

Mr. Chairman

Dear Colleagues

I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate to this important panel discussion on regional experiences in building back better through people first PPP.

The theme is of special importance for the countries of ESCWA region, where “building back better” is already on the agenda of many countries affected by conflicts that resulted with notable losses of the public assets of several sectors like health, education and of course transport. It is also of the same level of importance in countries that are facing challenges to achieve the objectives of equitable sustainable development due to chronic scarce of resources, financial and technical, and of course in all countries hit by the covid19 and its effects on economic slowdown and social disruptions, especially touching the most vulnerable groups of people around the world, in low and middle-income countries and in the high level-income countries as well.

In ESCWA, And I precise that I can talk only about PPP in the sector of transport, the issue was the subject of many kind of technical cooperation activities under the form of national and sub regional training workshops, namely:

- A Regional Training Workshop on PPP Projects for Trade and Transport. Held in Hammamet- Tunisia, 21-23 April 2015, with participants from the Ministries of Transport in four North African countries: Libya Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.
- An Experts Group Meetings on PPP Projects for Ports. Held in Amman, Jordan 23 -24 November 2019, with representatives of Ministries of transport and maritime authorities of five middle Eastern countries: Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon and Syria.
- In addition, PPP is embedded in many ESCWA technical papers and capacity building trainings related to transport planning in general and to financing the development and operation of transport infrastructure.

In this regard, it is worthy to recall the highly appreciated support we received from our colleagues of the UNECE in implementing PPP related activities, in addition to the valuable continual support of the Islamic Development Bank.

From our modest and humble experience, I dare to raise three main observations, even if they might be of intuitive nature for most of the experienced participants of this Forum:

First, there is a common belief that the responsibility of the public sector in a PPP operation ends with the signature of the contract and the launch of the PPP project.

This is of course not true. A PPP operation does not at all end with the launch of the PPP project. In fact, the real partnership only starts with the implementation of the project. The real partnership between the private and the public sectors continues over the whole phases of the project life cycle, with a lot of efforts and positive willingness and “partnership spirit” needed to overcome many obstacles that raise during the project life cycle.

Second, in some cases, PPP, and privatization in general, are considered as solutions to end corruption observed in the public sector procurement. This is not a valid consideration. PPP is not a remedy for corruption observed in the public sector. Successful PPP project needs a sound, healthy and accountable environment, without which the PPP model itself could easily lead to aggravate the losses of benefits for the public and the taxpayers. In some recent cases, initiatives presented under PPP models appeared to hide malign appetite of the “private sector” to bite off under- evaluated public assets through the disguised slogan of efficiency and effectiveness in developing and operating infrastructure projects related to public services.

If there are signs of corruption, the urgency would be to tackle this corruption at the source before starting a PPP operation.

Then, and this the third observation, the PPP operations need to be well prepared by an efficient and skillful team of public servants, which is unfortunately lacking in many of the Low- and Middle-Income Countries.

To dissipate such potential confusions, and to overcome these gaps, the support of the International Community is of crucial importance to the countries that need assistance when envisaging PPP solutions to develop and operate the infrastructure needed for their developmental objectives. It is advisable on this regard to provide a pole of high-level expertise and a mechanism to fund activities of the technical support required in replying to the needs of countries considering PPP solutions.

To conclude: We highly appreciate the ECE valuable resources and high-level expertise in this field, and we strongly support the idea of developing the annual PPP Forum as a worldwide platform servicing the exchange of best practices for a sound implementation of PPP projects in all the fields.

Thank you for your kind attention.