

Dissemination of Survey findings on citizens' needs and stakeholder perceptions on infrastructure projects in Uganda;

PRESS BRIEFING PAPER

Ugandans are concerned with the inadequate consultations especially on centrally planned public infrastructure projects; public works disrupting businesses and in some cases leading to loss of lives and destruction of property that is in often cases not compensated for; poor garbage management, inadequate disclosure on project sites and the use of complex language on disclosure platforms;

These issues were documented from a recent survey by CoST Uganda Multi-Stakeholder Group on citizens' concerns and stakeholder perceptions on infrastructure projects from October 2018 – April 2019. The survey sampled the Central, North and Eastern Regions including citizens, line sector CSOs, journalists, academia, line sector associations, and Central Government.

The study was based on CoST core features of Disclosure, Assurance, Multi-Stakeholder working and Social Accountability.

Findings;

1. 57.4% of the citizens were concerned on the inadequate consultations on Central Government projects and 32.6% had concerns on Local Government projects.
2. Consequent to perceived inadequate engagement, citizens in some cases denied road infrastructure projects the right of way.
3. All the communities engaged complained about infrastructure projects disrupting businesses; in a few circumstances, some infrastructure projects led to destruction of their properties and no compensation would be made.
4. Over three quarters (73.5%) of the citizens were not satisfied with the apparent quality of works on infrastructure projects.

5. There were also concerns about inadequate display of basic project information on site, as well as caution messages; where this was reported to have been done, citizens complained about the location and language used (usually English and/Technical) as well as quality of print did not permit access to the messages by the majority of those the information targeted.

Good Practices revealed by the study;

1. Some public procurement entities had improved on proactive disclosure of information. They were found to have opened-up electronic and user-friendly data formats (websites, social media links, toll free lines and print media).
2. However, majority of the survey respondents were not aware of the procurement procedures for both central (67.2%) and local government (71.6%) public infrastructure projects.
3. Similarly, 64.7% of the surveyed citizens both in rural and urban settings had never bothered to request for any information from data owners. More respondents in Gulu district (53.8%) were aware of the standard procurement procedures compared to those in Wakiso and Jinja districts.
4. Qualitative evidence from this survey showed that residents in Gulu Municipality and Wakiso district have a growing culture of vigilance towards new public projects. There was a good amount of effort to display procurement information on the notice boards for the public to access. And to inform citizens to attend bid opening ceremonies. Interpreters were available at the bid opening ceremonies.
5. Nearly three-quarters (74.3%) of the survey participants mentioned that they had ever seen or were aware of displays of information about certain infrastructure projects in their localities compared to only 3.0% who did not know. Nearly all survey participants could mention/describe some form of message they have ever seen displayed.

The CoST initiative of engaging stakeholders in the infrastructure projects at all project delivery stages was increasingly becoming popular among the stakeholders interviewed at both district and national level, particularly among the large procurement entities (PEs) previously engaged with CoST.

Indeed, expressions of willingness to further embrace the approaches in the infrastructure sector especially at the local government level were made during interviews with district and central level government actors; However, some PEs expressed the need to officially integrate CoST processes and approaches into government policy and programming.

In fact, as evidence of a growing demand for CoST approaches, CoST has recently been invited to conduct assurance process on 14 national level projects in partnership with PPDA through the Africa Freedom of Information Centre, the host organization of CoST in Uganda. This will be the 3rd assurance process for Uganda in addition to the previous 13 projects assured in 2017 and 2018. The 3rd assurance process has been commissioned today the 26th April 2019 and CoST hopes to give the country a 3rd Assurance report in August 2019.

Recommendations

To Government;

Government through Cabinet and Parliament should put in place a policy provision (Formal Disclosure Requirement) to enable disclosure of project and contract information as part of the contracting process. All (40) data points in the CoST Infrastructural Data Standards (IDS) should be proactively disclosed on websites of Procurement Entities, the Government Procurement Portal (GPP) and other platforms including project site information walls and other educative messages such as those intended for health and safety.

Measures should be put in place to protect citizens' rights to access basic user friendly information, and sanctions for non-compliance with set disclosure frameworks should be attached and effected whenever necessary.

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) should work with key stakeholders in citizen engagement and awareness raising and access to information on existing infrastructure developments in the country.

Government through Parliament should put in place measures for Information Management Systems for each Procurement Entity; the government agencies should

be encouraged to fully embrace the multi stakeholder working mechanisms and develop internal user friendly data management and retrieval systems; This should be accompanied by a deliberate and systematic strategy by government to reduce the cost of internet while ensuring that internet coverage is expanded.

Government through Parliament should strengthen the monitoring and supervisory functions of the oversight bodies such as the DEI, OAG, IG, and Parliament among others at all levels to inform joint monitoring and supervision of the work of these agencies to take action on concerns related to mismanagement, citizen participation, inefficiency and delays in the delivery of infrastructure projects which presents risks to corruption.

Government through Parliament should strengthen the role of the Office of the Auditor General to oversee levels of PEs disclosure and compliance with disclosure standards at national and international levels by; introducing a disclosure indicator for infrastructure projects as part of the indicators under the Auditor General's Audits. The same should also apply to Procurement Audits done by PPDA.

The policy guidelines for all sector classifications have not been reviewed for some years, and thus have no provisions for how much and what information should be disclosed by PEs; Government should put in place a mechanism through Ministry of Works and Transport to review sector guidelines to new national settings and international standards.

The Ministry of Works and Transport by law plays the oversight role. It oversees the development of public infrastructure by setting standards, guidelines and procedure for infrastructure projects in Uganda. The same Ministry is mandated to oversee by supervising all infrastructure projects in the country, atleast each District Local Government should have a representative from the Ministry to support this function; by this therefore, Government through Parliament should cause the provision of supervisory services of all infrastructure developments in the country up to the local level as well as increase the supervisory budget for the Ministry of Works to inform this function.

On our side as CoST we will together with government (MoWT) ensure that the local media capacity is fully assessed and addressed to enable them build a strong interest in infrastructure sector by accessing, interpreting and ensuring that the interpreted data is availed to the public in user friendly formats for easier comprehension and usage. CoST will also help in proving the media with training and user-friendly electronic open data formats for the media to easily do this.

To the contractors and consultants;

- Closely work with beneficiary communities and local leaders to increase participation locals, safety of workers and security of construction materials;
- Embrace disclosure of infrastructure data as a norm and ensure constant updates to the citizens on status of projects implementation to build citizen's trust and address unnecessary anxiety from citizens related to lack of information

To the citizens of Uganda;

A better infrastructure is everyone's pride; engage your leaders' to contribute to better delivery of infrastructure projects;

Participating in infrastructure delivery enables the citizens to realize cost-effective delivery of improved and life-enhancing infrastructure.

Communities are able to access work and markets on better roads, drink safe water from quality structures, be educated in well-constructed schools and receive medical care in safe hospitals, without your full engagement and participation; the quality of any of these may be compromised.

About CoST

CoST - An Infrastructure Transparency Initiative is aimed at improving citizen's lives through promoting the use of the Infrastructure Data Standard for information Disclosure, Assurance, Multi-Stakeholder working and Social Accountability.

CoST Uganda is a National Chapter of CoST International a charity based in the United Kingdom. The initiative is built on a tripartite partnership between Government, Private Sector and Civil Society to address the challenges in the construction sector in Uganda. CoST Uganda is Championed by the Ministry of Works and Transport and guided by a Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG) of 9 persons and one observer who lead, plan, engage together to build trust, transparency and accountability amongst the three sectors. In Uganda, the Initiative is hosted by Africa Freedom of Information Centre; a pan African NGO that promotes access to information and open contracting across Africa.