

Public-Private Partnership in Managing Secondary Schools' Infrastructural Development in North West and South West Regions of Cameroon

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Abstract: This study identified limiting factors and strategies in public – private partnerships in managing secondary schools in Northwest and Southwest Regions in Cameroon. Two research questions were used. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. A purposive sample of 310 respondents (121 managers of firms/industries, 102 bank managers and 87 secondary school principals) was selected. Data were collected through a 22-item questionnaire. Frequencies and percentages were used to answer the research questions. Findings indicated that lack of awareness of the need for public – private partnerships, government attitudes, relationships with school and lack of structures (law, monitoring and mobilization systems) to enforce public – private partnership in education are the major limiting factors. The identified improvement strategies ranged from information access and communication system, appropriateness and adequacy of sensitization and mobilization, transparency and accountability issues, legal or regulatory frameworks, visions and objectives and decisional improvement of varied stakeholders in public – private partnership projects. Therefore, it was recommended that the government, school staffs and private organizations (NGOs) should implement the identified strategies and eliminate the limiting factors in public – private partnership in managing secondary school' infrastructural developments.

Keywords: public – private, partnership and infrastructural development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has been a recurring theme in ongoing discussions in education. Zuboff and Maxim (2004) defined sustainable development of systems, resources and information that are central to national development. Managing education for sustainable development therefore refers to the process of continuous improvement in the maximization of human and material resources in education for the attainment of life-long educational aims and objectives. At the 1996 United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development, governments made a commitment to adopting national strategies for sustainable development. The strategies for sustainable development called for “highly participatory systems intended to ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefits of future generation” (United Nations Development Programme 1996:2). One of such participatory systems is public-private partnership.

Public-private partnership refers to the collaboration in the delivery of public services between government and private business on account of a sense of cooperate social responsibility and societal demands for strategic partnership in development efforts (Sans-Luis, 2007). In education, under such public-private partnership initiatives, the organized private sector and corporate organizations see support to education as a corporate social responsibility. They invest in donating resources and capacity building such as buildings, scholarships, books, prizes and computers with internet facilities, sponsoring competitions and training specialists subjects teachers (Farrel, 2003, Egboka, 2007). Public-private partnership is important in managing secondary school/education for infrastructural development because a greater deal of education reforms revolves around the collective input of all parties concerned.

Private sector should recognize their complementary importance in the educational life of learners (Caldwell, 2004) stressed that the creation of public-private partnership provides another opportunity to strengthen the social capital of public education, if a broader view of the concept is adopted. Public-private sector partnership has received great recognition in the international scene. For example, in the United Kingdom, Government introduced private finance initiatives (PFI) in the early 1990s to construct and refurbish schools after which the school is leased back to the public authority (local education authority) usually for 25 years (Caldwell, 2004). These private companies funded, refurbished and maintained more than 595 schools and drew profits from the leased arrangements.

Another major project in the UK is the establishment of city Academies that involves the closure, re-opening, re-naming and physical re-building of secondary schools in cities across England (Farrell, 2003). The academies either witnessed a contribution from the non-public sector of funds in the re-building programme (normally a requirement), significant philanthropic support or the management of the new schools by a non-public entity either profit or non-profit. The government has established the academy sponsors Trust to secure private sponsorship of #2 million pounds for each school, with government funding between #20-28 million pounds (Blair, 2003). Duncan, Leigh, Modden and Tynan (2004) found that an outstanding example by international standards is the substantial support of the private sector for the Port Phillip Specialist School in Port Melbourne that serves about 140 students with moderate to severe disabilities. Public-private partnership is also evident in Florida (David, 2002).

It is striking that most of the support of philanthropist, trust and foundations and the additional support of government in the three international examples is directed at schools in challenging circumstances. Cameroon have much to learn from Australia, UK, and also from the United States where the involvement of foundations, philanthropist and trusts generally exceeds that to be found in the nation.

In Cameroon, such high levels of public-private partnership are not visible. Ejiouneme (2007) pointed out that, what is visible is community participation where communities have built schools, provide some facilities and government had taken over the management of the schools. There are also cases where the Parents Teachers Associations (PTA), Old students' association and philanthropists from business-led private sector organizations and philanthropists have contributed to school' infrastructural development. However, contributions from business-led private sector organizations such as banks, firms, industries, trade associations and multi-national companies are almost non-existent (Akpa, 2007). This situation has prompted the state government of Cameroon to evolve several reforms for effecting positive change in public-private partnership in infrastructural development of schools. Some of these reforms cited by Ezekwesili (2006) include provision of an enabling environment and stimulation of active participation of the private sector, civil society organizations communities, and development partners in educational development through public-private partnership (PPP) initiative, Adopt-a-school and community Accountability and Transparency initiative (CAT). Despite these, (PPP) remains limited in the country. It is therefore, important to empirically find out the limiting factors in public-private partnership in managing education for infrastructural development as well as identify strategies for improvement.

Hence, this study;

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research in developed countries has shown that there is high levels public-private partnership in managing education for infrastructural development (David, 2002, Caldwell, 2004). This does not seem to be the case in Cameroon in general and particularly in North-west and South-west regions in Cameroon where the public-private partnership is highly limited (Ezekwesili, 2001, Kolo, 2007). Consequently, the status of infrastructure in most secondary schools in Cameroon in general and North-west and South-west regions in particular are deplorable and inadequate to effectively meet the requirements of a bludgeoning student population and the fast-paced technological changes. One is tempted to ask: what factors limit public-private partnership in managing secondary schools' infrastructural development. The problem of this study is therefore to identify the limiting factors in public-private partnership in managing secondary schools or education for infrastructural development in North-west and South-west regions in Cameroon.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to identify limiting factors in public-private partnership in managing secondary education for infrastructural development in North-west and South-west regions. Specially, the study sought to identify

1. The limiting factors in public-private partnership in managing secondary education in North-west and South-west regions and
2. The strategies for improvement or improving public-private partnership in managing secondary education in these two regions.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study as follows:

1. What are the limiting factors in public-private partnership in infrastructural development of secondary schools in North-west and South-west regions?
2. What are the strategies for improving public-private partnership in infrastructural development of the schools?

Population of the Study

The population of the study was made up of all the estimated number of 526 managers of public and private sector establishments in the two regions under study. This population comprised 126 managers of large scale firms/industries (with more 30 staffs), 117 bank managers and 283 principals of public-secondary schools in the 21 carved areas for the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study stood 310 respondents selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select seven divisions in the ratio of: North-west, 4 divisions and South-west 3 divisions. The divisions chosen have the highest concentrations of private sector establishment and school principals in these regions as the study sample. This sample comprised 121 managers of firms/industries, 102 bank managers and 87 secondary school principals.

4. INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

A researcher-developed questionnaire titled: "Limitations and strategies in public-private-partnership in secondary Education" (LSPSE) was used to collected data. The questionnaire consisted of 22 items (12 items on limiting factors and 10 items on improvement strategies). The respondents were expected to tick yes or no for items that apply to their establishments.

Experts in test and measurement validated the instrument. The test –re-test method with an interval of two weeks, was used to test for reliability by distributing copies of the questionnaire to 5 managers of industries, 5 bank managers and 5 principals in Manyu division. Their responses were coded into the statistical package for the social sciences (version 110) and analysed using pearson product moment correlation coefficient. A coefficient of 0.81 was obtained which was considered satisfactory for the study.

Several repeated visits were made to retrieve copies of the questionnaire. Nine copies were not retrieved and only 301 copies were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Frequencies and percentages were used in answering the research questions.

Responses of the three categories of respondents are presented under three different columns. Items that score up to 50% and above in at least two of the columns are accepted items, while those that scored less than 50% are not accepted.

5. RESULTS

Research question one: what are the limiting factors in public-private partnership in infrastructural development of secondary schools in North-west and South-west regions of Cameroon?

Table1. *Limiting factors in public-private partnership in infrastructural development*

| Public-private partnership in education limited by | Manage firms/industries | | Bank manager | | School principals | |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1. Lack of awareness of any pocing on public-private partnership education | 121 121 51 | 100 100 42.14 | 102 98 23 | 100 96.07 22.54 | 87 87 13 | 100 100 14.94 |
| 2. Government have not specified how the private and public schools should partner | | | | | | |
| 3. Private organizations do not have the financial capacity to assist schools | | | | | | |
| 4. there are many procedures to follow before the head quarters of the establishment must give approval for private sector financial contributions | 121 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |
| 5. schools do not approach the private bodies for infrastructural assistance | 118 | 97.52 | 102 | 100 | 56 | 64.36 |
| 6. schools do not give accounts of private organizations financial assistance to them | 21 | 17.3 | 17 | 16.66 | 11 | 12.64 |
| 7. government do not recognize and honour private organizations that provide schools with infrastructures | 121 | 100 | 100 | 98.3 | 87 | 100 |
| 8. it is not a responsibility of private organizations to donate infrastructure to public schools | 64 | 52.89 | 13 | 12.74 | 62 | 71.26 |
| 9. school principals do not relate well with private organizations in their locations | 87 | 71.90 | 43 | 42.15 | 63 | 60.91 |
| 10. there are no structure flow, monitoring and mobilization system to enforce public-private partnership in education | 121 | 100 | 99 | 97.05 | 84 | 95.55 |
| 11. school allow facilities donated by the private sector to deteriorate without being used | 117 | 96.69 | 58 | 80 | 91 | 95 |
| 12. schools do not provide adequate information on schools' states and needs to the private organizations when requesting for assistance | 108 | 89.25 | 80 | 78.43 | 13 | 14.74 |

In table 1, only 3 and 6 scored below 50% in the three columns. The remaining seven items scored above 50%. This indicates that while private organizations do not have the financial capacity to assist schools and schools do not give accounts of private organizations financial assistance to them, are not limiting factors in public-private partnership in infrastructural development in secondary schools, the rest of the factors stated in the remaining seven items are limiting factors.

Research Question 2: what are strategies for improving public-private partnership in infrastructural development of schools?

Table2. *Strategies for improving public-private partnership in infrastructural development*

| Strategies for improving public-private partnership in education should include: | Managers firms/industries | | Managers bank | | School principals | |
|---|---------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 13. government should clearly state and communicate the conditions for public-private-partnership in education to relevant bodies | 121 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |
| 14. government should use seminars and sensitization campaigns in the mass media to create awareness on the responsibilities for public-private partnership in schools' infrastructural development | 121 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |

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| | | | | | | |
|--|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|-------|
| 15. government schools and private organizations should collaborate and create visions and objectives for efficient public-private partnership in schools' infrastructural development | 121 | 100 | 99 | 97.05 | 83 | 95.40 |
| 16. the management of schools and private organizations should allow their branch managers to assist in providing infrastructure to schools in their areas within a specified limit | 121 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |
| 17. management of private organizations should allow their branch managers to assist in providing infrastructure to schools in areas within specified limit | 116 | 95.86 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |
| 18. government should establish a national agency with committees of the state and divisions level to evaluate and drive public-private partnership in schools' infrastructural development | 23 | 19.00 | 54 | 52.94 | 11 | 12.64 |
| 19. schools should set school community relationship committees to transparently work with the private bodies for infrastructural assistance | 91 | 75.20 | 82 | 94.25 | 87 | 100 |
| 20. government and school management should communicate adequate infrastructure and ensure that stakeholders in movement in public-private partnership are allowed to participate in decision making on the projects they fund | 111 | 91.73 | 79 | 77.95 | 75 | 86.20 |
| 21. school principals should establish, develop and maintain satisfactory relations with private sector organizations in their areas | 121 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |
| 22. government should make and enforce laws, regulations, sanctions and rewards to foster public-private partnership in schools' infrastructural development | 121 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 87 | 100 |

In table 2, only 18 scored below 50% in two of the columns. The remaining nine items scored above 50%. This indicates that government should not establish a national agency with committees of the regions and divisions levels to evaluate and drive public-private partnership in schools' infrastructural development as a strategy for improving public-private sector partnership in infrastructural development in secondary education. Other identified strategies should be adopted.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that several factors limit public-private partnership in secondary education infrastructural development in North-west and South-west regions of Cameroon. The factors include; lack of awareness and government specifications on public-private partnership, unnecessary approval procedures of organizations' head quarter, inability of schools to approach the private organizations and lack of government laws and recognitions for private sector contributions to schools' infrastructural development.

These findings agree with Sons-Luis (2007) who also found limitations in process and procedures of public-private organizations do not have the financial capacity to assist schools nor that the schools do not give accounts of private organizations' financial assistance to them. However, lack of structures flow, monitoring and mobilization systems) to enforce public-private partnership in education are the major limiting factor. Lack of information is also a limiting factor because it is likely that private

sector would require a profile of possible recipient beneficiary schools and information on the capability of these schools to partner with them in terms of performance standards, teacher profile, training needs, school development plans and even existence of access roads, electricity and telephone lines.

Where schools are unable to provide such information, the private sector is likely to decline in assisting such schools. Another limiting factor is that schools allow facilities donated to deteriorate without being used. This could be because schools were unable to use the facilities because of lack of expertise site for infrastructure, electricity in case of computerization, or space for laboratories. The findings also identified some strategies for improving public-private partnership. These strategies ranged from information access and communication systems, appropriateness and adequacy of sensitization and mobilization, transparency and accountability issues, legal or regulatory frameworks, visions and objectives, management process, and decisional involvement of varied stakeholders. These strategies are similar to those found by Duncan et al (2004) in Australia. These strategies if implemented are likely to open up possibilities for broader collaborative efforts in public-private partnership in education.

As the UNDP (1996) prophesied, the multi-faceted scenario of public education funding shall be anchored on "tight linkages" and their new strategic alliances between schools and the corporate private sector with an ever-expanding role for the latter. It should be borne in mind that where private organizations are allowed to participate in the decision-making process, it impresses participatory ownership and value of the project. Caldwell (2004) found that the overall effect of using varied strategies is to build confidence in a range of institutions and organizations that their contributions are in the national interest and will lead to measurable outcomes, especially in challenging circumstances in public education.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. Government should establish clear policies, laws and regulations to guide public-private partnerships in secondary schools' infrastructural development.
2. The private sectors should limit the unnecessary procedures that characterize obtaining approvals for private sector partnership in schools.
3. School staff should relate well with their private organizations in their areas and provide them with relevant information on request.
4. Government should organize educational approaches such as seminars, workshops and enlightenment in mass media to sensitize the private sector organizations of their social responsibilities in public-private partnership in secondary education.
5. Government should make and enforce laws, regulations, sanctions and rewards to foster public-private partnership in secondary schools' infrastructural development.
6. The entire strategies identify in this study should be implemented by the relevant bodies to improve the limiting factors in public private partnership in managing secondary schools' infrastructural development.

8. CONCLUSION

Public-private partnership in the management of secondary education for infrastructural development requires collaboration between government and private business on account of a sense of corporate social responsibility and societal demands for strategic partnership in development efforts. This study has identified some limiting factors in public-private partnership in secondary education in North-West and South-West Region of Cameroon. These factors could be responsible for the low rate of private sector participation in the provision of infrastructure in the schools. Some strategies were identified, which when implemented, might mobilise and build confidence in a range of institutions and organizations that their infrastructural contributions are in the national interest and will lead to measurable outcomes, especially in period of dwindling educational funding.

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Citation: Dr. Joseph Besong Besong. "Public-Private Partnership in Managing Secondary Schools' Infrastructural Development in North West and South West Regions of Cameroon" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 8, no. 11, 2021, pp. 150-156. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0811018>.

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