

Speaking Points – PPPs and Women’s Empowerment

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Introduction

I work with the Network for Women’s Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT). NETRIGHT is a member of the Feminist Group of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE). CPDE is a global platform representing the voice of CSOs in the Global Partnership and works to promote development effectiveness through concrete CSO action, utilizing a mix of approaches in policy advocacy, engagement, outreach, and capacity development at global, regional, sub-regional and national levels. One of our key policy advocacy priorities is private sector engagement.

I represent the feminist group on the CPDE working group on private sector engagement.

Opening Statement

Over the past few years, donor countries are increasingly keen to target the private sector in the context of sustainable development. Both donor governments and international financial institutions are pushing public-private partnerships as a means of financing social services and infrastructure across the world. Even though, PPPs are seen as a financing mechanism for delivering the SDGs; yet, support for PPPs is in contrast with governments’ commitments to promote gender equality and the fulfilment of women’s rights under the Agenda 2030 and other international, regional and country-level frameworks on GEWE.

The impacts of private sector engagement in development to reduce poverty and inequality are yet to be proven.

Let’s keep in mind that the private sector will not automatically undertake activities that are aimed at achieving the SDGs, so it behoves on the development cooperation community to monitor and ensure that the private sector operates by the same development effectiveness principles that other development actors abide, including civil society and trade unions.

What has been the progress in these four areas? What is the current situation in the infrastructure sector?

- I. Enhance the role of women inside companies undertaking PPPs and in the PPPs themselves (More women should be in senior management)
- II. Help women led companies in the supply chain compete in tenders for projects
- III. Make a difference in the communities where they do business - help young women and train them to become the business leaders of the future
- IV. Help women deal with the special challenges they face in their daily lives in the design and operational stage of the delivery of projects

Current Situation

PPP initiatives raise concern for gender equity and women's human rights.

Looking at the four-point action plan agreed at the May, 2018 PPP forum to address the lack of women across the spectrum in employment in the infrastructure sector will contribute to empowering women in PPPs. However, the reality is:

- There are still only few women in senior management positions – when it comes to downsizing, it is women that suffer the most because they mostly occupy lower positions in the job markets – as a result more women are being pushed to the already choked informal economy which is unprotected and unregulated;
- Companies involved in PPPs are mostly big foreign companies (TNCs/MNCs etc); only few local companies are involved; there are no sex-disaggregated data to determine which of these companies are women-led businesses; local businesses are unable to compete with the foreign companies due to the numerous incentives that our governments give to the foreign companies in the disguise of creating enabling environment for investment at the expense of local businesses. How do we ensure that our governments support local businesses and in doing that institute special measures to promote women-led businesses to benefit from PPPs?
- It is also critical to point out that women's empowerment in PPPs, is not just about getting few women in management positions – this is tokenistic –

measures should move beyond getting women in senior positions. It is important, also, to look at how PPP-operated projects impact on women's livelihoods and communities in general – we cannot push for people-first PPPs without analyzing how PPP-projects impact on communities, indigenous people etc. For example, a road construction project in Ghana, re-directed a main road through a town – the road had boosted commercial activities in that town and the local people, in particular were getting income through the various small businesses that they were engaged in. Many women and the local people lost their source of livelihoods as a result of the redirection of the road – meanwhile, no provisions/alternative options were made for the town;

- to ensure Redirecting the road without making provisions to ensure;
- the whole PPPs discourse should be gender-balanced – need to put in extra efforts to get women involved in the discourse
- PPPs are more expensive and carry more risks than public provisions thus failing to increase resources available to governments. Instead they risk creating additional constraints that undermine the state's capacity to deliver gender-transformative public services and infrastructure, or promote decent work for women - the pursuit of profits limits the provision of decent work for women within PPP-operated projects;
- As a result of the discrimination women face, they generally have lower incomes and less access to resources than men and thus in more need of affordable public goods and services. Their socially defined roles as caregivers further increases their reliance on public service provision. Accessible and high quality healthcare and education – as well as improved access to water, electricity and safe transport services – are all crucial to advancing a gender transformative agenda. However; private sector financing through PPPs is far more interested in participating in big projects, with higher return rates - women's needs are ignored, and not met.

How can the private sector be incentivized to advance the involvement of women in PPP?

How can infrastructure companies and governments better work together to give women concrete chances to further advance their career in the infrastructure sector?

Companies and governments can better work together to promote women's empowerment in the infrastructure sector in various ways – these include”

- Allocate sufficient resources and support initiatives that will promote gender equality and women's rights and empowerment;
- Embark on gender transformative social services and infrastructure that meets women's practical and strategic needs and priorities;
- Support gender-sensitive MSMEs and local female entrepreneurs/women-led business for the purpose of promoting/supporting female-led local businesses to benefit from PPPs;
- Reserve quotas for women-led businesses in the supply chain to bid for tenders/procurements;
- Analyze gender aspects during the preparation and appraisal stage, e.g. by collecting sex-disaggregated data, including women and men at an early stage in the community-wide consultations and by incorporating gender aspects into the various analyses and assessments; and translate the results into the design of projects and programs, e.g. by designing gender-responsive policies, bidding documents and contracts;
- Utilize meaningful performance indicators to monitor and evaluate actions designed to narrow gender gaps;
- Private Sector entities should adhere to all development effectiveness principles and implement human rights and gender equality standards, and at the same time, promote and practice decent work; adopt transparency and accountability standards;
- Strengthen and fully implement PS regulatory mechanisms and binding regulations founded on global human rights, labour and environmental standards to PS actions, including PS actions done with governments;
- Strengthen labour protection, both formal and informal, expand the right to collective bargaining, trade union formation and collective action at country level to eliminate precarious work conditions and establish decent work, gender-sensitivity and equal wages;
- IFIs and their governments should stop the ideological driven promotion of PPPs and instead ensure that the financial mechanism chosen contribute to, rather than undermine gender equality and other social goals within Agenda 2030;

Guarantee that DFIs put in place all necessary measures to ensure that blended finance fulfils democratic ownership principles; the application of due diligence, human rights obligations, including obligations on rights of marginalised groups; target those who have been left behind and maximise development results; and strengthen transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

It is the responsibility of our governments to provide affordable, accessible and quality public services to their citizens especially poor and marginalized women and girls – these they can efficiently deliver, if effective systems are put in place to promote accountability, transparency and seriously tackle the issue of corruption.

The discourse on women’s empowerment and PPPs cannot take place in a vacuum as it concerns development patterns, macroeconomic policies, international cooperation, tax issues and public expenditure policies. It should be integrated within the discussion on illicit capital flows. Developing countries would gain much more by confronting the significant capital losses (through tax evasion, avoidance and dodging) they are subjected to, than by promoting PPPs that are much more a platform for private businesses than an opportunity for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights, women’s rights including the right to development.

Sources:

CPDE Manifesto, April 2019

CPDE Private Sector Engagement (PSE) Key Messages, 2019 (draft version)

Can public-private partnerships deliver gender equality – a publication by Eurodad, FEMNET and GDN, March 2019

Why public-private partnerships don’t work –a publication by Public Service International (2015)

Other relevant publications on PPPs + personal analysis

