the customers can be taken as witness for the effectiveness and efficiency of the service delivery by the PPP.

The next section also examines the practical restraints faced by both Partners while adopting and implementing the PPP in utility billing. As it is presented in table 4.7, a comprehensive summary of the descriptive statistics were calculated and analyzed using the mean values of each partner.

Mann–Whitney U test is used to rank the respondents view on restraining factors ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly disagree” and find out the extent of differences between the Public and Private Partner respondents.

Table.2. Respondents’ Perception about the restraining factors.

Variable	Mean			Test	
	Public	Private	difference	Result	Sig.
High risk relying on private sector	3.7037	4.4615	0.7578	108.000	0.040
Excessive restriction on participation	2.1852	1.6921	0.4929	118.500	0.072
Lengthy delay in negotiation	2.5926	1.6923	0.9003	91.500	0.011
Absence of clear PPP focused policy	4.4074	4.9311	0.5157	116.000	0.033
Absence of independent agency dedicated for PPP	4.2963	4.9231	0.6268	103.000	0.013
Lack of experience and appropriate skills	4.2593	4.3846	0.1253	158.500	0.569
Lack of awareness on the issue of PPP	4.7407	4.8462	0.1055	157.000	0.460

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The summarized data set in the above table indicate that the respondents from private partner have felt that all restraining factors inhibit proper implementation than the respondents from public partner, except the case of excessive restriction on participation and lengthy delay in negotiation. Accordingly, the most serious restraining factor for both partners are and were lack of experienced and skilled man power with 0.1253 mean difference and p- value 0.569 which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance; and lack of awareness on PPP with 0.1055 mean difference and p- value 0.46 which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance). Therefore, this shows that there is no significant difference between public and private partners on the seriousness of these restraining factors and support the findings of Teshome,(2014) and Berg et al (2002). These researchers identified that knowledge and awareness gap on the issue PPP are restraints on PPP adoption and implementation. Therefore, the finding of this research confirms that knowledge and awareness gap on the issue PPP are challenges of the PPP under investigation through supporting the findings of the prior research.

Additionally, the finding of this research is consistent with the finding of Chan et al., (2006) who explained that due to lack of relevant skills and experience of project partners, PPP projects would become more complex to procure and implement.

It also indicates that, the most serious restraining factors for PPP in the Utility billing as perceived by the respondents from public partner were and are lack of awareness, absence of clear PPP focused policy and absence of independent agency dedicated for PPP. Then again, the respondents from private partner indicated that the lack of awareness about PPP, absence of clear PPP focused policy, absence of independent agency dedicated for PPP, lack of experience and appropriate skills and high risk relying on private partner were and are the serious restraining factors for the PPP in utility billing.

The result of the Mean Ranking (Public, 3.7037 and Private, 4.4615) also supports the existing difference in which risk sharing is relatively less felt as restraining factor for the public sector respondents with 0.7578 amount

of mean difference and p- value (Sig, 0.040) which is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance difference as compared to the private sector. This entails that, among the list of restraining factors risk sharing is serious restraining factor for the private sector with the existing significant differences in the perception with the public sector.

Therefore, there is a significant difference between the public and private partners' perception on the issue of risk sharing as a restraining factor for the PPP in utility billing with a P- value 0.04. This shows that, there is a significant difference between the Public and Private sectors opinion on the issue of risk sharing.

Moreover, one of the interviewees from the private partner revealed that 100% of the operation risk is relying on private partner since it is service availability based PPP modality which largely supports Kwak et al. (2009) finding in relation to operation related risks. This also validates the assumption that operation related risk sharing is the most serious restraining factor for the private sector.

Logically, the government would prefer to transfer risks associated with asset procurement and service delivery to the private sector participants (Efficiency Unit 2003). However, the finding of this survey has literature support from Kwak et al. (2009) which asserts that most operation related risks are retained solely by the private sector.

Apart from this, interviewees from private partner revealed that, problems related with financial arrangement are also challenges for the PPP. One of the indicators is lack of interest in providing loans to the private partner by different financial intuitions including the domestic Banks. In this regard respondents from private partner suggested that there is a need for reviewing the legal frameworks related to bank loan service system. This also implies that financing PPP projects are not encouraged by the financing institutions as it compared with other sectors.

Finally, both the Mean Ranking and Mann-Whitney U test have shown that the private partner respondents are more seriously concerned about these restraining factors than the public partner, confirming that these restraining factors were and are remained challenges for the successful implementation of PPP in utility billing.

4. Conclusion

With all recognized drawbacks, there are still functional legal frameworks in place to make the PPP functional. However, there are still gaps in the level of awareness on the existing legal frameworks. Therefore, this implies that there was not sufficient policy dialogue that involved the private sector.

The practice of the PPP guideline by Ministry of Communication and Information Technology was considered as best practice made by the public partner which is used as a platform and framework to manage the PPP with the purpose of devising a framework for the Ethiopian Government, Public Enterprises and Agencies to enable and promote private investment in the ICT infrastructure.

The political commitment in the form of political support is considered as the most important factor that contributed a lot for the successful implementation of PPP in utility billing. This implies that the contribution of the exiting two legal frameworks for the establishment of the partnership was not as such adequate rather it was the political commitment that made this PPP possible and successful.

Additionally, the existence of strong private partner was ranked the second most important factor and highlighted that Kifya Financial Technology PLC with sufficient technical knowledge to manage complex tasks and posses the will to investment on PPP has made this PPP successful.

These above mentioned success factors have resulted high level of customer satisfaction and remarkable cost-effectiveness and service waiting time reduction. Therefore, it can be concluded that the adoption of effective PPP in utility billing creates strong level of satisfaction among citizens which can be taken as a witness for the effectiveness of the service delivery through the undergoing PPP.

Regarding restraining factors, the most serious inhibiting factors for both partners were and are lack of experienced and skilled man power and lack of awareness on the issue of PPP. Therefore, this article confirms that knowledge and awareness gap on the issue PPP are the challenges of the PPP under investigation. Moreover, the issue of risk sharing is seriously felt restraining factor by the private partner and it was highlighted that 100% of the operation risk is relying on private partner in the PPP under investigation.

Generally, the article confirms that, though legal frameworks are in place, it is the ever increasing political commitment and the existence of strong private consortium that made the PPP effective and successful.

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