

Overview of Public-Private Partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa: Emerging Risks and Narratives

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Abstract

Powerful global actors including international finance institutions, multilaterals and funders promote neoliberal policies across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), prioritising public-private partnerships (PPPs). Assumptions are that private sector resources will solve public sector deficiencies and ensure effective and efficient development and service delivery. SSA governments are creating required PPP-enabling environments to attract such investments. This article reports on a desk review of 128 academic and grey literature documents about SSA PPP development covering the period 2013-2022. Rather than present a detailed audit, the article identifies risks and narratives at both population and State levels emerging from PPPs across diverse countries and sectors. This initial overview contributes to building an evidence base about PPP risks and can be used to inform a comprehensive feminist analysis of PPPs. It also sets the context for the more specific case studies and articles in this issue of *Feminist Africa*.

Accelerating PPP costs shrink fiscal and policy space, undermining government efforts to drive national development priorities. Negative effects on employment, livelihoods and access to services exacerbate burdens for disadvantaged women, as they assume increased unpaid care responsibilities when healthcare and education services decline, and as they support families with fewer productive resources. Citizen-state relationships and national sovereignty weaken as States are increasingly accountable to financial actors. There are, however, some signs of a growing momentum to reclaim the role of the State and to make an accountable public sector work in the interest of the people.

Keywords: Public-private partnerships, Sub-Saharan Africa, development models

Introduction

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are having negative effects on development efforts across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), through directly impacting the lives of disadvantaged communities, especially women, and by weakening States' ability to direct their fiscal and policy space.

PPPs have threatened women's livelihoods by forcing relocation from traditional agricultural areas and by harming the environment. Project designs have regularly missed providing means of production such as transportation to markets. Private partners have shown how they will not honour PPP contract commitments to ensure women's formal employment.

At a broader level, there are indications that PPP mechanisms are weakening the governance of service delivery, often commodifying and narrowly focussing essential health and education services in ways that decrease access for disadvantaged households. This erosion of public services also increases women's unpaid care responsibilities within families as they shoulder the burden of filling the gaps created by depleted services. Government financial resources, systems, legal and regulatory frameworks and decision-making processes are increasingly geared to inviting and facilitating investment, particularly by global private sector actors, while reducing State capacity to deliver on national development priorities.

This article serves as a bridge between Rodríguez Enríquez's overall conceptual article in this issue (Rodríguez Enríquez Forthcoming), which frames the feminist analysis of global debates, and the other articles discussing specific case studies and actions taking place across SSA. Rather than present a detailed audit and inventory, the aim of this article is to identify and consider the indicative types of PPPs and their observed risks. In short, this article sets the scene and context for the more specific articles.

I am a retired development worker, privileged to have lived and worked in several African countries for almost 40 years, and I have deep personal and family ties in the region. My perspective reflects my growing concerns after having observed the increased engagement of global private sector corporations and investors that are trying to influence SSA national and regional development.

I begin by highlighting the background and explaining the methodology, after which I examine in more detail the risks and narratives emerging from the literature and subsequently share concluding remarks.

Background

PPPs are a highly contested model of development with considerable evolution in their governance, in the array of engaged actors, and in the overall context for their development. Initially, governments in the Global South integrated PPPs into State-driven strategies. For example, the South East Asian developmental state model intended to strengthen national economies and resist globalisation processes by developing PPPs to support the national private sector (Johnson 1999). Many newly independent African States (e.g., Ghana) had similar State-led strategies integrating PPP development (Torvikey and Ohene Marfo 2023a, Forthcoming).

Current SSA and global contexts, however, are very different, and power has shifted to global rather than national actors. Since the 1980s, donors and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) including the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have driven structural adjustment and financialisation strategies to reduce and reframe State roles and to increase private sector engagement in developing infrastructure and providing public goods and services. Contemporary PPP development is embedded in this neoliberal paradigm and occurs in a crisis context of deeply entrenched poverty, service deterioration, escalating debt levels and austerity measures (Farnsworth and Irving 2021).

Mainstream narratives point to insufficient public funds and inadequate state capacities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and look to the promise of trillions of dollars of private investment and PPP mechanisms to address public sector gaps (AfDB et al. 2015; AfDB 2020; AfDB Group 2021; Kociemska 2019; UN 2015, 2017). The African Union's Agenda 2063 continental strategy (AU 2015) and the SDG Financing strategy (UNGA 2015) help institutionalise and embed this narrative in the "Africa Rising" vision (Economist 2011).

In reality, there has not been sufficient investment. In its 2021-2031 PPP strategic plan, the African Development Bank (AfDB) Group estimated that by 2025, African countries would collectively require USD130-170 billion annually to meet present and future infrastructural development needs (AfDB Group 2021). And yet, the plan estimated annual shortfalls of USD68-108 billion in meeting these needs (AfDB Group 2021). Existing investment was already skewed, with over half of the 2008-2018 PPP activity taking place in only five countries: South Africa, Morocco, Nigeria, Egypt and Ghana (AfDB 2020).

Typically, mainstream PPP literature has focussed on gaps in State capacity regarding technicalities and the requisite regulatory environments for PPP development and implementation (AfDB 2020; AfDB Group 2021; Kang et al. 2019). Drawing from a 2015 African survey (EIU 2015) and a 2009-2019 dataset (EIU 2019), the Economist Intelligence Unit reviewed 24 selected SSA countries and identified 18 emerging, five developed and one nascent PPP enabling environments based on national system abilities to leverage financing and develop relevant project pipelines.^{1 2 3}

The mainstream solution to these gaps has been to continually support and pressure States to create these PPP-enabling environments grounded in government reforms to improve approval processes, risk assumption and project pipelines (Convergence 2022; UN 2023). States are expected to increase financial contributions and asset ownership and operation while also decentralising authority to local governments (ICA 2018). Significantly, the State should leave commercially viable investments for private actors while itself assuming responsibility for asset classes that provide lower returns (Lakmeeharan et al. 2020).

Critics have been raising concerns about PPPs. While notable African organisations such as FEMNET, the NAWI collective, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER), and the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) have been undertaking feminist macroeconomic analyses, much of the evidence is fragmented.^{4 5 6 7 8} To address this gap, *Feminist Africa* and *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)* aim to provide a consolidated feminist analysis of PPPs through this issue. The intent of this specific article is not to undertake a detailed feminist analysis of all the PPPs identified. Rather, as a

contribution to addressing this analytical gap and to informing feminist analyses, I examine emerging narratives and observed risks from various PPP arrangements across SSA countries, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities, particularly women, as well as the State itself.⁹

Methodology

A feminist analysis moves beyond the mainstream gender strategies promoted by IFIs such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank.^{10 11} These approaches broadly focus on increasing women's participation in both the formal labour force and in access to and ownership and control of productive assets, based on the market economy.

Instead, Rodríguez Enríquez (2021) asserts that:

A feminist approach of PPPs should not be restricted to the specific study of its impact on women's lives, but, rather on the way PPPs contribute or not to deepen a financial capitalism that commodifies life, plunders land and destroys Nature, and advances a predatory system that puts profits ahead of the sustainability of life and the boundaries of the planet (sec. viii) Resistance, para. 2).

Rodríguez Enríquez (2021) then presents a detailed intersectional feminist approach that locates PPPs within the prevailing national and regional economic development strategy. The approach involves analysing the roles, influence and levels of power of the main public, private (especially corporate) and civil society actors, the framing and role of regulatory and legal frameworks, the specific dynamics and characteristics of PPP design and implementation, and their impact on gender and human rights. In addition, the effects on transparency and accountability, governance and democracy and levels of resistance need to be understood.

Through this article I sought to draw out evidence and trends that can inform this feminist approach. As well, I applied a maximum variation sampling strategy (Better Evaluation 2014) to cover as broad an array of literature as possible. I completed a desk review of academic and grey literature covering the period 2013-2022 between December 2021 and February 2022 (with selected

updating during 2022-2023) using University of Bath library search engines, Google scholar and Google searches of institutional and general websites.

Overall, I reviewed 128 documents; 87 discussed indicative types of PPPs covering 34 out of 48 SSA countries. Table One highlights the geographical spread and indicative types of PPPs identified.

Table 1: Geographical Coverage of Indicative PPPs

<i>Region</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Indicative types of PPPs identified</i>
Central Africa	Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe	Services (municipal rubbish removal); infrastructure (water, energy); agriculture
Eastern Africa	Burundi, Comoros, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda	Agriculture; health; infrastructure (water, energy, transportation)
Southern Africa	Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Agriculture; health; infrastructure (water, energy, transportation)
Western Africa	Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia	Agriculture; education; health; infrastructure (water, energy, markets, transportation)
TOTAL	34 Countries	

Source: Generated by author from desk review of literature.

Although not a comprehensive audit, the table indicates that PPP models have been adopted across all SSA regions. Indicative examples suggest a concentration of PPPs in agriculture, health services and infrastructural development.

Implementation is not uniform across the regions, but despite geographical and sectoral imbalances and a lack of comparable financial data, the literature helped to surface indicative risks and narratives from PPP activity, and it was possible to develop an overview of issues relevant to the region. A growing evidence base points to negative risks and consequences of PPP development and implementation. They are considered in the following sections.

PPPs are Straining Community Livelihoods

Direct action by corporate actors involved in infrastructural PPPs is threatening livelihoods through dislocating communities to make way for their projects, harming environments through non-eco-friendly production models and establishing exploitative formal employment opportunities that also tend to limit disadvantaged women's participation. These processes have exacerbated food insecurity, raised health risks and made women's lives more difficult.

In Senegal, the Toll Motorway PPP forced 3,350 families to move to a new site close to the largest waste dump in West Africa, known for its health hazards, without any mitigation measures being put in place. Agriculture was also undermined and women were forced to find new ways to generate incomes (DAWN 2022; Ndoye 2020, 2023). In Sierra Leone, the Addax Bioenergy PPP displaced communities, polluted neighbouring water sources and degraded the agricultural environment, increasing women's workload through forcing them to spend long hours collecting water and firewood and travelling to buy food (Abdullah 2020).

In response, private partners have often developed compensating corporate social responsibility programmes such as women's garden projects, but as in the case of Senegal and Sierra Leone, they have generally not mitigated negative PPP consequences (Abdullah 2020, 2023a, b; Ndoye 2023). The result in Sierra Leone, which is typical of other contexts, was "increased poverty and food insecurity, youth out-migration, alcoholism, domestic violence" (Abdullah 2020, 1).

Agricultural PPPs, supported by substantial global private sector investment in green revolution strategies, have demonstrated direct negative impacts on people, the environment and the structure of the sector.¹² For example, Gates Foundation's support for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has promoted integration of farmers into production and marketing value chains. Despite AGRA's claims of success (AGRA 2021), critics have pointed to negative impacts on food security, food sovereignty and livelihoods, given evidence of increased soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and overall lack of increased yields and incomes (Malkan 2022; Wise 2020). Despite these negative effects, AGRA's PPPs continue to fundamentally restructure the sector by penetrating

communities and privatising systems. While this process increases farmer vulnerability, it enhances benefits to value chain actors and strengthens corporate control of the seed sector. This has happened through the Village Based Advisors (VBAs) PPP between AGRA, Cereal Growers Association (CGA), and Makueni County Government in Kenya which established a private sector-led extension approach that enabled CGA to collaborate with 55 value chain actors (input suppliers, output buyers, mechanisation, post-harvest handling, agroforestry, spraying and other service providers). Trained VBAs have been reaching out to over 14,000 smallholder farmers (AGRA 2021a) while earning commissions for catalysing sales and services (AGRA 2021b). Ultimately, Bayer East Africa confirmed that this model has helped it increase product sales (AGRA 2021b).

Despite PPP actors' mainstream gender aspirations of increasing women's formal employment opportunities and access to the means of production, there are indications that PPP development can intensify the barriers confronting disadvantaged women. For example, rural women in Kenya typically produce 60% of the food and yet cannot access the costly new PPP railroad to transport their goods to market, despite paying VAT and consumption taxes that help repay the substantial railroad debt (Simeoni 2021). Even locally driven PPP business models can worsen livelihood possibilities, and Torvikey and Ohene Marfo (2023a, Forthcoming) show how an Accra traditional market, restructured through PPP mechanisms, has tended to advantage better-off women sellers and sideline marginalised poorer women.

PPPs in different sectors are also ignoring contractual obligations around formal employment, thereby worsening vulnerable women's already precarious livelihoods. The Sierra Leone PPP failed to comply with contract commitments to hire quotas of women in its factories. Abdullah found that this contributed to stifling women's advancement, gender equality and women's rights (Abdullah 2020). In Senegal, the contracting company entrenched gender inequities by promoting night shift work and ignoring national labour laws restricting women's engagement in such activities (Ndoye 2023). The private partner in a controversial Lesotho hospital PPP disputed contract obligations and fired 345 nursing staff (predominantly women) who went on strike for wage parity with the public sector (Guardian 2021).

These practices, seen in an array of infrastructural, agricultural and service PPPs across regions and countries, suggest systemic risks to traditional and formal livelihoods, especially for disadvantaged women.

PPPs are Eroding State Fiscal and Policy Space

PPPs integrate standard global designs and management mechanisms as well as contract language and commitments, which in turn consume significant proportions of State financial and technical resources, skewing their use towards guaranteeing private sector investment profits and preventing comprehensive implementation of nationally determined development priorities. This context has been driven in large part by State vulnerabilities in securing adequate financial resources to fund national priorities. In the past, public procurement projects across SSA were typically funded from national budgets, or through low interest, longer repayment period concessional financing from IFIs or donors. As national statuses changed from Low-Income Country (LIC) to Low- and Middle-Income Country (LMIC) – in 2007 for Ghana (Torvikey and Ohene Marfo Forthcoming) and in 2015 for Kenya (Simeoni and Kinoti 2020) – countries have had reduced access to concessional financing and development assistance and increasingly depend on private financing. As noted earlier, this evolution has driven most SSA states to create the PPP and investment-enabling environments demanded and framed by IFIs and global financial actors.

As a result, fiscal space is reduced because governments are required to cover PPP preparation costs, expected investor profit returns, financing and risk mitigation / contingent liabilities fees (Romero 2015). By 2019, the UN Economic Commission for Africa's Macroeconomics and Governance Division warned of growing State vulnerability because high annual risk mitigation fees appear off-budget, making it seem that governments have more fiscal space than they actually do (UNECA 2019). This process has drastically reduced the fiscal space for State activities.

The risk is real as both infrastructural and service delivery PPP projects face escalating costs across all SSA sub-regions. While private partners continue to earn their profits, the impact on national development is devastating. For example, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC)

supported Ghana's Sankofa Gas PPP (World Bank 2020b) which had an obligatory "take or pay" contractual clause that committed the Government to purchasing ninety per cent of predetermined quantities of gas produced irrespective of need. In 2019, the Government paid USD250 million for unused gas. The cost of unused gas combined with increasing PPP financing debts and contingent liabilities contributed to the Government subsequently reducing poverty reduction spending from 28% of GDP in 2015 to 19,4% of GDP in 2019-20 (Chikowore 2021).

In Kenya, poor project design almost doubled the cost of a PPP with five international companies to lease and service medical equipment for the country's hospitals. Despite paying KSh63 billion (over USD400 million), equipment went unused due to lack of needed personnel and infrastructure (Mutua and Wamalwa 2020). By 2016/17, the PPP had consumed the third biggest allocation of the health budget (Simeoni and Kinoti 2020, 2023).

Lesotho's Queen Mamohato Memorial Hospital PPP was actively promoted by the IFC as delivering value for money "without really adding to public expenditure" (Marriott 2014, 4). The Government signed an 18-year contract in 2009 with a consortium led by a South African company to build and operate a hospital and three filter clinics (Hellowell 2019). Due to contract weaknesses, the Government had to pay USD67 million inflation-linked annual fees, plus charges for patients above agreed quotas (already exceeded by 25% by 2013) and interest charges on late payments (Hellowell 2019). By 2015/2016 the PPP had absorbed 60% of total Ministry payments to healthcare providers (Hellowell 2019). Given the fee structure, however, the consortium had been estimating a twenty five per cent return on investment (contrasting with international norms of thirteen-eighteen per cent) and projected earnings of 7,6 times the original investment over the contract period (Marriott 2014). After ongoing state-consortium disagreements, the Government cancelled the PPP in 2021, resulting in service disruption (Areff 2021; Gernetzky 2021; Sello 2021a, b) and the risk of potential dispute mechanism penalties.

PPPs are Undermining Access to Infrastructure and Services

Declining fiscal space is increasingly imperilling state commitments to providing universally accessible quality services. There has been a profound shift since SSA countries' independence when states were principal providers of health, education, agricultural extension and other services. Mainstream development financing priorities and macroeconomic pressures since the 1980s have driven austerity policies, leading to underfunding of the public sector and consequent decline in public service content, scope and quality. A powerful accompanying mainstream narrative has developed that attributes this decline to LIC and LMIC state inadequacy and incompetence, reduced state resources, and superior private sector capacity, efficiency and resources (Rodríguez Enríquez and Llanereras 2023a).

In response, WBG, IMF, UN agency and donor narratives promote service delivery PPP models as a solution to this decline. They assert that businesses ostensibly lower costs by implementing standardised packages while the state simply has to regulate and pay for services, set standards and monitor benchmarks (UN 2015; UNSG 2019).

Yet critics argue that there is limited evidence demonstrating presumed sectoral, cross-sectoral or regional benefits from PPPs (Gideon and Unterhalter 2017). And evidence increasingly suggests that PPP models are fundamentally changing the content and process of service delivery, with adverse effects on equity (Languille 2017). A key driver is the commodification of services and the direct charging of user fees to clients, whether by a private or public actor. Given worsening poverty levels, disadvantaged communities and households often cannot afford the fees and thus have reduced access (Tariq and Zhang 2021). These processes are driving the current financialisation of life characterised by growing household debt as basic services must be purchased.

This happened with Senegal's PPP toll highway, access to which is unaffordable for most citizens (DAWN 2022; Ndoye 2020), and in Ethiopian electrical distribution projects which have been shown to exclude poor women due to fees (DAWN 2021; Wiese 2020). Similarly, Uganda's reproductive health voucher PPP effectively re-introduced health user fees that had been abolished in 2001 – pregnant women were required to pay UGX4,000 for a voucher covering

antenatal, delivery and post-delivery services (ISER 2020). In other cases (e.g., Lesotho), the state pays user fees for clients but the charges are often high and drain the fiscus, thereby sapping resources from other development priorities.

Examining maternal health services demonstrates the negative impact of PPPs on service delivery. In the case of Lesotho, state payments for the hospital PPP distorted the overall health programme because there were insufficient resources for primary health care services that are essential for reducing overall maternal mortality and achieving equitable universal health coverage. By 2015, the Government had spent almost double for patient health in Maseru city (where the PPP was located) than in rural districts (Hellowell 2019), despite the city having maternal mortality rates four times lower than the national average (Marriot 2014). By 2019, PPP-run facilities had drained almost half the country's doctors from the public sector (Hellowell 2019), although the numbers treated represented a small percentage of the national population.

Similarly, Uganda's health voucher PPP used public funds from the WB, the Swedish Government and the Ministry of Health to strengthen poor women's sexual and reproductive health services. Despite favourable reviews (GPRBA 2021; World Bank 2020a), ISER's evaluation identified several shortcomings that hindered sustainable access to services. For example, the voucher excluded essential costs including transportation home after delivery and the programme partnered with mainly private providers, many of which closed at the end of the project because most women could not afford regular service fees. Almost half the PPP funding was spent on project management and evaluation costs. ISER concluded that "Piecemeal market based approaches like vouchers are not the most effective use of state funds" (ISER 2020, 11) because targeting strategies typically cost more and raise governance and beneficiary selection issues in contrast to providing universal benefits.

More fundamentally, PPPs are significantly narrowing service content because they invariably apply results-based financing mechanisms related to meeting specific measurable outcomes. The Uganda voucher programme radically diverted women's sexual and reproductive health away from the originally framed comprehensive social justice and feminist frameworks towards narrowly defined maternal mortality. This obscures the "structural factors – including power, economic inequality and gender relations – that shape women's health"

(Languille 2017, 13). Likewise, the Kenya and Lesotho health PPPs focused mainly on hospital-based treatment and care of medical symptoms and moved away from primary healthcare priorities of prevention and health promotion. Narrow hospital PPP strategies carry long-term risks for health and social outcomes because they fail to address the many social determinants of health and do not facilitate cross-sectoral coordination and pooling of resources. As one East African health technical advisor noted:

“[The] majority of people ...still have serious challenges with [cholera], malaria and diarrhoea ... Let’s tackle the very basic things that our community health worker can do ... If the Ministry of Water ensures that not only hospitals but the communities have clean water we will have sorted out a large part of our diseases ...” (Godt 2021, 21).

Similar processes are penetrating the education sector, particularly in West Africa. Since 2016, the Government of Liberia has launched a series of highly publicised PPPs – with significant donor funding – to outsource public primary school management aimed at improving educational outcomes (LMOE 2022). Comparable initiatives have been subsequently launched in Ghana (GMOE 2023) and Sierra Leone (COTAE and GI-ESCR 2022). All employ results-based financing strategies linked to achieving narrowly defined literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. The underpinning mainstream narratives claim that public schools are deficient.

These PPP service delivery models are, however, highly contested. Improvements in Liberia were not as positive as expected and results were not immediately scalable (Romero and Sandefur 2019). Critics in Ghana have raised concerns about untransparent management and implementation given lack of progress reports or Ministry data (COTAE and GI-ESCR 2022). More broadly, education critics argue that structural drivers of poor educational outcomes need to be addressed (Klees 2019) and they raise concerns about the impact of narrowly defined standardised education approaches that are delinked from contextual realities and national priorities. Instead, what is urgently needed is “transformative learning to engage in transformational change” that will enable people to effectively contribute to Africa’s sustainable development (Tikly 2019, 229).

Quality comprehensive health and education services are central to women's lives. As access is reduced, disadvantaged women and girls in particular are less able to engage in the social, economic and political life of the community, and this has long-term impacts on family, household and society. They are also vulnerable, both as employees, given their high participation in these sectoral work forces, and as the main providers of unpaid care, which increases as families adjust to gaps in services.

Narrowed content applying results-based financing priorities, combined with fees, whether paid directly by users or indirectly by the State, can easily distort national policy directions, thereby risking overall development outcomes. Social services are the slippery slope and there is a real risk, particularly with health and education, of replacing the public sector with the private sector. This raises the question of whether the systems will serve the public good or simply generate profits.

PPPs are Undermining Governance and Threatening National Sovereignty

Most SSA governments are caught in an intensifying neoliberal cycle that continues to confound their efforts to fulfil their citizens' right to development – obligations typically enshrined in national constitutions and ratified international instruments. As States have been reframed to prioritise the creation of enabling environments beneficial to investors, the resulting PPP processes tend to sideline citizen participation and engagement. PPPs are in effect the thin edge of the wedge, a virtual trojan horse, and are promoted as the immediate solution to immediate problems. They inevitably trap States in an endless cycle of crippling debt repayments that demand priority accountability to financiers (usually global).¹³ The overall effect is to fundamentally undermine accountabilities to the people and weaken national sovereignty (Eurodad 2022; Rodríguez Enríquez and Llanereras Blanco 2023b).

Evidence from Ethiopia and Kenya highlights how global financial actors pressure and exploit national vulnerabilities. When the Ethiopian government rejected its long-time developmental state model in 2018 and rapidly launched economic reforms embracing private sector participation, (Gebremichael 2020,

2023), the global community applauded. By March 2021, the State had negotiated substantial G7, WB and IMF loans and had approved a pipeline of 23 PPP major infrastructural projects (Ethiopia 2021). Implementation stalled when investors objected to the government's application of national laws that restricted the use of foreign currency to pay PPP fees and profits. In late 2021, the IMF suspended loan disbursements and did not approve new credit arrangements, ultimately forcing the government to reverse its currency policy (Yewondwossen 2021). By 2023, the government was still negotiating with the IMF to borrow at least USD2 billion (Central Banking 2023), but any consideration has been made contingent upon the country restructuring up to USD28.2 billion of external debt. The country now faces a high risk of debt distress (Robertson 2023) which further constrains efforts to negotiate finance.

Kenya is facing a similar situation. By August 2021, the country was spending half its annual tax revenues on servicing debt interest and principal repayments (KTN 2021), up from 40% in 2020 (Kodongo 2022). The government initially declined to apply for COVID-related debt relief through the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) (World Bank 2021) after global private lenders warned that participation "would put debtors at risk of default and undermine the functioning of private financial markets, jeopardizing market access and capital flows" (IIF 2020). Given reduced domestic revenue collection, however, the government eventually applied to DSSI and negotiated a controversial USD2.34 billion IMF bailout loan (IMF 2021). Unsurprisingly, Kenya amended its initial PPP legislation in December 2021 to facilitate PPP procurement and county-level expansion (Munda 2021), thereby enabling private penetration into local levels. This was done despite a 2017 WBG report identifying Kenyan PPP risks around these very elements (Olotch 2017). Currently, the country also faces a high risk of debt distress (Robertson 2023).

Internal governance mechanisms are increasingly being subverted and undermined by PPPs. Historically, States directly governed and citizens used national constitutions to hold governments accountable for fulfilling rights to education, health, and development. With current metagovernance decision-making mechanisms enshrined in SDG practices, however, States now have to indirectly manage the performance and accountability of public, private and voluntary stakeholder platforms (Gleckman 2018). Of great concern is that these platforms

are increasingly dominated by unaccountable corporations and global institutions rather than national structures and actors.

The actions of Philips Corporation in Kenya clearly reflect this trend. As the first private sector member and the largest initial funder, Philips skilfully captured Kenya's SDG Partnership Platform and set priorities around public-private collaboration and innovative health financing development. Decisions were taken in closed spaces by the steering committee comprising senior government and UN officials, big (mainly global) private sector actors and all health investors (UNRC 2020), while civil society and other non-state actors were excluded.¹⁴ Philips also established partnerships with Kenyan county governments and the UNFPA to pilot co-creation methodologies with selected stakeholders aimed at configuring and marketing its community life centre (CLC) model (Maltha and Choskey 2017; Philips 2017). National stakeholders have raised concerns:

One of the big dangers is that if government is very involved in these experiments, more often than not it will lead to policy; to scaling up something rather than exploring alternative ways ... (Godt 2022, 130).

This corporate capture of decision-making platforms has enabled Philips to rapidly scale its model. An initial county PPP in 2018 piloted the CLC model and developed a business case for outsourcing county health care (Philips Foundation 2018). Follow-up partnerships aimed to test the "model for further roll-out across Kenya and across the continent" (FMO 2020), and by March 2021 Philips and the Dutch development bank FMO had agreed to identify, finance proof of concept, and develop ten primary healthcare projects across Sub-Saharan Africa to attract investment for scaling (Philips 2021).

These untransparent and unaccountable PPP processes are obscured by the narrative that expansion is simply a technical exercise rather than a profound muscling into national policies and programmes. As noted by Gebremichael (2020, 11), these processes reflect "elements of state capture by international business organisations."

Examining the examples presented in this article reveals the broader processes at play around PPP development and underlines the ultimate risks reflected in the earlier-noted approach to feminist analysis of PPPs, which bears repeating:

A feminist approach of PPPs should not be restricted to the specific study of its impact on women's lives, but, rather on the way PPPs contribute or not to deepen a financial capitalism that commodifies life, plunders land and destroys Nature, and advances a predatory system that puts profits ahead of the sustainability of life and the boundaries of the planet (Rodríguez Enríquez 2021, (sec. viii) Resistance, para. 2).

It is therefore critically important to undertake feminist analyses of PPPs across SSA to build an evidence base of the processes being used to advance this model and to document the impact on disadvantaged women and communities, on State structures and mechanisms, and on overall governance and sovereignty. The knowledge generated will strengthen analytical frameworks and can contribute to policy and advocacy efforts to improve sustainable development efforts.

Conclusion: There are Deep Contradictions in the Logic of PPPs

This article has reviewed the experiences of developing and implementing various types of PPPs across the regions of SSA. Although States are reforming and restructuring national systems to create enabling investment environments, PPP costs are rising considerably given private sector profit expectations, contingent liabilities and risk mitigation costs. Growing debt and pressures on domestic fiscal and policy space could further constrain State capacity from using public resources to drive national development priorities, thereby deepening inequities, worsening service delivery and wasting resources.

After hollowing out public services for over four decades, global actors promote PPPs to improve service quality. Yet evidence points to negative effects on both content and scope of service delivery because quickly achieved and easily measured results-based financing outcomes tend to address selected symptoms rather than drivers and determinants of poor health and education. Imposed user fees can further exclude poor communities from such services. As services are reduced to vertical interventions, jobs are inevitably lost – impacting women who constitute most of social services workforces. Infrastructure PPPs such as those involved in Senegal's highway construction and Sierra Leone's biofuel production have excluded women from many of the jobs and expected benefits.

PPPs have also jeopardised women's livelihoods in agriculture and the informal economy – whether through relocation from lands (Senegal), destruction of the environment (Sierra Leone), exclusion from transport services (Kenya), or disruption of markets (Ghana).

Overall negative effects on employment, livelihoods and access to services exacerbate burdens for disadvantaged women coping with growing poverty and vulnerability. Women assume increased unpaid burden of care responsibilities as healthcare and educational services decline and disappear and as they have fewer productive resources to care for their families.

More broadly, current metagovernance processes risk destroying the social contract as citizen-state relationships are eroded and State accountabilities are increasingly directed towards financial actors. Ultimately these processes undermine national sovereignty which is necessary for governments to drive accountable development in the interest of the people.

These effects deeply contradict the overall logic of PPPs embedded in mainstream claims about their greater efficiency, effectiveness and positive impact on national development. The emerging evidence also disputes the narratives around State incompetence and decline that are used to justify this model of development.

Can an appropriate mix of public and private provision improve service delivery? The growing evidence base is showing that profit-maximising PPPs cannot sustainably deliver social services to those who need them. COVID-19 has brought the issues into sharp relief and highlighted the critical role of functioning public services that should be protected at all cost. It is necessary to look beyond technical problems of PPP investment and implementation to more deeply understand the profound consequences of these developments on populations and on State structures and processes. We need to analyse PPP processes as a significant political shift at national and global levels (Gebremichael 2020).

As powerful global players continually promote mainstream neoliberal approaches, there is a growing call for reclaiming the public sector (Martens, 2017), based on the recognition that “public expenditure in social sectors is the most powerful instrument available to governments to address poverty and inequalities” (Mariotti 2022, 4). Advocates increasingly call for comprehensive,

integrated services, grounded in national development priorities and accountability mechanisms and processes. Currently, 225 organisations globally have endorsed “The Future is Public” manifesto (TFIP 2021) and significant efforts (e.g., in Uganda) are underway as national actors – development workers, civil society members, researchers and advocates – hold States accountable through demanding universal, quality, accessible services. (Rodríguez Enríquez et al. 2023).

It is time to break the dependency on PPPs, to reclaim the role of the State and to make the public sector work in the interest of the people. As noted by one activist in East Africa:

The fact is we can have access to our money if we curb illicit financial flows. We can set our priorities right. We can hold our governments to account. And our frameworks, our constitution, and our budget processes have the space for that to happen (Godt 2022, 129).

Endnotes

1. Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, The Gambia, Togo, Uganda, Zambia
2. Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, South Africa
3. Democratic Republic of the Congo
4. <https://www.femnet.org/>
5. <https://www.nawi.africa/>
6. <https://iser-uganda.org/>
7. <http://isser.ug.edu.gh/>
8. <https://www.iej.org.za/>
9. Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Democratic Republic), Congo (Republic), Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia (The), Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome And Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ZG>
10. <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/ppp-sector/gender-impacts-ppps/impacts-ppps-gender-inclusion>
11. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-development-bank-group-gender-strategy-2021-2025>
12. The so-called “green revolution” reflected mid-20th century efforts to increase food production, particularly in the Global South. The introduction of new, high-yielding crops raised concerns about high costs and environmental harm given the requirements for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Poor farmers unable to afford the inputs have frequently achieved lower yields than with earlier varieties adapted to local conditions <https://www.britannica.com/event/green-revolution>.

13. https://data.one.org/data-dives/data-dive-the-hidden-impacts-of-rising-interest-rates/?akid=185978.10886437.oTi_nC&rd=1&source=email&t=37&utm_campaign=covid19&utm_content=185978&utm_medium=email&utm_source=email_95&utm_term=media
14. Netherlands, USAID, World Bank, Sweden, Switzerland, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Philips, AstraZeneca, Huawei, and Merck for Mothers

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