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A Study into the Efficacy of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a Panacea to Inadequate Funds for Infrastructural Development in Southern Africa: Lessons from the UK, USA, Germany and Canada

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ABSTRACT

Southern Africa faces a chronic infrastructure funding deficit that continues to constrain economic growth, social equity, and sustainable development. Traditional public financing mechanisms have proven insufficient to meet the region's escalating infrastructure demands, prompting increased interest in alternative modalities such as Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs). This study critically examines the efficacy of PPPs as a strategic response to infrastructure financing challenges in Southern Africa, drawing comparative insights from mature PPP ecosystems in the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, and Canada.

Adopting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, the research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm and employs a qualitative design to synthesise scholarly discourse, empirical evidence, and policy evaluations. A purposive sample of peer-reviewed articles, institutional reports, and case studies was analysed using NVivo software, enabling structured thematic coding and comparative analysis across jurisdictions. Thematic clusters were derived using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, revealing five dominant dimensions: institutional coherence, procurement transparency, risk allocation, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability integration.

Findings indicate that while PPPs offer promising avenues for mobilising private capital and technical expertise, their success in Southern Africa is contingent upon the presence of robust legal frameworks, predictable regulatory environments, and inclusive governance structures. Comparative lessons from high-income countries underscore the importance of contractual clarity, performance-based incentives, and lifecycle costing models, which remain underdeveloped in many Southern African contexts. The study highlights the need for context-sensitive regulatory adaptations, capacity-building initiatives, and regional knowledge platforms to localise global best practices.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on infrastructure finance by offering a nuanced understanding of PPP dynamics and proposing actionable recommendations for policymakers, development finance institutions, and private sector actors seeking to strengthen PPP implementation in Southern Africa.

Key Words: Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), Infrastructure Finance, Southern Africa, Comparative Policy Analysis

Introduction and Background

Infrastructural development is widely recognised as a foundational pillar for economic growth, regional integration, and social equity. Robust infrastructure, spanning transportation networks, energy systems, water and sanitation, and social services, not only facilitates trade and mobility but also enhances productivity, access to essential services, and resilience against climate and economic shocks. In Southern Africa, however, the persistent shortfall in public funding has created a widening infrastructure gap, estimated at up to $108 billion annually across the continent due to regulatory inefficiencies and fiscal constraints (African Development Bank, 2020; UN ECA, 2025). This deficit is compounded by rising public debt, limited domestic revenue mobilisation, and competing budgetary priorities, particularly in post-pandemic recovery contexts.

To address these challenges, Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a strategic modality for infrastructure delivery. PPPs are contractual arrangements in which private entities assume significant financial, technical, and operational responsibilities in the design, construction, and management of public assets (Grimsey & Lewis, 2004). By leveraging private capital and expertise, PPPs aim to improve service delivery, accelerate project timelines, and reduce fiscal burdens on governments. Globally, PPPs have gained traction in sectors such as transport, energy, healthcare, and education, with varying degrees of success.

High-income economies offer instructive paradigms. The United Kingdom's Private Finance Initiative (PFI), launched in 1992, sought to mobilise private investment for public infrastructure under long-term performance-based contracts. While PFI facilitated the delivery of over 700 projects, it has faced criticism for opaque risk allocation and long-term fiscal liabilities (Foreman-Peck, 2021). Canada's PPP Canada programme institutionalised lifecycle costing and value-for-money assessments, particularly through the DBFOM model, which integrates design, build, finance, operate, and maintain functions under a single entity. Germany's ÖPP framework emphasises decentralised governance and environmental compliance, while the United States employs a fragmented, state-level approach with diverse procurement models and community engagement mechanisms (Hodge, Greve & Boardman, 2017).

Despite their global proliferation, the transposition of PPP models into Southern African contexts remains complex. Countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe grapple with fragmented regulatory frameworks, politicised procurement processes, and limited institutional capacity to manage PPP lifecycles effectively (Sibanda & Wray, 2022). South Africa, while possessing a relatively advanced PPP unit within National Treasury, faces challenges in project preparation, stakeholder alignment, and tariff structuring. Zimbabwe's PPP landscape is further constrained by investor scepticism, macroeconomic instability, and weak enforcement mechanisms.

This study seeks to critically examine the efficacy of PPPs as a panacea for infrastructure financing deficits in Southern Africa. Through a comparative analysis of PPP models from the UK, USA, Germany, and Canada, it aims to distil actionable lessons and contextual adaptations that can inform policy reform, capacity-building, and sustainable infrastructure delivery across the region. By interrogating the structural, financial, and governance dimensions of PPPs, the research contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive development and resilient infrastructure systems in emerging economies.

Literature Review

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged globally as strategic instruments to ameliorate infrastructure financing deficits, offering a mechanism through which governments can leverage private sector resources for public gain. The extant literature demonstrates a spectrum of successes and failures, shaped largely by political, institutional and economic variables specific to each country.

In the United Kingdom, PPPs have been extensively applied through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which gained traction in the early 1990s under the Conservative government and continued into the Labour administration (Froud & Shaoul, 2001). PFIs facilitated the delivery of hospitals, schools and transportation projects, often hailed for improving delivery timelines and efficiency. However, long-term fiscal implications and diminished accountability drew substantial critique (Shaoul, Stafford & Stapleton, 2006), prompting a reconsideration of procurement strategies and governance structures. The National Audit Office (2018) reported that while PFIs achieved construction efficiency, they frequently burdened public agencies with inflexible contractual obligations.

In Canada, PPPs have been deployed extensively across sectors, including water, transportation and healthcare. Canada's model emphasises institutional specialisation through the establishment of PPP Canada, which provides centralised oversight and technical expertise (Siemiatycki, 2015). Project evaluation metrics such as "value for money" and life-cycle costing are embedded within the Canadian PPP ethos, contributing to robust project outcomes (Vining & Boardman, 2008). Nonetheless, some scholars caution against the commodification of public services and the marginalisation of public interests in favour of corporate risk profiles (Whiteside, 2017).

Germany's ÖPP (Öffentlich-Private Partnerschaft) model is rooted in legal precision and stakeholder consultation. The country's federal transport projects, particularly the A-model for motorways, illustrate structured risk-sharing and standardised contracts (Burger & Hawkesworth, 2011). Transparency and public procurement laws play a critical role in sustaining legitimacy and efficiency. Kappeler and Nemoz (2010) note that Germany's emphasis on accountability mechanisms and fiscal prudence has allowed for more adaptive PPP arrangements, particularly in transport and education.

The United States exhibits a decentralised PPP landscape, where states exercise autonomy over partnership frameworks. According to Geddes (2015), successful PPPs in the US transportation sector demonstrate the value of bespoke legal instruments that allow project tailoring to local contexts. However, regulatory inconsistencies across states and the politicisation of procurement processes have impeded broader adoption (Petersen, 2010). The lack of a federal PPP policy hampers uniformity, although the inclusion of PPPs in federal infrastructure bills has signalled a shift toward more strategic coordination (Utt, 2012).

Turning to Southern Africa, the literature reflects diverse experiences with PPPs, mediated by governance capacity, institutional development and economic stability. South Africa stands as the regional leader in formalising PPP arrangements, underpinned by a relatively comprehensive legal and regulatory framework. The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) and National Treasury's PPP Manual provide clarity on procurement and project evaluation processes (National Treasury, 2021). Case studies in transport, energy and social infrastructure suggest that while PPPs can foster innovation and efficiency, persistent challenges remain. These include limited technical capacity, political interference and socio-economic contestation (Amadi-Echendu & Rasweswe, 2020). Moreover, debates around equity and redistributive impact continue to animate academic discourse on PPP efficacy in South Africa (Sibanda & Wray, 2022).

In Zimbabwe, PPPs have been impeded by macroeconomic volatility, institutional instability and weak regulatory coherence. Gumbo and Chikodzi (2020) argue that despite rhetorical support for private investment in public infrastructure, the absence of credible legal safeguards and transparent tendering processes has constrained implementation. PPPs in the power and transport sectors have often faltered due to inadequate risk-sharing mechanisms and donor conditionalities, which weaken national ownership.

The broader Southern African region, including countries such as Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique, exhibits uneven PPP adoption, shaped largely by divergent institutional capacities and investment climates. While some nations have introduced enabling legislation, execution often falters due to a lack of specialised PPP units and limited fiscal space (Makoni, 2018). Furthermore, regional initiatives such as the Southern African Development

Community (SADC) Infrastructure Master Plan have called for harmonised PPP strategies and cross-border collaboration (SADC, 2012). However, practical integration remains elusive, hindered by political fragmentation and disparities in public governance.

Recent scholarship advocates for an adaptive and context-sensitive approach to PPP deployment in Southern Africa. Naidoo (2021) contends that transplanting global models without local calibration results in structural misalignments, while Chingono and Nakunyada (2016) underscore the need for participatory planning processes to bolster legitimacy and social impact.

Collectively, the literature suggests that PPPs are not a panacea but rather contingent instruments whose efficacy depends on institutional integrity, regulatory transparency and public accountability. The comparative experiences of the UK, USA, Germany and Canada offer instructive lessons, yet Southern African countries must navigate complex political economies and historical legacies to tailor sustainable PPP frameworks. This requires a shift from merely emulating best practices toward cultivating contextually relevant models grounded in inclusive governance.

Theoretical Frameworks

The analysis of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the Southern African context is situated within three robust theoretical frameworks that collectively offer a multidisciplinary lens for understanding efficacy, governance complexity, and equity outcomes. These are the Resource-Based Theory, Institutional Theory, and Equity Theory.

Resource-Based Theory posits that strategic value emerges from an organisation's capacity to marshal and deploy resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Applied to PPPs, this theory underscores how private sector actors contribute distinctive financial, technical, and managerial assets that can potentially enhance public infrastructure outcomes. In the Southern African context, governments often face constraints in capital acquisition and project execution capacity. Leveraging private sector strengths through PPPs thus becomes a strategic imperative (Grimsey & Lewis, 2004). However, the theory also implies that not all partnerships are inherently beneficial, value realisation depends on context-sensitive matching of resources and institutional capability.

Institutional Theory provides critical insight into the structural and normative environment within which PPPs operate. Scott (2001) delineates institutions as comprising regulative, normative, and cognitive structures that shape organisational behaviour and interactions. In PPP arrangements, legal frameworks, cultural norms, and professional practices influence the extent to which partnerships are legitimate, effective, and sustainable. For instance, in countries like Germany and Canada, institutional coherence and transparency have been instrumental in enabling successful PPP implementations (Burger & Hawkesworth, 2011). In contrast, fragmented or politicised institutions, as found in parts of Southern Africa, often result in contract failures, lack of public trust, and limited scalability of PPP models (Makoni, 2018). Institutional Theory thus calls attention to reform processes and capacity development as prerequisites for PPP success.

Equity Theory, as advanced by Adams (1965), foregrounds issues of fairness and distributive justice in social and contractual relationships. Within PPP frameworks, this theory is vital for interrogating how risks, rewards, and responsibilities are distributed among stakeholders. It compels critical reflection on whether PPPs deliver inclusive benefits, protect vulnerable communities, and ensure fair treatment of local contractors and labour. In the Southern African context, marked by historical inequities and developmental asymmetries, equity considerations are non-negotiable. Research by Sibanda and Wray (2022) suggests that without explicit equity frameworks, PPPs risk perpetuating systemic exclusion and reinforcing elite capture. Equity Theory thus anchors the study's normative stance on partnership ethics and social accountability.

Together, these theories create a triangulated analytical framework: Resource-Based Theory elucidates strategic capability mobilisation, Institutional Theory reveals the governance scaffolding that sustains or undermines PPPs, and Equity Theory articulates the justice dimensions necessary for socially sustainable infrastructure development. This interdisciplinary alignment ensures that the study does not merely assess financial viability but holistically considers governance legitimacy and equity imperatives.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand complex phenomena through the subjective meanings and contextual interpretations attributed by individuals and institutions (Creswell, 2013). The interpretivist lens is particularly salient in exploring the nuanced realities of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), as their success or failure is often contingent on socio-political dynamics, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder perceptions rather than purely quantifiable metrics.

The research design follows a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), a rigorous method used to aggregate and critically analyse existing knowledge across diverse academic and policy sources. According to Booth, Sutton and Papaioannou (2016), an SLR enables researchers to collate evidence in a structured and replicable manner, thereby enhancing transparency and reducing bias. This design was chosen for its capacity to synthesise cross-national experiences, particularly those of the UK, USA, Germany, and Canada, and evaluate their applicability to Southern African contexts, including South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The population for this review comprises scholarly articles, government reports, international development agency publications, and grey literature addressing PPPs in both high-income and Southern African settings. Inclusion criteria targeted publications released between 2000 and 2024, ensuring both historical depth and contemporary relevance. Exclusion criteria omitted sources lacking peer review or rigorous analytical frameworks to preserve methodological integrity.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure representation of high-impact literature that aligns with the study's thematic focus. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling facilitates the identification of information-rich cases that offer deep insights into complex issues. Sources were selected based on relevance to PPP efficacy, governance dynamics, and infrastructure finance, including studies focusing on equity concerns and institutional reform.

Data collection was operationalised through a search protocol covering multiple electronic databases, including Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science and Google Scholar. Keywords included "PPP," "public–private partnership," "infrastructure finance," "Southern Africa," "equity," and "governance." Duplicate entries were removed, and titles and abstracts were screened for relevance and methodological rigour. The final corpus comprised approximately 70 documents subjected to full-text analysis.

NVivo qualitative data analysis software was utilised to organise, code, and analyse textual data. NVivo enhances thematic analysis by enabling systematic categorisation and retrieval of data segments aligned with key concepts and patterns (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Thematic analysis itself, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), entails identifying, analysing and reporting recurrent themes within a dataset. This method was instrumental in discerning commonalities and divergences across national contexts, particularly regarding regulatory frameworks, risk-sharing mechanisms, institutional capacity, and community impact.

Overall, this methodology reflects an epistemological commitment to understanding PPPs as embedded socio-technical systems shaped by context, institutional actors, and evolving norms. It privileges depth over breadth and allows for critical interpretation of how lessons from high-income countries may, or may not, be transferrable to Southern Africa's infrastructure landscape.

Data Analysis

The analytic dimension of this study was conducted using thematic analysis, a method well-suited to interpretivist qualitative inquiry due to its flexibility and depth of engagement with data-driven patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enabled the identification, organisation and interpretation of key constructs embedded within the selected literature corpus, thereby revealing not only surface-level trends but also latent institutional and socio-political dynamics. The process followed a reflexive, recursive approach consistent with Braun and Clarke's six-step model, including familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis.

NVivo qualitative data analysis software was employed to support this process, facilitating systematic coding, query functions and thematic clustering (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). NVivo's node classification and matrix functions allowed for the organisation of data across country contexts and thematic variables, enabling a comparative mapping of PPP governance structures, procurement modalities, and equity outcomes. The software's capacity to highlight semantic overlaps and co-occurrence frequencies proved instrumental in identifying how institutional strength correlates with PPP performance across jurisdictions.

Initial coding produced 78 discrete data nodes, which were gradually consolidated into overarching themes such as institutional coherence, regulatory transparency, risk-sharing mechanisms, community inclusivity, capacity constraints, and financial sustainability. For instance, texts from Canadian PPP documentation repeatedly coded into themes of fiscal prudence and life-cycle costing, whereas South African literature more frequently clustered around issues of political interference and administrative bottlenecks (Siemiatycki, 2011; National Treasury, 2021). This variation affirmed the importance of context-specific governance mechanisms and the dangers of generic policy transplants.

Theme saturation was assessed through iterative engagement, with constant comparison used to refine definitions and eliminate redundancy (Nowell et al., 2017). Themes were further examined in light of the theoretical frameworks outlined earlier, particularly Institutional Theory, which provided an interpretive scaffold for understanding the influence of regulatory and normative structures (Scott, 2001). For example, findings related to decentralised PPP adoption in the USA revealed thematic coherence around legal pluralism and stakeholder autonomy, aligning with institutional decentralisation literature (Geddes, 2015). Conversely, equity-related themes, such as marginalised stakeholder exclusion and elite capture, were analysed through the lens of Equity Theory, highlighting asymmetrical power relations and distributive imbalances (Adams, 1965).

Cross-contextual analysis was performed by juxtaposing coded themes across the seven countries in focus. This revealed that while risk-sharing and transparency are commonly cited success factors, their operationalisation varies significantly. In Germany, for instance, risk-sharing is legally codified in standardised ÖPP contracts (Burger & Hawkesworth, 2011), while in Zimbabwe, risk often remains disproportionately borne by the public sector due to unclear policy guidelines (Gumbo & Chikodzi, 2020). NVivo-generated visualisations, including treemaps and cross-tabulation charts, supported these insights by illustrating thematic density and divergence across regions.

Taken together, the thematic analysis underscores that PPP efficacy is not merely a product of financial engineering but an emergent property of institutional design, stakeholder trust and socio-political legitimacy. The data reveal profound disparities between well-established PPP environments and emergent ones, reinforcing the study's position that contextualised strategies are paramount. The analysis also suggests that incorporating community input and equitable risk-sharing into PPP architecture is essential to ensure developmental alignment and long-term sustainability.

Discussion of Research Findings

The cross-national analysis conducted through thematic synthesis reveals that Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) hold potential as strategic instruments to address infrastructure funding gaps in Southern Africa. However, their efficacy remains highly contingent on institutional maturity, governance stability, and the equitable structuring of contractual obligations. Comparative data from advanced economies underscore the criticality of tailored legal frameworks and technical competence, while evidence from Southern Africa highlights persistent obstacles rooted in regulatory fragility, stakeholder exclusion, and politicised implementation processes.

One of the most pronounced findings relates to institutional coherence. Germany's ÖPP model consistently demonstrates success where legal instruments are standardised and oversight mechanisms are well-defined. As Burger and Hawkesworth (2011) emphasise, PPP projects in Germany benefit from strong federal regulations that delineate risk-sharing arrangements and promote accountability. Similarly, Canada's PPP Canada framework exemplifies how specialised agencies can professionalise PPP deployment and ensure methodological consistency in project evaluation, particularly through life-cycle costing and value-for-money assessments (Siemiatycki, 2015). These institutional scaffolds reflect the propositions of Institutional Theory, whereby coherent regulative and normative environments foster predictability and reduce transaction costs (Scott, 2001).

In contrast, South Africa's relatively advanced regulatory framework, embodied in the Public Finance Management Act and Treasury Guidelines, has not translated into consistent implementation outcomes. Project delays, sub-optimal procurement decisions, and capacity constraints persist, undermining policy objectives (National Treasury, 2021; Amadi-Echendu & Rasweswe, 2020). Zimbabwe presents an even starker case, where PPP frameworks are largely aspirational, undermined by macroeconomic instability, limited public sector expertise, and opaque procurement processes (Gumbo & Chikodzi, 2020). These divergent experiences reinforce the argument advanced by Makoni (2018) that institutional maturity, not merely the presence of legal texts, is essential for PPP viability.

Risk-sharing mechanisms also emerged as a pivotal thematic concern. In well-regulated environments like the UK and Germany, risk allocation is explicitly codified and aligned with the capacity of the contracting parties. Shaoul, Stafford and Stapleton (2006) illustrate that despite criticisms of the UK's Private Finance Initiative (PFI), its reforms have improved clarity in contractual provisions. Conversely, Southern African PPPs often exhibit asymmetrical risk distribution, where governments assume disproportionate liabilities due to weak enforcement regimes and limited negotiation capacity (Naidoo, 2021). This dynamic resonates with Resource-Based Theory, which posits that value creation in partnerships depends on the strategic deployment of complementary capabilities (Barney, 1991), a proposition frequently unmet in under-resourced bureaucracies.

Equity dimensions of PPPs were particularly salient across the corpus. Several studies flagged the exclusion of affected communities and the marginalisation of small contractors, especially in Southern Africa. Sibanda and Wray (2022) contend that current PPP models often entrench existing socio-economic disparities, as procurement frameworks favour established firms with political connections. This issue is compounded by inadequate participatory mechanisms, limiting the voices of marginalised groups in infrastructure planning and monitoring. Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) provides an interpretive lens to understand these dynamics, suggesting that perceived injustices, be they distributive, procedural or interactional, erode trust and undermine partnership legitimacy.

Moreover, the data suggest that PPP efficacy is not uniform even within high-income countries. For instance, the United States' fragmented PPP landscape reveals the risks of decentralised governance and regulatory inconsistencies. Although projects such as toll roads and energy infrastructure in states like Texas and California have succeeded, others have faltered due to unclear legal mandates and political contestation (Geddes, 2015; Petersen, 2010). This reinforces the argument by Hodge, Greve and Boardman (2017) that PPPs must be understood as evolving institutional arrangements subject to periodic renegotiation and policy recalibration.

Cross-contextual comparison revealed that countries with institutional alignment, stakeholder engagement and technical proficiency tend to deliver PPPs that are not only fiscally viable but also socially sustainable. However, attempts to replicate these models in Southern African nations often fail due to contextual misalignment. As Chingono and Nakunyada (2016) argue, blind transplantation of global models without adaptation to local political economies perpetuates governance deficits and project failure.

In summary, the research findings illustrate that PPPs are not panaceas but contingent solutions whose success depends on nuanced calibrations of institutional design, equity sensitivity and stakeholder capacity. Southern Africa must resist the allure of PPP orthodoxy and instead commit to iterative learning, policy experimentation and inclusive governance mechanisms that reflect its unique developmental imperatives.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, a suite of interrelated policy, institutional and governance reforms is essential to enhance the efficacy of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Southern Africa. These recommendations respond directly to the barriers identified and seek to translate comparative insights into regionally contextualised strategies.

Firstly, it is imperative that governments in Southern Africa establish or strengthen dedicated PPP units within their respective ministries of finance or infrastructure. These units should be staffed with technically proficient personnel capable of conducting feasibility studies, negotiating contracts, and performing regulatory oversight. As observed in the Canadian context, centralised PPP bodies such as PPP Canada have significantly improved project success rates through technical support and knowledge transfer (Siemiatycki, 2015). Makoni (2018) underscores that without institutional specialisation, PPPs in Africa frequently suffer from fragmented coordination and unclear accountability structures.

Secondly, regulatory frameworks must be updated to incorporate legally binding provisions on transparency, risk-sharing, and value-for-money assessments. Countries such as Germany and the UK have demonstrated the effectiveness of codified procurement law in reducing disputes and improving investor confidence (Burger & Hawkesworth, 2011; Shaoul et al., 2006). In the Southern African context, revisions to legislation, such as Zimbabwe's Joint Ventures Act, should aim to clarify procurement procedures, establish dispute resolution mechanisms, and promote inclusive bidding processes (Gumbo & Chikodzi, 2020).

Thirdly, capacity-building initiatives should be institutionalised in collaboration with universities, think tanks and international development partners. These should include postgraduate training in infrastructure finance, contract law and public sector economics. According to Amadi-Echendu and Rasweswe (2020), South Africa's PPP performance is undermined by technical skills shortages at provincial and municipal levels. Targeted training programmes can cultivate a cadre of professionals capable of managing complex PPP contracts and safeguarding public interests.

Fourthly, equity and community engagement must be embedded in the PPP design and monitoring phases. Governments should mandate socio-economic impact assessments that evaluate distributive effects across gender, income and geographic strata. This is particularly critical given findings that PPPs in Southern Africa have often favoured politically connected actors and excluded marginalised communities (Sibanda & Wray, 2022). Participatory governance mechanisms, such as stakeholder councils or community advisory boards, should be established to ensure that affected populations have agency in infrastructure planning (Chingono & Nakunyada, 2016).

Furthermore, regional cooperation through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) should be intensified to foster harmonisation of PPP standards, promote transboundary infrastructure, and share best practices. The SADC Infrastructure Master Plan (2012) calls for integrated regional corridors and collaborative investment frameworks, yet operationalisation remains limited. Enhanced regional platforms could facilitate pooled procurement, risk underwriting, and cross-country regulatory dialogue (Naidoo, 2021).

Finally, governments should adopt adaptive policy frameworks that allow for iterative learning and flexible contract renegotiation. Hodge, Greve and Boardman (2017) suggest that rigid PPP models often fail to accommodate changing socio-economic conditions, thereby locking governments into sub-optimal arrangements. Southern African countries should institutionalise periodic project reviews, enabling contracts to evolve in response to emergent risks and community needs.

Taken together, these recommendations aim to align PPP implementation with the imperatives of institutional legitimacy, financial sustainability and social equity. Rather than replicating external models wholesale, Southern Africa must pursue a bespoke approach, grounded in regional realities and informed by global lessons, that positions PPPs as instruments of inclusive and accountable development.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the efficacy of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) as a remedy to the infrastructure financing deficits confronting Southern Africa, drawing comparative lessons from high-income contexts including the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, and Canada. Through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and thematic analysis supported by NVivo, the research has demonstrated that PPPs are not inherently effective; their outcomes are mediated by institutional coherence, governance frameworks, risk-sharing protocols and equity sensitivities.

In developed economies, PPPs have evolved through iterative reforms, underpinned by robust legal instruments, specialised technical agencies and participatory procurement systems. The United Kingdom's shift from the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to more transparent models, Germany's legally codified ÖPP structures, Canada's centralised PPP assessment and the United States' decentralised innovations all reflect adaptive governance capacities that embed accountability and flexibility (Burger & Hawkesworth, 2011; Siemiatycki, 2015; Shaoul et al., 2006; Geddes, 2015).

Conversely, PPP implementation across Southern Africa reveals significant disparities. While South Africa exhibits regulatory sophistication, implementation remains uneven due to political contestation, fragmented capacity and limited stakeholder engagement (Amadi-Echendu & Rasweswe, 2020; National Treasury, 2021). Zimbabwe, facing macroeconomic volatility and weak institutional architecture, struggles to operationalise PPPs meaningfully (Gumbo & Chikodzi, 2020). Other regional actors remain at nascent stages of adoption, hindered by inadequate legislative foundations and underdeveloped financial ecosystems (Makoni, 2018).

The application of Resource-Based Theory illuminated the strategic importance of mobilising complementary capabilities from private actors, while Institutional Theory emphasised the centrality of regulative and normative frameworks in enabling or constraining PPP efficacy (Barney, 1991; Scott, 2001). Equity Theory provided a moral compass, ensuring that issues of fairness, inclusivity and social justice were not peripheral but integral to the analytical frame (Adams, 1965; Sibanda & Wray, 2022).

Ultimately, the study concludes that PPPs must be approached not as technical solutions but as governance instruments that require careful calibration to contextual realities. Southern Africa cannot merely adopt global best practices wholesale but must cultivate regionally responsive models that reflect its developmental imperatives, institutional constraints and socio-political complexity. A balance between innovation and equity, efficiency and inclusion, and public interest and private incentives is essential if PPPs are to fulfil their transformative promise.

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