



What is CoST – the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative

CoST – the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative is the leading global initiative improving transparency and accountability in public infrastructure. CoST Uganda is a national chapter of CoST International, a charity based in the United Kingdom.

Championing Infrastructure Transparency through Community Barazas on Busoga College Mwiru Access Road under Ministry of Works and Transport

CoST works with government, private sector and civil society to promote the disclosure, validation and interpretation of data from infrastructure projects. This helps to inform and empower citizens and enables them to hold decision-makers to account. Our experience indicates that Informed citizens and responsive public institutions help drive reforms that

reduce mismanagement, inefficiency, corruption and the risks posed to the public from poor quality infrastructure.

At the national level, CoST establishes a Multi-Stakeholder Group that guides, leads and builds trust amongst the Government, Private Sector and Civil Society. The National



Programme is overseen by a Champion who promotes its core features of Disclosure, Assurance, Multi-Stakeholder working and Social Accountability across Government and other stakeholders.

The four features of CoST

The CoST approach is focused on four core features: disclosure, assurance, multi-stakeholder working and social accountability. These features provide a global standard for CoST implementation in enhancing infrastructure transparency and accountability. Whilst the standard is universally applied by CoST members, we encourage it to be adapted to country contexts so it is appropriately applied to different political, economic and social systems.

Studies conducted on Citizen participation in infrastructure projects

Findings in a scoping study undertaken by CoST Uganda 2017 revealed that Uganda ranked 26 out of 93 countries with access to information laws in the global right to information rating of 2012, with a score of 98 points out of 150.6. The study further revealed that, whereas the CoST IDS covered 40 data points for proactive disclosure, Ugandan laws/policies provide for 12 data points of which only 20% was being disclosed. According to the study findings, whereas Uganda had an “enabling environment” for the implementation of the CoST IDS, there was still a lot to be done on during implementation of these policies and Government of Uganda needed to adopt

1

Disclosure

The disclosure process ensures that information about the purpose, scope, costs and execution of infrastructure projects is open and accessible to the public, and that it is disclosed in a timely manner. Key to the process is disclosure by projects procuring entities in accordance with the CoST Infrastructure Data Standard (CoST IDS). The CoST IDS requires 40 data points or ‘items’ to be disclosed at key stages of an infrastructure project cycle including: identification, preparation, completion, procurement and implementation.

2

Assurance

We promote accountability through the CoST assurance process – an independent review of the disclosed data by assurance teams based within CoST national programmes. The teams identify key issues of concern in relation to the items listed in the CoST IDS and put technical jargon into plain language. This allows social accountability stakeholders to easily understand the issues and hold decision-makers to account.

3

Multi-stakeholder working

Enhancing transparency and accountability in public infrastructure involves working with different stakeholder groups who have different perspectives and backgrounds, including government, private sector and civil society. CoST brings these stakeholders together through multi-stakeholder groups in each national programme. The groups guide the delivery of CoST and provide a neutral forum for stakeholders to pursue infrastructure transparency and accountability together.

4

Social Accountability

Social accountability stakeholders such as the media and civil society play an important role in holding decision makers to account. CoST works with these stakeholders to promote the findings from its assurance process so that they can then put key issues into the public domain. In this way, civil society, the media and citizens can all be aware of issues and hold decision-makers to account

HIGHLIGHT**CoST**

Infrastructure Data Standard provides for 40 proactive disclosure data points, Ugandan laws and policies provide for 12 data points, but of these, only 20% is currently being disclosed. This is attributed to the lack of a legal framework for disclosure of infrastructure data, lack of tools and standards for disclosure and the general perception of public officials on open data.

a Formal Disclosure Requirement to provide a legal mandate for disclosing data on Infrastructure projects to international best practice.

The CoST Uganda Assurance Team of the 2nd Assurance process in 2018 established that proactive data (40 data points) experienced the lowest levels of disclosure especially at the implementation level and that reference to audit and evaluation reports were not easily disclosed with financial audit reports disclosure standing at 77%.

The Financial audit reports non disclosure information was always incomplete which affected stakeholder access and use to engage. Access to project procurement and implementation data guides stakeholders on advocacy and engagement points, in this case it is deterred by the low levels of disclosure.

Most recently, a study conducted by CoST Initiative in 2018 on citizens needs on infrastructure projects in Uganda indicated that the level of disclosure was still very low with some public data holders having negative attitudes towards disclosing data to the local citizens which had led to negative reactions from the citizens (in form of violent riots). Such negative attitudes are against the Access to Information Act, 20057. These findings further point to the fact that efforts should be made to ensure public officials accept their roles as duty bearers to serve in the interest of the citizens which requires a review of the existing legal and policy frameworks to suit the needs of all the key stakeholders including the local citizens.

The survey revealed that transparency and accountability in public infrastructure sector was an issue of contention for both the technical, political leaders and the citizens as well, and that there was a sharp mistrust between the three entities. Although the proportion of community members who reported having

never been consulted on local government projects was lower (32.7%) than that of the central government

Recommendations

Enact a Formal Disclosure Requirement for Infrastructure projects; to enable disclosure of project and contract information as part of the contracting process and the implementation of CoST core features of Disclosure, Assurance, Multi Stakeholder working, and Social Accountability; Parliament should put in place measures to protect citizens' right to access basic user-friendly project and contract information, and sanctions for non-compliance with set disclosure frameworks should be attached and effected whenever necessary.

Strengthen transparency and citizen engagement on infrastructure projects the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) should work with key stakeholders in citizen engagement and awareness-raising at all levels of project delivery; the CoST methodology of infrastructure transparency Barazas should be enhanced learning from its impact in Wakiso district and Ministry of Works and Transport to create ownership and build trust between Government and citizens.

Demand for increased disclosure and citizen engagement on infrastructure projects; The public should build interest in demanding for increased proactive disclosure and participation at all levels of project delivery. The public should also build interest to use the disclosed information to engage duty bearers to account.

Establish measures for Information Management Systems and access to the internet; Parliament through the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance should fully embrace the multi-sectoral working mechanisms and develop internal user-friendly data management and retrieval systems, in addition, to

open data storage mechanisms for internal decision making. This should be accompanied by a deliberate and systematic strategy by the government to reduce the cost of the internet while ensuring that internet coverage is expanded.

Strengthen monitoring and supervision of infrastructure projects; Government through the OPM should strengthen the monitoring and supervisory functions of the oversight bodies and implementing Procurement Entities to delivery timely phased infrastructure monitoring; Mechanisms to retrieve and act on monitoring reports should be put in place to inform timely project delivery.

Introducing infrastructure project disclosure indicators in the Auditor General's Audits; 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.

Strengthen Social Corporal Responsibility activities; Contractors and Consultants should work closely with beneficiary communities and local leaders through frequent disclosure and updates on the status of project implementation; to increase participation, access to project economic benefits and ease engagements. This will build trust and improve on the relations with the contractors and consultants in order to reduce negative actions from community members.

Conclusion

The policy guidelines for the works and transport sector classifications have not been reviewed for some years (last review was 2005), and thus have no provisions for how much and what information should be dis-

closed by entities; 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.

CoST should 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 can help in providing the media with training and user-friendly electronic open data formats for the media to easily do this.

CoST Uganda Chapter

Hosted by;
AFRICA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTRE

Plot 436/437 Mawanda Rd, Suite A4, Corner House
P. O. Box 35643 KLa, Uganda
Tel: +256(0)414 533 554 | Email: info@cost.or.ug

Twitter: @CostUgChapter | Facebook: CostUganda Chapter
Website: www.cost.or.ug