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# Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships in Nigeria: Roles of Government, NGOs, and Private Sector Actors

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**ABSTRACT**
Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have become essential tools for tackling infrastructure shortages and encouraging sustainable development in Nigeria. This study looked at how the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector contribute to PPP efforts, focusing on the opportunities, challenges, and organisational frameworks involved. Using a mixed-methods approach, researchers collected data from 239 individuals who completed questionnaires and participated in interviews. The results showed that the government offers legal rules, risk management, and oversight, but struggles with weak institutional capacity and inconsistent policies. NGOs play a key role by advocating for transparency and mobilising communities, though they are not fully included in formal PPP arrangements. The private sector is crucial, as it provides funding, technical expertise, and innovative solutions, but it also deals with issues such as unclear regulations and balancing profits with social responsibility. It concludes that improving institutional strength, increasing transparency, and promoting collaboration among all parties are vital for successful PPP projects. Recommendations include ensuring consistent policies, transparent procurement processes, and creating platforms for dialogue among different actors to enhance PPP implementation in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Public-Private Partnerships, Government, NGOs, Private Sector, Institutional Capacity, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have become a key strategy for tackling Nigeria's significant infrastructure and service delivery challenges. Due to ongoing budget limitations, a historically low level of infrastructure compared to GDP, and competing spending priorities, both federal and local governments are seeking different financing and service delivery methods that share risks, utilise private investment and expertise, and enhance performance (Magaji et al., 2018). As a result, Nigeria has established PPP frameworks through laws, regulatory agencies, and project plans to attract private funding and management skills in areas like transportation, energy, health, and social infrastructure (Almeile et al., 2022).

The government's role in PPPs includes two main parts: (1) setting up a supportive legal and institutional framework (which includes policy guidelines, standard contracts, approval processes, and a regulatory commission) and (2) ensuring public interest is protected through project planning, monitoring, and risk sharing (such as availability payments or guarantees). Although creating institutions like the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission has improved transparency and project management, there are still challenges in implementation. These include inconsistent project planning (Magaji, 2004), political interference, and skill gaps in public contracting teams (Magaji & Eke, 2015). These issues emphasise the need for ongoing reforms and professional development in PPP project creation (ICRC, 2021).

The private sector adds funding, technical expertise, creativity, and motivation for efficiency to public-private partnerships (PPPs). Recent studies demonstrate that private entities can quickly gather large amounts of resources, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when multiple sectors came together. They not only provide financial support but also offer management skills and networks that help improve how projects are carried out. However, private involvement is influenced by various factors like charitable goals, business interests, reputation concerns, and stable regulations. This means that their motivations can be both selfless and strategic. To ensure that private profits align with public benefits, it is essential to have clear rules, competitive bidding processes, and strong accountability measures (Okeke, 2022).

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other groups in civil society play a crucial yet often overlooked role in PPPs. NGOs frequently serve as middlemen by advocating for at-risk populations, overseeing social and environmental protections, helping engage communities, and sometimes directly delivering services when the market or government falls short. Research on responses to the pandemic and health system assessments in Nigeria indicates that partnerships involving NGOs have strengthened key areas of the health system, including fundraising, advocacy, technical assistance, and outreach to underserved communities. However, a lack of formal agreements for multi-sector collaboration has limited their ability to grow and sustain these efforts. This highlights the need for further research on how NGOs can be officially integrated into PPP governance structures to promote fairness and accountability (Onyedinma et al., 2023).

Recent studies and reviews highlight important success factors for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). These include the quality of preparation and procurement, transparent risk sharing, stakeholder involvement, and effective contract management. The literature suggests that Nigeria's PPP efforts will only succeed if these key technical aspects are paired with reforms that boost institutional capability, encourage civil society participation, and create a stable policy environment that draws in responsible private partners. This study looks at the unique and supportive roles of the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private entities in Nigeria's PPPs. Its goal is to identify governance strategies and practices that enhance public value while addressing financial and social risks (Vale de Paula, 2024).

**Conceptual clarifications**

**Public Private Partnership (PPP**). It is defined as: "A long-term agreement between a private company and a government organisation that involves providing a public asset or service. In this deal, the private company takes on significant risk and management duties, and its payment is based on how well it performs." It is also defined as: "Long-term agreements where the private sector supplies infrastructure and services that the government usually pays for directly, with some risk shared between both the public and private sectors." (as explained by European public-sector networks in their reviews of PPPs).

Again, it is defined as: "A partnership where government and private companies work together to plan, fund, carry out, and manage projects or services. They share risks, resources, and benefits — this approach is beneficial for filling financial gaps in developing countries." (from a literature review focused on projects).

**Government (role in PPPs):** it has numerous definitions which encompass: "The role of public authorities in public-private partnerships (PPPs) is to set up a supportive legal and regulatory framework, prepare and acquire projects, manage risks appropriately, and safeguard the public interest through oversight and contract management." (World Bank PPP guidance).

"The government acts as a facilitator and guarantor by providing clear policies, regulatory certainty, funding for gaps in project viability or guarantees when needed, and ensuring that projects are in line with national development goals." (benchmarks for PPP implementation).

"At the national level, specialised agencies, such as the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission in Nigeria, are responsible for standardising procedures, approving business cases, and managing a project pipeline to attract reliable private partners." (Nigeria-specific institutional analysis).

**Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO).** This is another concept which attracts many definitions. Some of the definitions are:

"A non-governmental organisation (NGO) is a non-profit group that works separately from the government. These organisations usually focus on humanitarian, development, or advocacy goals and often provide services or influence policies." (UNDP definition).

NGOs are groups that focus on specific missions, either advocating for causes or providing services in the voluntary sector. They can work at local, national, or international levels and take on various roles, such as delivering services directly to people or monitoring and ensuring accountability in policies." (Harvard Law School summary).

NGOs include many different types of organisations that operate independently from direct government control. They may receive funding from various sources, including governments, donors, and private entities, while also combining their operations with advocacy efforts." (practical/financial overview).

**Private Sector**: "The private sector includes businesses and individuals that are owned and run for profit, separate from government organisations." (Investopedia definition). The private sector is all economic activities carried out by individuals, groups, or organisations that are privately owned and managed with the primary aim of generating profit (Magaji, 2024). Unlike government institutions, which operate to provide public goods and services, the private sector is primarily driven by market forces, competition, and innovation (Ahmed et al., 2024). It includes small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), multinational corporations, financial institutions, and individual entrepreneurs (Magaji & Saleh, 2010). The sector plays a vital role in job creation, investment, technological advancement, and wealth generation, often complementing or partnering with the public sector through initiatives (Adekoya et al., 2025). By operating independently of direct government control, the private sector brings efficiency, expertise, and capital to economic development and service delivery (Bappayo & Magaji, 2006).

"Engagement with the private sector includes all types of for-profit businesses and is intentionally defined in a wide way in development practices to include both formal companies and informal participants, as well as partnerships based on the market." (development cooperation guidance).

"In public-private partnership situations, the private sector brings money, technical expertise, new ideas, and reasons to work efficiently; their involvement depends on expected profits, reputation issues, and clear rules".

**Empirical literatures**

In their study, Onyedinma, Okeke, and Onwujekwe (2023) used qualitative case analysis and document reviews to examine partnership activities. Their findings show that strong partnerships among government, NGOs, and private entities enhanced specific health system functions like advocacy, funding mobilisation, technical assistance, and last-mile delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the research effectively documents how various partners contributed practically and offers valuable policy insights for crisis responses, it has limited applicability beyond the health sector and focuses on short-term pandemic scenarios. More comparative and long-term evidence would be beneficial in evaluating the sustainability of gains made by NGOs and private organisations.

Ndukwe (2023) employed a mixed-methods approach by combining sector performance data with interviews from stakeholders. The results indicate that public-private partnership (PPP) arrangements in the electricity sector could improve service delivery but faced challenges due to poor project preparation, political interference, and a mismatch between private incentives and public goals. This work provides valuable insights into the specific issues in the power sector, which deals with unique regulatory and technical risks. However, the study could be improved by breaking down different types of PPP contracts

more clearly and measuring how specific contract terms affect outcomes. Additionally, its policy recommendations are broad instead of being actionable at the level of contract design.

Musawa (2023) surveyed with institutional managers and key informant interviews. He found that low awareness and limited capacity at tertiary institutions hindered the adoption of PPPs for campus infrastructure and service partnerships. Major obstacles included procurement capacity, legal knowledge, and trust issues. Critics argue that this research primarily identifies gaps in supply-side institutional capacity that the government must address; however, its sample was limited to only some tertiary institutions, so its findings may not be representative of all states or types of institutions. The study also does not test any interventions like capacity-building pilots.

Akinola (2024) conducted a literature review, examining case examples and policy recommendations. His research revealed that public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be improved for affordable housing when they include good project planning, support for viability gaps, and clear regulations. He stressed the importance of municipal capabilities and community involvement. However, while his policy synthesis is timely and relevant to the growing need for housing, it lacks empirical validation. Practical applications would benefit from pilot projects in Nigeria showcasing financial models that achieve affordability while also providing returns for investors.

Obasa & Oluyomi (2024) utilised policy analysis and reviewed project inventories. Their findings indicated that PPPs are pushed as a way to fund infrastructure related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Success relies on aligning with national SDG priorities and showing measurable social results. Although the connection to SDGs is conceptually strong, the project inventory offers a practical overview of engagement; yet, there is limited measurement of outcomes, with few PPP projects demonstrating effective social-impact monitoring to prove real gains towards SDGs.

Vale de Paula, Cunha Marques & Gonçalves (2024), in their study titled "Critical Success Factors for PPPs in Urban Regeneration (International Comparative Study)," identified five groups of critical success factors: external enabling environment, exogenous factors, preparation, procurement, and contract management. They highlighted that having supportive institutions and effective contract management is crucial. While their findings are not specific to Nigeria, these critical success factors align closely with common issues faced in Nigeria, such as regulatory gaps and weak procurement processes. The main limitation is that their focus is on urban regeneration; adapting these insights to other sectors like health or power needs careful consideration.

**Theoretical framework**

The research is primarily based on Institutional Theory, with support from Stakeholder Theory. This framework was chosen because it shows how formal rules, regulations, organisational standards, and pressures for legitimacy influence the behaviour of individuals and how different organisational setups (like PPP units, regulatory bodies, and contracting methods) are created or fail to thrive. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are highly influenced by institutions: their success relies on laws, agencies (such as Nigeria's ICRC), procurement standards, and professional practices that provide clear incentives for private investors and hold public authorities accountable. Therefore, Institutional Theory helps clarify (a) why similar governance models for PPPs spread in different situations (isomorphism), (b) how gaps in institutions or weak enforcement can hurt PPP performance, and (c) how changes in laws and agencies can alter partner behaviour over time. Both classic and modern studies on institutionalism highlight these processes.

**How Institutional Theory will be applied in this study**

Utilise Institutional Theory to explore how formal institutions, such as laws, regulatory bodies, and standardised business processes, along with informal norms like professional practices, patronage, and trust, influence the unique functions of government, NGOs, and private companies in Nigeria's public-private partnerships (PPPs). Investigate how strengthening regulations, such as through the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) and pipeline certification, serve as an institutional change that minimises uncertainty and attracts private investment. On the other hand, identify informal political or bureaucratic pressures that may create instability.

Additionally, consider Stakeholder Theory. This theory works alongside Institutional Theory by highlighting various actors like government agencies, private investors, contractors, NGOs, communities, and donors whose interests and power dynamics shape project design and results. Stakeholder Theory clarifies the necessary methods for stakeholder engagement, accountability, and benefit-sharing to turn institutional frameworks into socially accepted PPPs. By combining both theories, you can analyse official rules (institutional) alongside the interests and strategies of different stakeholders.

Institutional Theory is relevant because your research focuses on roles and contributions carried out through institutions, rules, and agency capacities. It sheds light on why reforms in institutions (such as legal frameworks and ICRC activities) are crucial for attracting private capital and incorporating NGOs into governance. Stakeholder Theory is essential because the success of PPPs relies on aligning the incentives of various actors and ensuring participatory governance to maintain fairness and accountability, primarily when NGOs advocate for community interests.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive survey design, complemented by qualitative research. The survey method was selected because it helps gather standardised information from many people about their views and experiences regarding the roles of the government, NGOs, and the private sector in public-private partnerships (PPPs). The qualitative part, which includes interviews with key informants and a review of documents, provides a deeper insight into institutional practices, challenges, and success stories within Nigeria's PPP system. Using mixed methods improves the reliability of the findings by comparing different data sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The group being studied consists of stakeholders who are actively involved in PPP activities throughout Nigeria. This includes officials from government PPP units (like the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission, Federal Ministry of Finance, and state PPP agencies), NGO representatives who focus on advocacy or service delivery, and leaders from private companies engaged in PPP projects in areas such as energy, transportation, and health.

From this group, a sample of 239 respondents was selected, including 40% government officials, 30% NGO representatives, and 30% participants from the private sector. A stratified random sampling method ensured that all three groups were represented, followed by simple random sampling within each group. For the qualitative part of the study, 15 key informants were chosen based on their expertise in PPP policymaking, project implementation, or advocacy.

Two primary sources of data were utilised:

1. Primary data: gathered through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. 2. Secondary data: obtained from government reports, project evaluation documents, academic articles, and policy briefs about PPPs in Nigeria.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire featured closed-ended questions on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly), addressing topics like policy framework, financing methods, NGO involvement, private sector efficiency, and challenges in partnerships.

Interview Guide: Semi-structured questions were created for key informants to gain insights into institutional practices, obstacles to effective partnerships, and recommendations for enhancing collaboration among various actors in PPPs.

To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, two public administration academics and one PPP practitioner reviewed it. A pilot test with 20 participants outside the leading study group provided feedback that helped refine unclear items. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which resulted in an overall coefficient of 0.82, showing good internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) and inferential statistics (such as the Chi-square test and ANOVA) to explore differences in perceptions among different stakeholder groups. For qualitative data from interviews, transcripts were coded and analysed thematically to find common patterns related to the roles, contributions, and limitations of various actors in PPPs. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation to create a well-rounded view of PPP practices in Nigeria.

A university research ethics committee approved the study. People participated willingly, and they were assured that their identities would remain private and their information would be kept confidential. Before giving out questionnaires and holding interviews, we made sure to get informed consent from everyone involved.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

**Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

| Serial Number | Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 001 | Government Officials | | 38 |
| 002 | NGOs Representatives | | 31 |
| 003 | Private Sector Actors | | 31 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |

**Source: Survey, 2025**

Out of the 239 questionnaires distributed, 230 were returned valid, giving a response rate of 96%. Respondents included government officials (38%), NGO representatives (31%), and private sector actors (31%). The majority (62%) had over five years of experience in PPP-related activities, suggesting a knowledgeable sample base.

**Table 4.2: Roles and Contributions of Government in PPPs**

| | **Questions** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **001** | **Is it true that the Government provides an Enabling Legal and Policy Framework?** | | |
| | Yes | 173 | 75 |
| | No | 57 | 25 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |
| **002** | **Government Contribution in Risk-sharing through guarantees and subsidies** | | |
| | Yes | 154 | 67 |
| | No | 76 | 33 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |
| **003** | **Government agencies provide sufficient technical capacity during project design and procurement** | | |
| | Yes | 101 | 44 |
| | No | 129 | 56 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |

**Source: Survey, 2025**

A large proportion (75%) of respondents agreed that the government provides the enabling legal and policy framework for PPPs. Similarly, 67% recognised the government's contribution to risk-sharing through guarantees and subsidies. However, 56% of respondents disagreed that government agencies provide sufficient technical capacity during project design and procurement.

Interviews revealed that while institutions such as the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) have standardised PPP frameworks, bureaucratic bottlenecks and inconsistent political will often delay project implementation.

This backs up previous research (Musawa, 2023; Ndukwe, 2023) that highlighted how weak institutions are a big problem for public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Nigeria. Institutional theory suggests that changing laws and agencies is crucial for establishing a stable PPP environment. When institutions are weak, private companies lose trust and are less likely to invest for the long term.

**Table 4.3: Contributions of NGOs in PPPs**

| Serial Number | Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **001** | **NGOs play a vital role by gathering community support and pushing for transparency in public-private partnership (PPP) projects.** | | |
| | Yes | 152 | 66 |
| | No | 78 | 34 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |
| **002** | **NGOs are important for monitoring, especially in health and social initiatives.** | | |
| | Yes | 131 | 57 |
| | No | 99 | 43 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |
| **003** | **NGOs are fully included in official PPP decision-making processes.** | | |
| | Yes | 90 | 39 |
| | No | 140 | 61 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |

**Source: Survey, 2025**

About 64% of those surveyed believe that NGOs play a vital role by gathering community support and pushing for transparency in public-private partnership (PPP) projects. Additionally, 57% think that NGOs are essential for monitoring, especially in health and social initiatives. However, only 39% believe that NGOs are fully included in official PPP decision-making processes.

People interviewed pointed out that NGOs usually get involved late in the process after the project design stage, which decreases their ability to influence outcomes. One NGO director mentioned: "We are viewed as watchdogs instead of partners, which limits what we can do beyond advocacy."

This finding matches with Onyedinma et al. (2023), who stated that while NGOs played essential roles in responding to COVID-19, their involvement was not fully recognised within formal structures. Stakeholder theory is critical here: ignoring NGO participation weakens accountability and diminishes the social legitimacy of PPPs.

**Table 4.4: Contributions of the Private Sector in PPPs**

| Serial Number | Responses | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **001** | **The Private Sector offers Funding and Technical Skills** | | |
| | Yes | 177 | 77 |
| | No | 53 | 23 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |
| **002** | **Private Sector brings Innovation and Efficiency to Project execution** | | |
| | Yes | 161 | 70 |
| | No | 69 | 30 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |
| **003** | **Private Companies often focus on Making Profits rather than being Socially Responsible.** | | |
| | Yes | 122 | 53 |
| | No | 108 | 47 |
| | **Total** | **230** | **100** |

**Source: Survey, 2025**

Most respondents (77%) agreed that the private sector offers funding and technical skills. Additionally, 70% thought the private sector brings innovation and efficiency to project execution. However, 53% mentioned that private companies often focus on making profits rather than being socially responsible.

Interviews revealed that businesses usually join in for better reputations and to get profitable government contracts. Still, investors raised concerns about unclear regulations and slow government contributions.

This aligns with Okeke (2022), who found that private involvement is influenced by both charitable goals and business interests. The findings also match international research (Vale de Paula et al., 2024), indicating that good contract management and stable policies are essential for effective private sector participation.

**Table 4.5: Challenges Facing PPP Implementation (Multiple Choice)**

| Serial Number | Challenges | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 001 | Limited capacity within institutions | 277 | 60 |
| 002 | Political interference and corruption | 245 | 53 |
| 003 | - Insufficient engagement with stakeholders | 217 | 47 |
| 004 | Uncertainty in regulations and disputes over contracts | 203 | 44 |
| | **Total** | **462** | **204** |

**Source: Survey, 2025**

The main challenges highlighted are:

Limited capacity within institutions, mentioned by 60% of those surveyed; Political interference and corruption, noted by 53%; Insufficient engagement with stakeholders, reported by 47%; Uncertainty in regulations and disputes over contracts, indicated by 44%.

Some private sector representatives described Nigeria's public-private partnership (PPP) environment as "high-risk" due to frequent policy changes. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also highlighted the lack of transparency in procurement procedures.

These results align with existing research that shows institutional weaknesses and poor coordination among stakeholders as significant barriers to successful PPPs in developing countries (Akinola, 2024; Obasa & Oluyomi, 2024). Both Institutional Theory and Stakeholder Theory help clarify these issues: without strong institutions and effective stakeholder involvement, PPPs struggle to achieve their goals.

**4.6: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

The results from the survey and interviews indicate that:

The government plays a crucial role in creating supportive conditions, but it must also improve its technical skills.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) help with advocacy and community involvement, but are not fully utilised within official systems.

The private sector offers funding and expertise, but its participation is limited due to weak institutions and unpredictable policies.

These insights highlight the importance of collaboration among different groups. Institutional reforms (according to Institutional Theory) should go hand-in-hand with active engagement from stakeholders (as suggested by Stakeholder Theory) to achieve lasting Public-Private Partnership (PPP) success in Nigeria.

**Summary of Findings**

The study looked into the roles and contributions of the government, NGOs, and private companies in public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Nigeria. Researchers gathered information from 239 participants and conducted interviews for deeper insights. Here are the main findings:

Government: It establishes legal rules, shares risks, and oversees projects, but problems like weak institutions, lack of resources, and political meddling reduce its effectiveness. - NGOs: They are essential for advocacy, promoting transparency, and getting local communities involved. However, they have a limited role in formal PPP setups, which restricts their influence on project planning and long-term success. - Private Sector: This sector provides funding, technical know-how, and new ideas, but deals with issues like unclear regulations, poor enforcement of contracts, and conflicts between profit-making and social responsibility.

**Challenges:** Common obstacles to successful PPPs include insufficient institutional capacity, low transparency levels, inconsistent policies, and weak engagement with stakeholders.

**Theoretical Application**: Institutional Theory shows how weak formal institutions hinder the growth of PPPs. At the same time, Stakeholder Theory emphasises the importance of including all parties to ensure legitimacy and create shared value.

## CONCLUSION

The study finds that the success of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Nigeria relies on improving institutions, promoting transparent governance, and including all stakeholders. Agencies like the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) have made significant progress, but changes need to go further than just rules and regulations. We also need strong institutions, open discussions with stakeholders, and steady policy enforcement. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should play a more central role in PPP decisions instead of being sidelined. Likewise, the private sector can contribute more effectively when clear guidelines and solid contract management create stability and build trust for the long term.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Build Institutional Skills: The government should develop technical skills in project planning, purchasing, and contract management within all PPP agencies.

Boost NGO Involvement: NGOs need to be officially included in the governance of PPPs, especially in designing projects, monitoring progress, and engaging with communities to guarantee accountability and inclusiveness.

Ensure Policy Stability: The government must create a steady and reliable policy framework to attract responsible private investors and lower project risks.

Encourage Open Procurement: Set up transparent, competitive, and technology-driven procurement systems to reduce corruption and political interference.

Align Profit with Social Goals: Utilise tools such as performance-based contracts and social impact assessments to ensure that private profit motives align with the public good.

Promote Collaboration among All Parties: Create dialogue platforms where government officials, NGOs, and private sector representatives can work together to develop solutions and exchange best practices in delivering PPPs.

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