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### Prescribing Public-Private Partnerships to Global Health Initiatives

Elizabeth Rhoads

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Prescribing Public-Private Partnerships to Global Health Initiatives

Elizabeth Rhoads

IBUS - 3000

Alternative Financial Systems and Intermediation

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### **Abstract**

For six weeks I served as a finance intern with the Toilet Board Coalition (TBC) and created a Portfolio Presentation to deliver to TBC's corporate board members in May. With my background in Public Health and interest in Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability, I was interested in learning how cross-sector partnerships can help accelerate global health development. My internship with TBC provided me with valuable firsthand experience in my topic of research, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), which I was able to compare alongside a formal literature review. In this research paper I combine my research with my internship experience to show that while PPPs have weaknesses, they can serve as a valuable tool in global health development. I also make several recommendations for future research initiatives that would help overcome these weaknesses.

### **Contextualization**

#### ***Profile of the Toilet Board Coalition***

The Toilet Board Coalition (TBC) is a business-led partnership and platform formed in 2014. Its mission is to enable collaboration between the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to create Sanitation Economies around the world that advance SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. TBC runs the Toilet Accelerator, the world's first accelerator program dedicated to sanitation entrepreneurs in low income markets. Each year, a number of entrepreneurs are selected to join the Accelerator cohort through which they are provided with funding and technical advisory. Currently, the cohort consists of 28 businesses from 12 countries across Asia, Africa, and South America. By supporting community-level innovation and entrepreneurship, TBC hopes to build sustainable Sanitation Economies in places with limited water and sanitation services. The work

of TBC is relevant to my study abroad program theme of Banking Finance and Social Responsibility, because it involves corporate actors seeking sustainable investment opportunities.

TBC's organizational structure consists of its directors, global steering committee members, India chapter steering committee members, cohort council, secretariat, and partnership council. The steering committee members help drive the Accelerator Program, the cohort council consists of experienced Accelerator entrepreneurs, and the partnership council consists of representatives from TBC's corporate board. Through its corporate board, TBC is connected to 22 of the most influential global health actors including Unicef, Unilever, Kimberly-Clark, The World Bank, Population Services International, and others. By joining the Accelerator, entrepreneurs are connected to these institutions and their resources. For example, Svadha (a sanitation business based in India and joined the cohort in 2018) was advised by Kimberly-Clark in Marketing & Sales, Supply Chain, and Human Resources through the Accelerator. As a result, Svadha has increased its scale and efficiency, cut down on costs, and seen an improvement in its business performance and organizational structure (Toilet Board Coalition, 2018).

While at most nonprofit organizations, partnerships are used as a tool under broader missions, partnerships are the central focus of TBC's work to achieve SDG 6. TBC recognizes that the private, public, and nonprofit sectors share a common interest in global health and that by accelerating the Sanitation Economy, they can deliver a significant impact to business and society.

### ***Internship Focus and Objectives***

As an intern, I developed a Portfolio Presentation with market summaries and profiles of Accelerator entrepreneurs. This Portfolio will be presented to TBC's steering committee in May

to justify the need for a designated Corporate Fund for the Accelerator Program. I applied my skills in Communications to design a concise, visually appealing presentation and researched what information was necessary to include about the entrepreneurs to attract corporate investment. With the task of designing this presentation, my internship objectives were to learn how to leverage corporate funds to support sustainable development initiatives, diversify my Communications skills, and learn about the practical and technical aspects of private-public partnerships. With these internship objectives in mind, I decided to use my research as an opportunity to deepen my learning experience about Private-Public Partnerships (PPPs).

Another objective of mine was to expand upon my study abroad program theme of Banking, Finance, and Social Responsibility. Having learned about corporate social responsibility and sustainable investments in the classroom, I was eager to learn about the field through practical, first hand experience.

### ***Research Objectives and Justification***

TBC's dedication to partnerships presented an ideal laboratory for me to explore the role of PPPs in global health initiatives. As a Public Health major with an interest in Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability, I am interested in how to bridge the efforts of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to achieve global health goals. Now is also an opportune time to explore PPPs, as the rise of corporate social responsibility and sustainability presents a substantive opportunity to engage the private sector in global health initiatives. PPPs are a valuable tool that have the potential to produce greater economic value and infrastructural outputs for both parties than the efforts of the private or public sectors alone. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 17: *Partnership for the Goals* incorporated PPPs as part of the



global sustainability agenda and inspired the formation of many initiatives focused on partnerships, including TBC. The number of PPPs is growing and the role of the public and private sectors in society is constantly evolving. Therefore, there is an important opportunity for research to track the successes and limitations of these partnerships as a way to inform future strategies and policies. Through this research and my internship with TBC, I sought to explore the nature of PPPs. My central research question and sub-questions stood as following:

*What are the risks and opportunities of Public-Private Partnerships in advancing global public health initiatives? What factors determine the effectiveness of a PPP? Is there comprehensive criteria available to evaluate PPPs?*

After conducting my research into these questions, I discovered that a key challenge in PPPs is the “inherent conflict of interest” between the public and private sectors (Parker, Zaragoza, & Hernández-Aguado, 2019). If true, this conflict of interests could present a challenging barrier to achieve global health goals. Thus, my research question evolved to:

*Is there an inherent conflict of interest between the private and public sectors? If so, what are the implications on the ability of PPPs to achieve global health development goals?*

### **Information Acquisition**

To answer these questions, I refer to academic research analyzed in a literature review and my own experience as an intern at TBC. The combination of these resources give me a comprehensive look at PPPs and reveal how they are perceived on both a practical and academic level. For the literature review, I draw upon a variety of academic resources that identify current issues in PPPs and the direction of future research. Finally, I include my experience at TBC in my discussion section to compare with the academic literature. My internship occurred from

March 24th to April 30th and I worked 20 hours per week (see Appendix). I completed my work remotely and conducted weekly calls with my advisor to update on my progress. We also communicated regularly via email and Whatsapp and exchanged files through a shared drive.

### **Positionality and Ethics**

My internship with TBC was only six weeks long, and so I acknowledge that I was limited in time to develop an understanding of their work. This impacted my research because I have used my experience at TBC to inform my research into PPPs. As a Public Health major, I am entering the internship with a strong knowledge base in global health and international development which helps me better understand the mission and activities of TBC. My internship was conducted remotely and I checked in with my supervisor once a week. Although time and remoteness will no doubt limit my research, I have made an effort to overcome these barriers through frequent communication with my advisor. As a Public Health advocate, I tend to view PPPs based on how they serve global health and sustainability and less as a practical, value-generating relationship. I have tried to be as objective in my research as possible by drawing upon the evidence that I gather through my research, however there is an inevitable cognitive bias in the way in which I gather my research and how I present it.

Ethics are a key concern of mine in conducting this research. For this reason, I only refer to TBC's entrepreneurs with information that is publicly available on TBC's website and am positive that my research will in no way harm them or their businesses. The work I completed during my internship will in fact benefit TBC and their entrepreneurs by helping to secure a corporate fund for the Accelerator Program. TBC's work also benefits its beneficiaries in a way that is culturally appropriate, collaborative, socially responsible, and promotes the health of

humans and the environment. Throughout my internship, I continually self-reflected on my work with TBC and how I upheld SIT's Human Subjects policies and ethical guidelines.

### **Critical Reflection on Internship Experience**

My internship with TBC occurred from March 24th to April 30th. I worked remotely for 20 hours per week and had weekly phone calls with my internship advisor to discuss the progress of my work (see Appendix). My responsibilities to develop the Portfolio Presentation and Market Summaries remained the same throughout the internship and I ultimately completed these tasks. Prior to my internship, I set my personal objectives to learn how to leverage corporate funds to support sustainable development initiatives; to diversify my Communications skills; and to learn about the practical and technical aspects of PPPs. In reflection, I feel I achieved these objectives. By researching and putting together the Portfolio and Market Summaries, I learned about what information was crucial to attract investors, I improved my Photoshop and design skills and learned about Communications in an investment context, and I learned about the application of PPPs by writing profiles on all 28 entrepreneurs in the Accelerator Program.

Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic, I also feel I developed professionally in a unique way. While my work was always intended to be remote, I had to leave my study abroad program in Switzerland and return to the US where I worked in quarantine at home. I was challenged to push through these major life changes to complete my work and remain professional. Because of this, I learned that I am capable of pushing through intense stress and that I find stability and peace in my work.

While I am proud of myself for these accomplishments, I also feel I could have performed better by communicating more regularly with my teammates and asking for their

suggestions on my work more frequently. In reflection, this would have improved the efficiency and quality of my work.

### **Analysis of Critical Issues and Themes**

#### ***i. PPPs: How are they formed? How are they applied?***

The PPP Knowledge Lab of the World Bank Group defines PPPs as "a long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility, and remuneration is linked to performance" (PPP Knowledge Lab, n.d.). PPPs were first formed in the 1990s to address HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2008). Today, PPPs are applied by a variety of actors including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and national governments to support public health and infrastructure development worldwide. PPPs have become a common tool to address global public health issues, especially since they were highlighted in Goal 17 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### ***ii. The Role of PPPs in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Broader Global Public Health Agenda***

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were created in 2015 by the United Nations as part of the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and serve as a blueprint for all global public health initiatives (United Nations, 2015). There are 17 SDGs and 169 targets that span issues from poverty reduction to climate action to clean water and sanitation. In 2015, The United Nations established the Joint SDG Fund; a muscle of the 2030 Agenda that leverages

public and private funds to scale up SDG investment. Target 17.17 aims to “encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.” With over 4000 partnerships dedicated to the realization of one or more SDGs, the United Nations recognizes that PPPs have the potential to capture the vast resources, expertise, legitimacy, and implementation and enforcement capacity of the private sector (Marx, 2019). According to a United Nations 2019 report on Goal 17, progress is moving rapidly but key challenges remain: Government assistance in development is declining; private investment flows are not consistent with sustainable development; there is a persisting digital divide; and trade tensions are high (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2019). To add to these broader challenges, the effectiveness of PPPs in achieving the 2030 Agenda depend on a number of factors including a coherent PPP policy; strong enabling institutions; cooperative risk sharing and mutual support; transparency; and putting “people first” (Hamilton, n.d.). When executed effectively, PPPs can also be used as a powerful mechanism in today’s shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance,’ in which non-state actors play an increasingly important role in public policy (Marx, 2019).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also undertaken a commitment to engage the private sector in global health development. In their corporate strategy, WHO named PPPs as a mechanism to achieve health for all and in 2000 (Gro Harlem Brundtland, 1999), WHO launched the Initiative on Public-Private Partnerships for Health which supports nearly 70 global health partnerships. At WHO, PPPs have proven an effective tool for addressing challenging global health issues (especially those involving research and development); advancing public health

messages; and establishing industry-level incentives for more sustainable and healthful practices (Buse & Waxman, 2001).

### *iii. Evaluation of PPP Effectiveness*

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) commissioned a Stanford University research protocol to evaluate the effectiveness of PPPs in improving health and welfare systems worldwide. The research revealed that while there was great enthusiasm for PPPs, there was little available research or record kept on their success (Barr, 2007). The author created a series of questions that monitor the effectiveness of PPPs, some of which include: *What were the intended outcomes of the public-private partnership effort?; did the effort identify specific, measurable indicators of the intended outcomes?; and are the methods used to measure the outcome indicators reliable and consistent over time?* Since a key aspect of the WHO is to enhance equity in health and wellbeing, the author also recommends an additional measure of PPPs affect equity for vulnerable groups separate from the assessment of overall effectiveness.

A more recent evaluation of PPP effectiveness was published in 2019 in the *BioMed Central* public health journal. The authors identify that the core issue with PPPs is the inherent conflict of interest between the public and private sectors, especially as it applies to health promotion. While the public sector seeks to promote health, many private sector companies produce products that are harmful to health. Partnerships can damage the legitimacy of public health institutions or lead to institutional capture (Parker, Zaragoza, & Hernández-Aguado, 2019). The author recommends that in PPPs, the private sector's role is to aid in the implementation of activities and not to develop general strategy lines. The author also identifies that there needs to be scientific evidence on the effectiveness of these partnerships that evaluates

whether the partnership is able to produce an improvement in population health. Especially given that current evaluations focus more on successful functioning, and not on impact on health (Parker, Zaragoza, & Hernández-Aguado, 2019).

### ***Findings from the Toilet Board Coalition***

My internship at TBC provided me with insight into the application of PPPs in global health development which I now compare alongside my research to answer the questions of: *Is there an inherent conflict of interest between the private and public sectors? If so, what are the implications on the ability of PPPs to achieve global health development goals?*

TBC's Toilet Accelerator Program launched in 2016 and has grown from a handful of sanitation entrepreneurs to 28 entrepreneurs across 12 countries in three continents. TBC now has 20 multinational corporations on its board to connect with its entrepreneurs. The Accelerator is based on the perspective that investment in the sanitation economy benefits the private and public sectors, as well human health and the environment. In my research, I discovered that one of the key challenges with PPPs is the inherent conflict of interest between the private and public sectors (Parker, Zaragoza, & Hernández-Aguado, 2019). However, TBC is able to bridge the sectors by presenting the 2.4 billion people in the world lacking sanitation services as an vastly untapped market. The research also suggests that there is no adequate measure of the effectiveness of PPPs or its impact on equity which is important for TBC since it works with entrepreneurs in low-income markets. I observed in my internship that TBC has no formal tool to evaluate their partnerships, however many businesses in the Accelerator demonstrate that collaboration with TBC's corporate board has helped improve their business strategies and brought growth. Svadha, the Accelerator business aforementioned, has seen measurable growth

as a result of its advisory by Kimberly-Clark. Through the Accelerator, Svadha has 2x more entrepreneurs within its network, an 85% reduction in entrepreneur attrition, a 200% increase in quarterly revenue, 50% lower inventory costs, and 50% improved sales forecasting (Toilet Board Coalition, 2018).

Collaboration between corporations and the sanitation entrepreneurs is part of TBC's "De-risking Strategy." One of the main goals of the Accelerator Program is to de-risk investments in the water and sanitation sector. TBC achieves this by facilitating corporate advisory to its entrepreneurs, like Kimberly-Clark with Svadha. Other businesses in the Accelerator Program have had the same opportunity and experienced subsequent growth. For example, Samagra (a business based in Pune, India) worked with Unilever, Firmenich, and USAID in HR Support, Marketing & Media, and Digitising Operations and was able to improve its financial planning strategies, scale up its community toilet program, lower operational costs, and scale up its capital growth. Through its "De-risking Strategy," the corporate board advises businesses creating a shared interest in the businesses' success and growing their investments.

As an intern with a firsthand look into TBC's operations, I observed that part of the Accelerator's success was likely due to the specific corporations on its board. All of the corporations on TBC's board are invested in health, water, sanitation, the environment, and development and therefore there was less conflict of interest. Many of the board members are well-established like Unilever, Kimberly-Clark, and Unicef, and therefore have greater capital and bear less risk in their investments into the Accelerator entrepreneurs. The Accelerator program has been in operation now for four years, and therefore the board has more experience and knows what to expect from the program. Based on my findings from my internship with



TBC, I have learned that the determinants of a successful partnership to reach global health goals depend on building shared interest and selecting the right partners.

In performing my duties as an intern with TBC, I also learned that Communications contributes to the success of a PPP. Research for my Sanitation Portfolio taught me in order to attract corporate investment, my designs had to be visually-appealing, concise, and consist of only the most important information. In the Portfolio, I organized the entrepreneurs based on their location because I learned that investors are drawn to locations where they are already based. Communications are also important for sustaining partnerships so that partners can be assured that they made smart, successful investments.

### **Reflection**

The United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals serve as the leading international framework for all global public health and sustainable development initiatives until 2030. When Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals was codified in the Agenda, PPPs became a global health priority. Thus, the risks and opportunities of PPPs as they relate to global health are best evaluated in relation to the Agenda.

The Toilet Board Coalition exemplifies how PPPs can be used to address a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Without corporate funding, TBC would not have the financial capital to stimulate the sanitation economy and support its sanitation entrepreneurs. TBC provides an example of how public and private interests can be bridged to reach global health goals. TBC's "De-risking strategy" demonstrates that in order for this to happen, it is key to actively build a shared interest between partners. The specific members on TBC's board have also likely

contributed to the success of the Accelerator, and thus selectivity of partners is important for partnership effectiveness.

Based on the academic literature, it appears there is substantive opportunity to engage the private sector in global health initiatives through the formation of PPPs. PPPs applied to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have the potential to capture the skills and resources of the private sector and apply them to development. However, with limited data collected on PPPs and no system for evaluating their effectiveness, it is difficult to measure the successes and limitations of PPP implementation. Therefore, further research is needed in order to adequately gauge the risks and opportunities of PPPs. It is safe to say, however, that PPPs have led to significant advancements in global health initiatives as proven by the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and TBC.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The BMC research article made an interesting statement that although there is an inherent conflict of interest between public and private partners in health promotion activities, if the public sector didn't partner with private sector companies that sell harmful projects, that would eliminate nearly all opportunities for collaboration and limit progress towards achieving global health goals. Instead, there needs to be more established criteria to evaluate partnerships in order to mitigate the risks. (Parker, Zaragoza, & Hernández-Aguado, 2019). It is true that further research must be directed towards establishing criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of PPPs. Even if a PPP achieves its target health outcome, it is also crucial to evaluate how the PPP affects the equity of vulnerable populations. PPPs present substantive opportunities to help global health actors like TBC achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 17:

Partnership for the Goals is unique because it is not only a goal in itself, but also a mechanism to achieve the other sixteen goals. Exploring PPPs in global health initiatives may also reveal other fields in which PPPs can be applied. As the fields of corporate social responsibility and sustainability evolve, there will be increased opportunity to collaborate with the private sector to reach public health goals. But first, future research must explore the risks and opportunities.

### **Personal Reflection**

As a Public Health Major interested in a career involving Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability, my internship with TBC and the research I conducted into PPPs has lead me to realize that although there is much progress that needs to be achieved to evaluate the effectiveness of PPPs, PPPs have the potential to serve a valuable role in the realization of future sustainable global health development goals. I believe that promoting health is a key way to create equality across a society, and I am excited that cross-sector partnerships can help strengthen health development, so long as they are carried out sustainably.

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### **Appendix**

My internship with the Toilet Board Coalition occurred from March 24th, 2020 to April 30th 2020. I worked 4 days per week for 20 hours over the course of six weeks, totalling 120 hours. Every week, I worked on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Tuesdays at 9:00 am, I called my internship advisor to update my internship progress.