

A CALL FOR INFRASTRUCTURE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Press Statement: For immediate Release

CoST Uganda Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG) calls on the Government of Uganda, Procurement Entities and all stakeholders to prioritise transparency and accountability in infrastructure projects procurement and delivery during COVID-19 crisis.

As the country grapples with managing the effects of COVID-19, there have been unanswered questions relating to **infrastructure transparency and accountability**. At this critical moment, access to every information by citizens is key in the delivery of every service. The experience the country has gone through in the last one -two month vividly explains the growing need to enhance our health sector infrastructure and other critical sectors to enable readiness in times of such pandemics.

The Construction industry has been challenged in these times, especially as the pandemic occurred during the rainy season that have affected road and water transport as well as existing infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and construction sites. This coupled with floods and increased levels of Lake Victoria have escalated the situation. Lack of access to quality infrastructure affects access to key livelihood services like health which is critical during this period.

We commend the government for maintaining and permitting construction of infrastructure to continue as an essential service during the lockdown. However, lack of monitoring and citizen engagement of infrastructure development could affect the quality of infrastructure that is being built in the current lock down; a lot of decisions, quality controls among others are limited to a few stakeholders during this period. This could lead to corruption risks in procurement, project preparation, shoddy work, collision, cost overruns, mismanagement of funds among others.

“As the lockdown continues, construction works continue, but the citizen aspect of infrastructure monitoring and access to information have greatly been affected due to restrictions in movement and the “work from home aspect where most Government officials do not have facilities to do so,”
Hon. Nathan Byanyima, MSG Chairperson, CoST Uganda.

We thus would like to encourage oversight bodies to ensure that there is management of risks that may be caused by these emergencies such as the pressure to spend, increased demand for goods and services, flexibilization of value for money standards and political influence in accordance with the procurement guidelines put up by PPDA for emergency situations. More so, Procurement Entities must remain publicly accountable and transparent through available channels. It is during such times that tools like the <http://eimt.cost.or.ug/#/monitoring-tool> and the <http://www.infra-data.cost.or.ug/> would be helpful to enhance infrastructure monitoring and citizen access to public infrastructure

information and strengthen interaction with stakeholders. It is also important that Government carries forward with all innovations currently being handled post COVID-19 especially in improving health infrastructure and its associated facilities.

The Multi-Stakeholder Group further recommends that;

1. All Procuring and Disclosing Entities with infrastructure projects are called upon to disclose information and safety alerts to the public to reduce anxiety and mistrust and promote ownership. We encourage cooperation with civil society, media and whistle-blowers to enhance access to information and monitoring.
2. To manage the effects of COVID19 and floods, we encourage Government to increase access to quality infrastructure by providing equipment, enabling upgrade, maintenance, renovation of existing affected infrastructure.
3. The Ministry of Works and Transport through the Design Review Board is encouraged to strengthen the review, approval and monitoring design implementation processes beyond project completion, this should be extended to commercial buildings.
4. The Ministry of Works and Transport is encouraged to strengthen its planning and supervisory units to ensure quality infrastructure. CoST promises its continued support through Assurance and where possible support monitoring.
5. The Ministry of Water and Environment and NEMA are encouraged to monitor activities along the water bodies and swamps, drainage channels to prevent risky economic activities and issue timely warning alerts to protect lives and property. NEMA should also monitor implementation of ESIA findings and strategies.
6. PPDA is encouraged to work with the CSOs to monitor and influence compliance with procurement standards. Emergency procurements should be justified, recorded and made public. E-procurement portals should be updated from time to time to enhance competition and access to information.
7. Contractors and consultants' associations are encouraged to supervise/monitor their members to ensure quality delivery of infrastructure projects as well ensure safety of workers on site. The same should be done in the commercial sector vigorously.

Hon. Nathan Byanyima,

Chairperson, CoST Uganda, Multi-Stakeholder Group

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