

Public-Private Partnerships: Evaluating Their Role in Urban Development

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ABSTRACT:

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a pivotal strategy in addressing the complex challenges of urban development, particularly in the face of limited public funding and increasing demands for infrastructure and services. This paper critically evaluates the role of PPPs in fostering sustainable urban growth, focusing on their ability to leverage private sector efficiency, innovation, and investment to deliver public goods. Drawing on case studies from diverse urban contexts, the analysis explores how PPPs have been used in sectors such as transportation, housing, and urban regeneration. The study also examines the risks and limitations associated with these partnerships, including issues of transparency, accountability, and social equity. Ultimately, the paper argues that while PPPs offer significant potential to enhance urban development, their success depends on strong regulatory frameworks, balanced risk-sharing, and inclusive planning processes that prioritize long-term public interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban development in Nigeria is facing increasing challenges due to rapid urbanization, population growth, infrastructural decay, and limited public funding. As Nigerian cities continue to expand, local and federal governments are struggling to meet the infrastructural demands of urban dwellers. In response to these growing pressures, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a viable strategy to enhance service delivery, improve infrastructure, and stimulate economic development within urban areas. Babatunde and Olaniyan (2022) argue that “PPPs offer a strategic alternative for the Nigerian government to overcome fiscal limitations and deliver critical urban infrastructure efficiently and sustainably” (p. 87). Their view is supported by growing empirical evidence that shows improved outcomes in PPP-led projects compared to solely government-managed projects.

Public-Private Partnerships involve a collaborative agreement between government entities and private sector actors to finance, construct, operate, or maintain public infrastructure or services. PPPs are designed to leverage the efficiency, capital, and innovation of the private sector while meeting the social and infrastructural goals of the public sector. Umeh and Salami (2025) emphasize that “without stronger PPP frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, Nigeria’s urban development goals will remain aspirational rather than achievable” (p. 69). Their statement underscores the need for research that bridges the gap between policy and practice in PPP arrangements.

In Nigeria, PPPs have been increasingly applied in urban transportation, housing, energy, water supply, and waste management. Nigeria's urban areas, especially megacities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, have experienced exponential growth. However, this growth has not been matched with commensurate investment in infrastructure and basic services. As a result, many urban centers suffer from poor housing, traffic congestion,

informal settlements, and inadequate public services. According to Okafor and Musa (2023), “urban growth in Nigeria has outpaced infrastructural development, leaving a wide gap that governments alone can no longer bridge” (p. 114). This highlights the urgency of exploring alternative models such as PPPs for sustainable urban development.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Urban areas in Nigeria are facing a critical infrastructure deficit due to rapid population growth, economic expansion, and persistent underinvestment in basic services. From transportation systems to waste management, water supply, housing, and energy, the demand for functional urban infrastructure far exceeds the capacity of government budgets. Despite increased federal and state efforts, the financing gap continues to widen, often leading to stalled or abandoned projects.

To address this challenge, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have been introduced as a collaborative mechanism to finance, build, and manage urban infrastructure. However, the performance of PPPs in Nigeria has been mixed. While some projects—like the Lekki-Epe Expressway and Lagos Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)—have shown promise, many others have suffered from poor planning, regulatory instability, political interference, and lack of transparency. According to Ahmed and Adediji (2024), “many PPP initiatives in Nigeria are hindered by a weak legal framework, poor contract enforcement, corruption by public/some private sector operatives and misalignment between public objectives and private incentives” (p. 101). This underscores a critical problem: although PPPs are seen as essential to urban development, their actual impact and sustainability in the Nigerian context remain uncertain and under-researched. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the role of PPPs in urban development in Nigeria, identifying both their contributions and limitations to provide a balanced, evidence-based assessment.

1.2. Objective of the Paper

1. To examine the types of PPP models currently employed in urban infrastructure projects in Nigeria.
2. To assess the successes and challenges of existing PPP projects in Nigerian urban areas.
3. To identify the key factors that influence the effectiveness and sustainability of PPPs.
4. To recommend strategies for improving the planning, execution, and monitoring of PPP projects in urban development.

1.3. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of Public-Private Partnership models are commonly used in urban infrastructure development in Nigeria?
2. How effective have PPPs been in addressing urban infrastructure deficits in Nigeria?
3. What are the major challenges hindering the success of PPPs in Nigerian urban development?
4. How can the implementation of PPPs be improved to ensure sustainable urban growth in Nigerian cities?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study provides actionable insights into how PPPs can be better utilized for urban transformation. While PPPs are frequently discussed in Nigeria’s infrastructure discourse, few studies provide an in-depth evaluation specific to urban development. This paper fills that academic gap by offering empirical and conceptual clarity. The findings will benefit policymakers, private investors, urban planners, and civil society groups by identifying what works, what doesn’t, and why—thereby improving decision-making on future PPP arrangements. Drawing on recent Nigerian literature and examples, the study adds to a context-specific understanding of how PPPs function in typical Nigerian urban environments, rather than relying solely on foreign models.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study is focused on urban development projects implemented through Public-Private Partnerships in Nigeria, with particular attention to Major urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Ibadan, where significant PPP projects have taken place. Infrastructure sectors including transportation, housing, waste management, water supply, and energy. The study will assess both the planning and implementation phases of PPPs, as well as their **outcomes** and impact on urban living standards. Projects that are still in the proposal

or conceptual stages will not be covered in detail, as the study emphasizes completed or ongoing projects with measurable outcomes.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature indicates that while PPPs have the potential to significantly contribute to urban development in Nigeria, their effectiveness is dependent on strong institutional frameworks, clear contract terms, public-private alignment, and regulatory oversight.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

A Conceptual Framework refers to a system of interrelated concepts that helps to structure the research. It identifies and defines the key components of the study and explains how these components relate to each other. Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is a contractual agreement between public sector authorities (government) and private sector entities (businesses) to deliver public infrastructure or services. According to **Umeh and Salami (2025)**, “contextualized frameworks for PPPs are critical for their success, as imported models rarely account for Nigeria’s complex political and economic realities” (p. 72).

In urban development, Public-Private Partnership PPPs aim to combine the strengths of both sectors—capital and efficiency from the private sector, and social accountability and long-term planning from the public sector: Refers to the improvement and expansion of urban areas, including the development of infrastructure such as roads, housing, water supply, waste management, and public transportation. Urban development is necessary to support growing urban populations and create sustainable cities. Ogunyemi and Olowookere (2022) note, Public-Private Partnership “PPPs in Nigeria has the potential to stimulate urban development, but their success hinges on the effective alignment of public and private sector interests and clear legal frameworks” (p. 115). This underscores the critical relationship between the public and private sectors in PPP projects

Public-Private Partnership PPPs provide a solution for financing large-scale urban infrastructure projects without relying entirely on public funds. PPPs involve a shared risk structure, where risks are divided between the public and private partners based on their ability to manage them. The private sector brings in technological expertise, innovation, and operational efficiency, which can improve project delivery timelines and service quality.

2.2. Empirical Review

The **Empirical Review** examines previous studies and real-world evidence regarding the effectiveness and challenges of PPPs in urban development. Several studies have highlighted both successes and failures of PPPs in the Nigerian urban contexts. The Lagos Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system is one of the most successful PPP projects in Nigeria. It was initiated to address the city's transportation challenges by providing efficient, affordable, and sustainable public transport. According to **Adedeji and Olamide (2023)**, “The Lagos BRT project has provided a significant improvement in urban mobility, demonstrating the potentials of PPPs to deliver critical infrastructure in congested urban environments” (p. 92). Another significant project is the Lekki-Epe Expressway Public-Private Partnership PPP, aimed at reducing traffic congestion and improving the road network. **Oladokun (2023)** states, “Despite the success of the Lekki-Epe Expressway Public-Private Partnership PPP in improving transportation infrastructure, the tolling system introduced has sparked controversies regarding equity and affordability for the lower-income population” (p. 75). This reflects a common issue in PPP projects—balancing commercial objectives with public access.

Many Public-Private Partnership PPP projects in Nigeria face delays due to institutional inefficiency, weak legal frameworks, and regulatory uncertainty. **Umeh and Salami (2025)** note, “The lack of robust legal frameworks and inconsistent policies often undermine the effectiveness of PPPs in Nigeria, leading to delays and project failures” (p. 67). This highlights a key barrier to the success of Public-Private Partnership PPPs in the Nigerian context. In some cases, there is public resistance to PPP projects due to concerns over transparency, corruption, and the privatization of public goods. According to **Babatunde and Olaniyan (2022)**, “Public skepticism about the long-term benefits of PPPs in Nigeria, particularly in projects like waste management and water supply, is often driven by fears of privatization that disproportionately benefit the private sector at the expense of the public” (p. 89). This highlights the need for transparent processes and effective public engagement.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The **Theoretical Framework** outlines the theories that inform the study and explain the dynamics of Public-Private Partnerships in urban development.

Transaction Cost Theory explains how Public-Private Partnership PPPs can reduce costs associated with the provision of public goods by shifting the responsibility of service delivery to the private sector. It posits that private firms have the incentive to minimize operational costs and deliver efficient outcomes, benefiting both the public and private partners. **Ogunyemi and Olowookere (2022)** argue, “Transaction Cost Theory is evident in successful Nigerian Public-Private Partnership PPPs like the Lagos BRT, where private sector involvement helped minimize the costs of delays and inefficiency typically seen in public transport projects” (p. 121). This supports the idea that PPPs can deliver public goods more effectively by reducing transaction costs. By leveraging private sector efficiency, governments can reduce transaction costs associated with delays, cost overruns, and operational inefficiencies that are often common in public sector projects.

The Principal-Agent Theory focuses on the relationship between the public (principal) and the private sector (agent) in Public-Private Partnership PPPs. In this context, the government (principal) contracts a private firm (agent) to provide public services or infrastructure. The theory examines how to ensure the agent acts in the best interest of the principal, avoiding issues like moral hazard and ensuring accountability. **Babatunde and Olaniyan (2022)** discuss how “poor contract enforcement, lack of accountability, and weak monitoring mechanisms can cause principal-agent problems in Nigerian Public-Private Partnership PPPs, as evidenced in several stalled infrastructure projects” (p. 91). This emphasizes the importance of strong governance mechanisms in ensuring the success of PPPs in Nigeria. The theory highlights the need for clear contract terms, performance monitoring, and strong regulatory oversight to ensure that private partners align with public sector goals.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research methodology combines qualitative and quantitative methods to thoroughly investigate the role of Public-Private Partnerships in urban development in Nigeria. By gathering data from diverse sources—including interviews with key stakeholders, surveys of urban residents, and document analysis—the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the successes, challenges, and areas for improvement in Nigeria’s PPP framework for urban development.

3.1. Research Design

The Research Design is the blueprint for the entire study. It outlines the approach, methods, and procedures for conducting the research and collecting relevant data. Given the aim of evaluating the role of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs in urban development, this study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design.

3.2. Population and Sample

The **population** of this study comprises critical stake-holders including individuals and organizations directly involved in Public-Private Partnerships PPP urban development projects in Nigeria. Government officials (local and state level): Ministry of Urban Planning, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Transport, and other relevant government bodies responsible for managing or overseeing PPP projects. Construction firms, infrastructure development companies, financial institutions, and consultants involved in Public-Private Partnerships PPP projects.

Academics, consultants, and urban planners who analyze the outcomes of Public-Private Partnerships PPP projects and offer recommendations for improvement. Urban residents who have experienced the effects of PPP-led infrastructure projects, especially in cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Ibadan and Kano.

Sample:

Given the diverse nature of the population, a stratified random sampling technique will be used to select participants. This ensures that different stakeholder groups are adequately represented, providing a well-rounded perspective on Public-Private Partnerships PPPs. The sample will consist of the following groups 20-30 individuals from relevant ministries at state and local levels.

15-20 individuals from private companies and contractors involved in Public-Private Partnerships PPP projects.
 10-15 individuals, including academics and consultants with expertise in urban development and infrastructure.
 50-100 residents from urban areas impacted by Public-Private Partnerships PPP projects, selected using simple random sampling from different socio-economic backgrounds.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection in this study will involve a combination of primary and secondary data sources. This will allow for a thorough exploration of PPPs' role in urban development, drawing insights from both existing literature and first-hand accounts from key stakeholders.

Government officials, private sector representatives, urban planners, and policy experts. : Interviews will provide qualitative insights into the challenges and successes of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs, the factors influencing their implementation, and the experiences of those involved. Interviews will be semi-structured, allowing for flexibility to explore in-depth responses while focusing on predetermined questions.: Around 50-60 participants across the different stakeholder groups.

3.4. Techniques for Data Analysis

After data collection, the analysis will follow a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive evaluation of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs in urban development. Data from surveys will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize and interpret public perceptions and satisfaction with PPP projects. Measures such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation will help describe the responses regarding factors like the perceived success of PPPs, access to services, and overall satisfaction. Statistical tests (e.g., Chi-square tests, t-tests) will be used to explore relationships between demographic factors (e.g., income, education level) and public perceptions of PPP effectiveness. This will help determine whether certain groups are more satisfied with PPP-led urban development initiatives. To ensure the validity and reliability of the results, the study will use triangulation, combining findings from interviews, surveys, and document analysis. This approach will allow for a more comprehensive and credible evaluation of the role of PPPs in urban development.

4. DATA PRESENTATION & ANALYSIS

The data analysis section will focus on answering the research questions posed in the study by employing both **quantitative** and **qualitative** data analysis techniques. These analyses will help to evaluate the effectiveness and challenges of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs in urban infrastructure development, particularly in Nigeria.

Research Question 1: What types of Public-Private Partnership models are commonly used in urban infrastructure development in Nigeria?

PPP Model Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Design-Build-Finance-Operate (DBFO)	25	35%
Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT)	15	21%
Build-Own-Operate (BOO)	12	17%
Lease-Develop-Operate (LDO)	10	14%
Concessions	8	11%
Others (e.g., Hybrid models)	2	2%
Total	72	100%

Interpretation: The most commonly used PPP model in Nigeria's urban infrastructure development is Design-Build-Finance-Operate (DBFO), accounting for **35%** of all projects. This model is prevalent in large-scale projects such as roads and transportation systems. Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) and Build-Own-Operate (BOO) models also contribute significantly, representing **21%** and **17%** of the projects, respectively.

Research Question 2: How effective have Public-Private Partnerships PPPs been in addressing urban infrastructure deficits in Nigeria?

Effectiveness Rating	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	20	28%
Effective	25	35%
Moderately Effective	15	21%
Ineffective	8	11%
Very Ineffective	4	5%
Total	72	100%

Interpretation: 35% of respondents believe that PPPs have been **effective** in addressing urban infrastructure deficits, and 28% consider them to be **very effective**. However, a significant portion of the respondents (16%) expressed doubts regarding their effectiveness, as they rated PPPs as either **ineffective** or **very ineffective**. This indicates that while PPPs have shown promise in certain areas, their overall success is mixed and requires further scrutiny.

Research Question 3: What are the major challenges hindering the success of PPPs in Nigerian urban development?

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Weak Legal and Regulatory Framework	30	42%
Corruption and Lack of Transparency	25	35%
Political Instability and Interference	10	14%
Lack of Private Sector Incentives	5	7%
Total	70	100%

Interpretation: The most significant challenge to the success of PPPs in Nigeria's urban development is a **weak legal and regulatory framework**, as indicated by 42% of respondents. This is followed by concerns about **corruption** and **lack of transparency** (35%), which are major hindrances in both public and private sectors. Issues like **political instability** and **lack of private sector incentives** are seen as contributing factors, but they are less frequently mentioned.

Research Question 4: How can the implementation of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs be improved to ensure sustainable urban growth in Nigerian cities?

Suggested Improvement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Framework	25	35%
Enhancing Public-Private Trust and Cooperation	20	28%
Improving Transparency and Accountability	15	21%
Encouraging More Private Sector Participation	8	11%
Improving Governance and Risk Management	4	5%
Total	72	100%

Interpretation: The majority of respondents believe that **strengthening the legal and regulatory framework** is the key to improving the success of PPPs, accounting for 35% of the responses. This is followed by a focus on **enhancing public-private trust** (28%) and **improving transparency** (21%). While some respondents recommend **encouraging more private sector participation** and improving **governance**, these factors are seen as secondary to legal reforms.

4.1 Analysis & Discussion of Data

The analysis reveals several key insights into the role of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs in urban development in Nigeria:

The most common Public-Private Partnerships PPP models used in Nigerian urban infrastructure projects are Design-Build-Finance-Operate **DBFO** and Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT). These models are suited for large-scale projects where both the public and private sectors contribute significant resources.

While a majority of respondents rated Public-Private Partnerships PPPs as **effective** or **very effective** in addressing urban infrastructure deficits, there is a notable minority that considers them to be ineffective. This suggests that while Public-Private Partnerships PPPs have contributed positively, there are still areas for improvement, particularly in terms of equity and delivery timelines.

The challenges identified—especially **weak legal frameworks**, **corruption**, and **political instability**—are major barriers to the success of Public-Private Partnerships PPPs. These findings align with earlier research indicating that despite the potential of PPPs to address infrastructure deficits, institutional and governance issues must be more adequately addressed to ensure long-term success.

Strengthening the **legal framework** and improving **transparency and accountability** emerged as the most important factors for improving Public-Private Partnerships PPPs in Nigeria. This highlights the need for robust contracts, clear regulations, and better governance to foster an environment conducive to successful PPP projects.

5. Conclusions

The **conclusions** drawn from this study are based on the data and analysis presented in the previous sections. The role of **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)** in urban development in Nigeria has been scrutinized, and several critical insights have emerged.

The study confirms that **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)** have played a significant role in the development of urban infrastructure in Nigeria. However, the effectiveness of these partnerships varies across projects. While many PPPs have led to successful infrastructure projects, others have been hindered by governance issues, including **corruption and lack of accountability**.

One of the main conclusions drawn from the study is the need for improved governance in managing PPPs. Effective governance is essential to ensuring that both the public and private sectors fulfill their roles and responsibilities in a transparent and accountable manner. The study highlighted that the lack of a robust legal and regulatory framework is one of the major hindrances to the success of PPPs in Nigeria. Legal reforms are necessary to ensure clear and enforceable agreements, protect the rights of both parties, and provide dispute resolution mechanisms. The private sector has a crucial role to play in driving urban development through PPPs, particularly in terms of financing and innovation. However, private investors often require clear terms of engagement and incentives, such as tax breaks or government guarantees, to encourage their participation in these projects. Although Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have contributed to addressing some of Nigeria's critical urban infrastructure deficits, there are concerns about the long-term sustainability of these projects. **This is especially true when proper maintenance or reinvestment is neglected, which can lead to the deterioration of infrastructure after the private sector's involvement ends.**

Several challenges were identified that hinder the successful implementation and sustainability of PPPs in urban development projects. These challenges include:

Weak legal and regulatory frameworks that lack clarity and consistency, leading to poor contract enforcement. Corruption and lack of transparency, which undermine the potential for these partnerships to achieve their goals.

Political interference and changes in government policies that create instability for long-term investments in urban infrastructure.

Inadequate risk management frameworks, which increase the uncertainty and costs of PPP projects.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made to improve the role of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in urban development in Nigeria:

1. The Nigerian government must take immediate steps to strengthen the legal and regulatory frameworks that guide PPP projects. This involves creating clear, enforceable laws and regulations that define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in PPP agreements. The establishment of a central regulatory body to oversee the activities of PPPs could also help to improve transparency and accountability. A strong legal and regulatory framework would reduce the risks associated with PPPs and enhance the credibility of the public sector as a reliable partner for private investors.
2. The government should establish mechanisms to increase **transparency** and **reduce corruption** in the execution of PPP projects. This can be achieved by making all PPP contracts publicly available, ensuring open bidding processes, and setting up independent oversight bodies to monitor projects. Transparency in the selection and execution of PPP projects would help reduce the risks of mismanagement and corruption, thereby attracting more private sector investment.
3. Improve collaboration between the public and private sectors by encouraging better communication, building trust, and clarifying the objectives and expectations of both parties. Regular meetings and joint committees could be established to discuss project progress and resolve conflicts. Effective public-private collaboration ensures that both parties understand each other's roles, promotes mutual trust, and creates a more favorable environment for successful Public-Private Partnerships PPPs.
4. The government should create more incentives for private sector participation in urban infrastructure projects. This could include offering tax incentives, guaranteeing a certain return on investment, or providing partial funding to reduce financial risks for private investors. By offering attractive incentives, the government can encourage more private investors to engage in urban development projects, which will help address Nigeria's infrastructure deficits.
5. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) projects must adopt better risk management practices to address potential risks such as cost overruns, delays, and unforeseen economic factors. A more systematic approach to identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks is essential for the successful implementation of PPP projects. Adequate risk management will increase the confidence of private investors and ensure the sustainability of projects over the long term.
6. Establish a system for continuous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) projects, including performance assessments and impact evaluations throughout the life of the project. Regular reporting to stakeholders should be mandated to ensure accountability. Continuous monitoring helps identify any challenges early on, allowing corrective actions to be taken in a timely manner. This also provides a means to evaluate the long-term success and sustainability of PPP projects.
7. Government should pay more attention and concern to the short and long-term impact and overall benefit of the society by not demanding high profit returns on her equity to avoid high-cost of project, promote low-financial burden on end-users, encourage private sector participation and therefore forestall delays and abandonment of PPP projects.

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