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Experts' Insights on the Sustainability of Public-Private Partnerships Development in the Philippines

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Abstract— *Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) became critical as the Philippines sought to improve infrastructure while minimizing debt. The researchers reviewed several publications and interviewed experts to understand how PPPs were used, particularly in transportation and utilities. The research examined the regulations that govern PPPs to see what contributed to their success or issues, such as how risks were shared between the government and private companies. The study took a qualitative approach, analyzing expert interviews and specific PPP case studies to determine their actual impact. The findings showed that, while PPPs had the potential to significantly aid development, they faced challenges such as achieving long-term success and maintaining transparency. The research concluded that improved policies were required to better manage PPPs, with an emphasis on fair risk distribution and clear communication. With stronger governance and a clearer legal structure, PPPs could help the Philippines responsibly improve its infrastructure. Finally, the research concluded that well-managed PPPs could significantly help the Philippines grow its economy and control public debt. It is suggested that the government reform the legal and operational aspects of these partnerships to make PPPs more beneficial and aligned with the country's economic goals. Such changes could make PPPs more useful in guiding the Philippines to a stable and prosperous future.*

Keywords—*Public-Private Partnership, Economic Infrastructure, Development.*

I. Introduction

Public-private partnerships, or PPs, are becoming increasingly common as a means of financing infrastructure development around the world (World Bank, 2019). In PPPs, the public and private sectors work together to build and maintain infrastructure, with the private sector contributing funding and technical expertise and the public sector assuring a consistent regulatory environment. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, airports, and hospitals have all profited from PPP finance. PPPs also allow the government to transfer risk to the private sector while gaining access to private-sector funding and improved project management.

Despite the growing popularity of applying the Public-Private Partnerships idea around the world, there are still many misunderstandings about what partnerships are, what people can learn from the past with partnerships, and what is innovative about the partnership structures that are currently popular (Hodge and Greve, 2007). This research investigates public-private partnership, the long-term infrastructure contract, and argues that reviews have yielded mixed results regarding their efficacy. Despite their popularity among governments, future evaluations should be reinforced and done independent of those who support the policy being evaluated.

The Philippine government's growth plan relies heavily on the ongoing effort to address infrastructure disparities. Different governments sought solutions to deal with the need to build new projects in areas such as electricity, transportation, and roads as a result of aging construction projects, an increasing population, and a desire to be more successful in the global marketplace. However, a limited budgetary space constrains the country's infrastructure development. In this context, the government views the private sector as a reliable partner in infrastructure development. Public-private partnerships have emerged in the Philippines over the years, with each governing body choosing a unique strategy to incorporating private enterprise into its economic growth objectives. Its legislative framework includes many regulations and rules that monitor the emergence of PPPs and how they relate to the current economic and political context.

PPPs provide the public sector with an efficient and effective risk-management solution. According to research conducted by Gerrard (2001), in its most basic definition, a public-private partnership is a formal agreement between the state and any participating private firm to fund, build, carry out, and maintain infrastructure facilities and services that were previously given by the government. PPPs benefit the public sector in both monetary and non-monetary ways by splitting project risks between the government and private sectors and freeing up public funds for other uses. To ensure the project's long-term viability, both parties must agree on the public sector's long-term service requirements. The Philippines features a variety of public-private partnerships, including the UP-PGH Investors' Conference and several concession agreements (Republic of the Philippines PPP Center, 2023).

The Public-Private Partnership Program of 2010 and the Build-Operate-Transfer Law of 1990 are just two of the numerous PPP projects implemented in the Philippines in recent years (Sicat, 2019). Despite these measures, concerns about the long-term viability of PPPs in the country remain. For example, issues with PPP project transparency and accountability may raise public suspicion and prevent their wider acceptance (Domingo & Abordo, 2017). The Philippine government's commitment to PPPs and ability to administer them properly are also important factors in determining their long-term viability (Sarmiento, 2018).

Clearly, it is undisputed that foreign investment has been critical to the industrialization of countries around the world, particularly in the Philippines, which relies heavily on trade and foreign direct investment to promote economic integration and, ultimately, determine the country's economic health. Do investors investing in this country constitute an opportunity? Is there an economic advantage? Are there no hazards, or is PPP a more superior alternative for economic development in the Philippines? New urbanization is an important strategy for long-term development in the country since it promotes economic growth and raises people's living standards. The financing platform approach has had a substantial impact on new urbanization, but it has also resulted in difficulties such as the government's reliance on land financing and a disregard for debt risk. The government began actively attempting to improve public-private partnerships (PPP) after social capital was used to invest in and run urban infrastructure through franchising and other methods in 1986. It was also carried out immediately following the Marcos Administration's martial law regime, broadening the financing channels and operational mode of new urbanization (PPP Center, 2020).

Considering the Philippines' aim to preserve PPPs, the researchers believe that further research is needed to determine how these exogenous variables affect the Philippine economy's ability to compete and function successfully, as well as its infrastructure, in the coming years. The research on the long-term sustainability of PPPs in the Philippines can create significant contribution such as assisting developing nations like the Philippines in achieving sustainable economic growth through public-private partnerships. This research can also help policymakers and stakeholders understand the benefits and downsides of public-private partnerships in the country, improving their efficiency and longevity.

The argument over whether international investors or local public-private partnerships should take precedence in the Philippines' economic and infrastructure development is ongoing. While public-private partnerships have been used in the Philippines to help reduce foreign debt and progress the country's economic infrastructure, economists in the country have limited knowledge of the PPPs' long-term viability. This research investigates the following questions:

1. What are the insights of economic experts with PPPs in terms of:
    1.1. Long-Term Sustainability of PPs
    1.2. Benefit of PPs for Debt Reduction on Economic Infrastructure Development
2. How do economic experts evaluate and interpret the elements influencing the long-term sustainability of PPs for debt reduction in the context of economic infrastructure development in the Philippines?
3. What are the critical considerations for ensuring the long-term sustainability of PPPs for debt reduction and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines, as perceived by economic experts?
4. How do economic experts envision the future trajectory of PPs in the Philippines for debt reduction in economic infrastructure projects?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative case study design. According to Tenny S. et al. (2022), qualitative research as a study examines and provides more detailed insights on real-world circumstances. Meanwhile, a case study technique provides researchers with an example of how to investigate a case. Furthermore, Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that case studies examine a real-world problem in a specific context using a variety of data sources. This research technique explains the potential of public-private partnerships in the Philippines and how they can help the country pay down its significant national debt.

The first step in conducting this research was to identify participants with firsthand expertise and experience with PPPs, such as government officials, business representatives, and economists. In the following phase, these participants were interviewed in depth utilizing a semi-structured interview guide to discover more about their perspectives on PPPs, personal interactions with them, and how they see the future possibilities of PPPs in the Philippines. The third phase entails conducting document analysis, which involves going through key policy documents, reports, and other secondary sources to provide context and background data on PPP operations in the field of research in order to identify patterns, themes, and insights into the potential for long-term success of PPPs in debt reduction and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines. The data from interviews and document analysis was transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic methods.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The researchers believe that selecting the right population and sampling technique is crucial. The intended target population for this research was public or private economic experts with knowledge and skill in PPPs, foreign debt reduction, and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines. Economists and policy analysts, government officials and other experts from relevant fields were included.

The researchers used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specified characteristics such as their knowledge, skill, or competence in a particular subject (Palinkas et al., 2015). Economists in public-private partnerships, foreign debt reduction, and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines was chosen through purposive sampling. This technique guarantees that participants have the necessary expertise and experience to provide significant insights and perspectives on the research topic, as needed by the researchers.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers believe that selecting the right population and sampling technique is crucial. The population for this research was public or private economic specialists with knowledge and skill in PPPs, foreign debt reduction, and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines. Economists and policy analysts, government officials and other experts from relevant fields were included.

The research began with an extensive literature evaluation, which focused on the Philippines, public-private partnerships aim to reduce debt and improve economic infrastructure. The examination builds a strong basis and identifies topics for additional exploration. Interviews with economic experts on the aforementioned topics were done in person, via phone, video chat, or in writing. These interviews explore a variety of topics, including the benefits and downsides of public-private partnerships, their role in reducing debt, and their impact on economic development in the Philippines.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data that was acquired to test the assumptions and the participants' responses to the research questions is critical to completing this research. The inquiry includes a variety of data, such as the participants' demographic profile and information on their ideas and opinions on the subject. Following completion of collecting data from the participants, the researchers continued to investigate their findings by classifying the method, themes, and codes to address issues raised by the data collected from the interview; evaluating responses from participants to determine whether or not the data presented was sufficient; and finally, drawing conclusions based on the results of data analysis.

III. Results and Discussion

Experts' Insights with PPPs in terms of Long-Term Sustainability and Benefits of PPPs for Debt Reduction

Economic experts' insights on PPPs cover a wide range of topics. To begin, in terms of involvement and collaboration, experts emphasize the need of bringing together varied stakeholders to ensure the success of PPP projects. This integration not only promotes collaboration, but it also adds to long-term partnerships, as experts in the field have noted.

Economic experts must assess the long-term viability of public-private partnerships. Sustainability, as a major theme, is related to both the partnerships' lifetime and their impact on economic infrastructure development. Mendoza and Aguirre (2019) contend that the effectiveness of PPPs is dependent on their ability to last over time and provide ongoing benefits to the community. This viewpoint is consistent with the sustainability theme discussed in relation to involvement and cooperation, highlighting the importance of long-term partnerships that go beyond short-term rewards.

Furthermore, economic experts emphasize the financial component of PPPs, focusing on the benefits these partnerships provide for debt reduction in economic infrastructure development. Collaborative funding approaches, comprising both public and private enterprises, are viewed as beneficial in reducing the strain on public finances. This viewpoint is consistent with the financial theme, emphasizing the significance of PPPs in optimizing resource allocation and lowering pressure on government finances.

Meanwhile, Pastoral (2018) revealed that ongoing collaboration and stakeholder integration are critical for the long-term success of public-private partnerships. Furthermore, as stated by Bueno (2020), the financial benefits of PPPs in terms of debt reduction and efficient infrastructure development lend credibility to the perspectives presented by economic experts on PPP-related themes such as involvement, collaboration, sustainability, and finance.

According to the participants, PPPs are collaborative contractual arrangements between the government and the private sector. In these collaborations, the government seeks support from private entities to implement specialized initiatives or meet targets by combining the talents and resources of both sectors. The projects benefit the private sector economically, resulting in a win-win situation. Participants stressed the importance of PPPs in improving service delivery and infrastructure development, particularly when the government lacks the financial resources, managerial techniques, know-how, or technology for certain projects. PPPs allow for effective, rapid, and tested solutions, avoiding the waste of government money on constant conceptualization. Ultimately, PPPs reflect a partnership approach in which the public and private sectors work together, allowing the private sector to recover its investments at a decent rate of return while supporting economic progress.

The participants in the discussion about the viability of PPPs in the Philippines provided a variety of viewpoints. One of the participants emphasized the necessity of technical and financial sustainability with the statement that these issues should be included in the private sector's feasibility assessment. Another participant, concentrated on the water sector, expressed confidence in the effectiveness of PPPs in Metro Manila while acknowledging that not all projects are equally successful, noting structural challenges and external influences. The hurdles to sustainability were addressed, including the impact of administrative changes and a general mistrust regarding project completion. Despite difficulties, some participants acknowledged PPPs' positive contributions to alleviating infrastructure gaps and reducing the burden on government resources. They emphasized the importance of private sector accountability, faster approval processes, and the complementary role of private capital in delivering large projects and decreasing the amount of government debt.

On the issues about the country's strategic focus, the participants express different viewpoints on the choice between PPPs and Foreign Contracted Agreements. While some participants enthusiastically support PPPs, citing advantages such as the use of Filipino tax money, financial and technical expertise from the private sector, and the possibility for job creation, others take a more nuanced perspective. Some emphasize the need for a case-by-case examination, taking elements such as transparency and stakeholder. Other participants advocate for public-private partnerships for significant projects to reduce the government's fiscal pressures.

To address the growth in foreign debt, participants in the discussion centered on the possibilities of PPPs as a method for alleviating economic strain. One participant addressed misconceptions regarding foreign loan interest rates, emphasizing the complexities of selecting finance sources. Others emphasized that public-private partnerships can identify more eligible entities to carry out projects, minimizing the need to borrow from other countries. They also mentioned benefits such as avoiding government debt, saving money, and allowing the private sector to profit from lower interest rates. The

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consensus was that PPPs, by leveraging local financial sources, might help ease a nation's economic strain created by foreign debts, promote sustainability, and lower government borrowing.

Improving the Long-Term Sustainability of PPs for Debt Reduction on Economic Infrastructure Development

The participants evaluate the long-term viability of PPPs for debt reduction in economic infrastructure development using a multidimensional analysis of essential components. First, they carefully examine the regulatory structure that governs PPPs, taking into account its coherence and adaptability to changing economic situations. This is consistent with the World Bank's 2017 research on PPPs in infrastructure, which emphasizes the significance of a favorable legal environment.

In addition, participants discuss the financial sustainability of proposed PPP projects, including revenue-sharing approaches, risk allocation measures, and the overall financial structure. The Asian Development Bank's insights into funding PPPs underline the need of risk mitigation in attracting private investment (ADB, 2020). By including such concerns, participants hope to ensure that PPPs are financially sustainable in the long term.

Additionally, assessing the social and environmental impact is an important part of the appraisal process. The participants cited the United Nations Development Programme's sustainable development principles and emphasized the importance of initiatives that are aligned with the country's sustainable development goals (UNDP, 2020). This approach assures that PPs contribute favorably to societal well-being and environmental protection, hence promoting long-term economic viability.

Under the overall issue of strategic review, participants examine the strategic alignment of PPPs with national development goals. They use the Philippine Development Plan and other government research that outline economic priorities to guarantee that PPP projects contribute to the country's overarching goals (National Economic and Development Authority (2017).

The participants use an extensive approach to evaluate and understand the factors that influence the long-term viability of PPPs for debt reduction in economic infrastructure development. This entails a detailed analysis of legal frameworks, financial feasibility, social and environmental implications, and strategic alignment with national aims, using credible sources such as World Bank, ADB, and UNDP publications, as well as national development plans.

The participants discussed how economists evaluate infrastructure investments. One participant noted the predominance of RA 9184 for short-term goods and services procurement, highlighting PPPs' flexibility for long-term infrastructure projects. Another participant expressed uncertainty about determining financial sustainability, emphasizing the significance of feasibility studies in both government and private-sector PPPs. The economists were seen to use a variety of techniques, focusing not only on commercial value but also on economic impact, weighing positives and drawbacks like environmental damage and displacement of people. Some participants expressed worry about the political impact on project planning in the Philippines.

The many ways to appraising long-term infrastructure projects versus short-term initiatives were examined, with a focus on issues such as complexity, social and economic implications, and risk management for long-term projects. The importance of contract management in PPPs to avoid unforeseen scenarios was emphasized. Furthermore, the discussion addressed the crowding-out effect, implying that PPPs could be critical for sustainability and long-term planning, preventing the depletion of private sector funds. Participants also emphasized the necessity of learning from history, reflecting on best practices, and incorporating the NEDA Manual and Cost-Benefit Ratio into the evaluation process.

Ensuring the Long-Term Sustainability of PPPs for Debt Reduction and Economic Infrastructure Development

Ensuring the long-term viability of PPPs for debt reduction and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines necessitates careful consideration of numerous crucial elements, as noted by the participants. For instance, promoting sustainable development in PPP projects entails linking infrastructure initiatives with the country's larger economic and environmental goals. The participants emphasize the necessity of incorporating sustainable practices throughout project design, construction, and operation to reduce environmental impact and increase social well-being (UNDP, 2021).

The participants emphasize the importance of honest and equitable relationships that protect both parties' interests. The Asian Development Bank's (2020) research emphasizes the significance of developing clear legal frameworks, effective risk-sharing mechanisms, and solid governance structures to improve the sustainability of these collaborations.

The participants also contend that successful collaboration necessitates the seamless integration of efforts from multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, commercial investors, and local communities. This synergy is crucial in addressing complicated challenges while increasing the efficiency of infrastructure construction projects. In a World Bank (2019) report, they emphasize the importance of a unified approach that harnesses the strengths of each stakeholder to achieve common development goals.

Finally, the participants also believe that the long-term viability of PPPs in the Philippines is dependent on the incorporation of sustainable development concepts, the formation of strong partnerships through transparent collaboration, and the achievement of synergy among various stakeholders. These considerations, endorsed by respected authorities such as the UNDP, ADB, and World Bank, provide a complete framework for directing the country's PPP implementation and success.

Several crucial points were highlighted throughout the discussion about sustainable development. PPPs' long-term success in terms of debt reduction and economic infrastructure development is dependent on several factors. These aspects include the importance of checks and balances in ensuring public benefits, compliance with environmental concerns through feasibility studies, consideration of raw material affordability, the role of PPP projects in increasing government revenue, efficient risk allocation, and a strong legal framework, transparency, stakeholder involvement, sustainable finance options, monitoring systems, and long-term fiscal planning. The discussions also emphasized the importance of a regulatory framework and third-party oversight in protecting the interests of both public and private entities involved in PPPs.

Legal constraints limiting foreign entities' involvement in the purchase and usage of land resources play a critical role in improving the long-term efficacy of PPPs. The restrictions help to reduce debt by prohibiting superfluous initiatives that could lead to debt if not completed. The participants emphasize the significance of these regulations in protecting national security, increasing transparency, and assuring fair decision-making. While some claim that long-term leases by foreign firms are practically equivalent to land ownership, others underline the importance of joint ventures between the public and private sectors in protecting national interests and encouraging small business participation. The restriction on foreign firms holding land is viewed as helpful for partnerships, fostering sustainability and fairness, and decreasing possibility problems. The legal provisions establish a framework for effective PPP contracts, promoting a balance between encouraging international investment and safeguarding the country's interests.

Future Trajectory of PPs in the Philippines

The participants observed a promising future for PPPs aiming at debt reduction in economic infrastructure projects. As the Philippines faces the challenges of maintaining economic growth and managing its debt burden, experts emphasize the growing relevance of collaboration and partnerships between the public and private sectors. This alignment of interests is regarded as critical for establishing long-term solutions that satisfy the nation's infrastructure demands while easing the financial burden on the government.

To assist, the National Economic and Development Authority released the "Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022". The plan emphasizes the need of PPPs in infrastructure development as a way to attract private investment, leverage resources, and improve project implementation efficiency. The paper also emphasizes the government's commitment to developing strong partnerships with the private sector in order to promote long-term and equitable growth.

The participants also believe that well-structured PPPs can help to create a more balanced and controllable budgetary framework. By integrating the private sector in financing and executing infrastructure projects, the load on government finances can be reduced, thus eliminating the need for considerable borrowing.

Additionally, participants emphasize the need of guaranteeing the partnership's long-term viability. Sustainable PPPs not only promote economic progress, but also address environmental and social concerns. Integrating sustainability into the core of these collaborations makes the initiatives more resilient and capable of long-term obstacles.

The participants anticipate a trajectory for PPPs in the Philippines based on stronger collaboration, strategic alliances, and a commitment to sustainability.

IV. Conclusion

The interview with economic experts on public-private partnerships in the Philippines provides a detailed and comprehensive examination of this collaborative strategy to economic infrastructure development. The experts emphasize the importance of integrating multiple stakeholders, maintaining transparency, and providing a balanced regulatory environment for the success of PPPs. Throughout the discussion, the critical issue of sustainability appears strongly, with experts emphasizing the importance of incorporating sustainable development concepts, strong teamwork, and stakeholder synergy for the long-term viability of PPPs.

PPPs are evaluated on a variety of dimensions, including project feasibility, financial viability, social and environmental effect, and strategic alignment with national development goals. The difficulties as well as the advantages are examined, with a special emphasis on the importance of long-term sustainability and the reduction of foreign debts through PPPs. Legal restrictions on foreign engagement in land resources are recognized as a factor contributing to the long-term effectiveness of public-private partnerships.

Looking into the future, economic experts are optimistic about the future of PPPs in the Philippines. They anticipate a trajectory characterized by increased collaboration, strategic alliances, and a dedication to sustainability. Less expensive end-user tariffs, cheaper private sector risk premiums, and positive economic growth over the next three decades are among the anticipated benefits. To ensure the long-term survival of public-private partnerships, experts offer solutions including government-appointed consultants, legislative strengthening, project selection based on PPP suitability, and reduced reliance on debt repayment. The economic experts also emphasize the necessity of creativity, strong rules, and government commitment to PPPs for long-term sustainability, debt reduction, and economic infrastructure development in the Philippines.

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