

Stronger Together: Uganda's multi-stakeholder drive for better infrastructure

Uganda had an estimated infrastructure deficit of about 1.4 billion USD a year which was further exacerbated by losses of nearly 300 million USD per year in inefficient infrastructure spending, according to [figures by the World Bank](#). This helped galvanise Uganda to focus on open governance, including adopting the **CoST approach** to improve both value for money and quality of public infrastructure.

Uganda joined CoST – Infrastructure Transparency Initiative – in 2014 with the membership focused on progressing transparency in road infrastructure. Seeing early success, the approach was expanded to more infrastructure sectors from 2017.

CoST Uganda is used to describe a multistakeholder approach championed by the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Works and Transport and hosted by the civil society through the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC). They work with the **private sector** through including the Uganda National Association of Builders, Suppliers and Engineering Contractors (UNABSEC) and all procuring entities; **civil society** through Transparency International Uganda; and **government** through the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.



Former CoST Uganda manager, Olive Kabatwairwe, hands over the CoST Alfredo Cantero award to CoST Uganda Champion, Minister of Works and Transport, Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala, July 2023.

Key reforms:

This story builds on [Uganda's earlier success](#) by taking a deep dive into the legal, policy, cultural and institutional reforms achieved over the last six years to deliver the cultural and legal change required to further advance better public infrastructure. These include:

1. **institutionalising a culturally rooted participatory mechanism** of barazas to bring together over 3000 citizens face to face with decision makers to influence public infrastructure decisions, leading to the importance of citizen participation in the monitoring of public contracts being enshrined into law (PPDA Act 2021);
2. **securing a government commitment to utilise the CoST international data standard** for public infrastructure and upskilling government officials to disclose over 1 billion USD worth of projects;

- 3. building a culture of engagement and advocacy in using data** to monitor and report on public infrastructure projects, including training the media to publish over 100 media stories on public infrastructure nationally;
- 4. embracing independent review and analysis to identify areas for improvement** and acting on these findings, including two Infrastructure Transparency Index (ITI) and six independent reviews (assurance reports), leading to a **26% improvement in their data publication rate** and **nearly 20% increase in their citizen participation score**; and
- 5. improving fair business practices which increased competition and value for money**, including by influencing legal reforms to the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act and associated legal framework.

Putting local communities at the centre

At the heart of CoST Uganda's success are barazas (a Kiswahili word meaning public forums). In around five years these have brought approximately **3000** citizens face-to-face with decision-makers to build trust, raise concerns and co-create solutions around public infrastructure. For example in Nwoya District, Northern Uganda, community dialogue at a baraza revealed gaps in access to healthcare despite improved road coverage. In response, a family in Mulila village offered land free of charge for the construction of a community health centre.



A baraza meeting in Kampala, March 2025.

Seeing the success of this approach, the Office of the Prime Minister institutionalised the baraza approach to engage communities in government programmes more widely. And in 2021, the importance of citizen participation was legally mandated into the monitoring of public contracts, including infrastructure, through an amendment to the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA) (Amendment) Act 2021.

Barazas have also been instrumental in strengthening Uganda's citizen participation score in the Infrastructure Transparency Index (ITI) **increasing from 13.8% in 2021 to 33.65% in 2024**. This progress shows how a culturally rooted participatory mechanism can be successfully scaled and institutionalised to influence national policy and create real changes to building community services that better meet local needs.

Driving reform through infrastructure data

At the beginning of Uganda's journey towards public infrastructure transparency, Uganda was plagued by low data publication which did not support evidence-based decision making. Since then the Ministry of Works and Transport and CoST Uganda's host organisation, the Africa Freedom of Information Centre, worked consistently with the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) to integrate CoST's internationally recognized data standard (the Open Contracting for Infrastructure Data Standard (OC4IDS)) into Uganda's official national procurement platform (the Government Procurement Portal (GPP)). This was achieved in 2021.

The government has committed to using this standard, and as of 2025, **381** projects have been published on the portal, representing a total value of just over 4 trillion UDX shillings, equivalent to over **1 billion USD**.

Understanding that capability building was fundamental to successful data publication and its use, CoST Uganda implemented a wide-scale training programme. Since 2019 they have trained a total of **1172** stakeholders including:

- **civil society** on how to use published data to monitor infrastructure projects;
- **public officials** on how to publish data and use data modelling in decision making; and
- **journalists** to strengthen investigative journalism related to public infrastructure.

CoST Uganda has always understood that the media play an important role in building accountability around public infrastructure. Therefore they saw a need to increase the number of journalists interested in reporting on infrastructure projects, and then build their capability to use published data to write objective investigative stories on public infrastructure. Building journalists' level of understanding allows them to uncover major stories around corruption, inefficiencies and mismanagement of public infrastructure; shining a light on parts of the sector - such as procurement – which are often inaccessible without technical knowledge.

Since 2020, CoST Uganda's work with journalists has resulted in over **100** media stories published about public infrastructure. This has increased awareness of challenges and solutions in Ugandan infrastructure projects and led to [more entities committing to publish infrastructure data](#).

In 2024, as part of Uganda's ongoing drive for better evidence-informed decision making in public infrastructure, [CoST's new sustainability \(economic, social, environmental and institutional\) and climate finance data points were piloted](#) across 12 road infrastructure projects worth UGX 1.11 trillion, equivalent to around **300 million USD**. Funded by the UK Government under the Responsible Infrastructure Investment campaign, the pilot concluded in 2025 with key findings on how data transparency can enhance the planning and delivery of public infrastructure. Kampala Authority has already committed to reinforcing public participation in the early stages of infrastructure projects and, as far as possible, to applying the new sustainability modules on an ongoing basis by integrating them into the Government Procurement Portal.



CoST Uganda training media representatives, April 2025.

“As a radio presenter, I used my programme to talk about the bumpy roads, and the potholes across the city [...] I also publish the gaps on my social media platforms calling for action. Infrastructure journalism is now part of me and I take responsibility to report any problems in the roads sector in Kampala. I know I have raised awareness and I will continue to speak about these issues, I have seen KCCA has strengthened maintenance and patching of city roads including those I reported on”

Deo Wasswa, Journalist, Capital Radio who took part in CoST Uganda's media training.

Recognising the value of independent review

The multiple stakeholders involved in taking forward the CoST approach in Uganda have demonstrated an openness and commitment to continuous improvement and accountability; actively recognising the value of - and even inviting - public scrutiny through completing: **six** issues-based studies; **six** independent reviews of data (assurance reports) with recommendations, covering **69** projects; and **two** ITIs (Infrastructure Transparency Index) covering **118** projects across 60 entities.

The most recent [independent review of data \(assurance report\)](#) in 2025 celebrated significant progress such as revealing that the Ministry of Local Government's overall data publication (disclosure) rate increased by **26%** between 2017 and 2025, reaching **58%** in 2025.



Site inspection of Busoga Mwiri college road construction works as part of independent review, June 2021.

It also provided useful recommendations and learning for Uganda and more widely. For example despite CoST Uganda's strong track-record with community engagement, their [sixth assurance report](#) provided a stark reminder of the importance of community involvement in project planning when it reported that the Wii Lacor Road in the Northern Region, Acholi Sub region which was originally planned at 5.2 km, had to be extended to 7.9 km due to a right-of-way dispute with local residents who were not consulted. This led to unbudgeted scope changes and cost implications.

The independent review's recommendations included: i) keeping an ongoing focus on community participation; ii) establishing a dedicated contingency framework to ensure uninterrupted access to essential infrastructure data in the Government Procurement Portal during periods of website maintenance/downtime; and iii) creating a national capacity-building programme for engineers to improve institutional and technical capacity in post-construction management of infrastructure assets to improve their lifespan.

In Uganda, the **Infrastructure Transparency Index** (ITI) serves as an evidence-based tool to assess how well public entities manage infrastructure projects; not only benchmarking transparency practices but also stimulating conversations and actions among stakeholders which lead to tangible changes.

Uganda's most recent ITI covered **58** infrastructure projects and displayed an **11%** overall improvement over the previous three years. They achieved a national ITI score of **32.26%** in 2024, indicating strong progress in promoting infrastructure transparency and that recommendations from the previous ITI were acted upon.

“As we celebrate this win, I appeal to all government entities, oversight bodies, and non-state actors to engage deeply with these recommendations, hold us accountable, and join us in driving the transformational change our sector so urgently needs.”

Minister of Works and Transport, Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala, ITI Uganda launch, December 2024.

Promoting fair business practices

Given the high expenditure of Uganda on public infrastructure, there are significant business opportunities for companies. Yet for years, public procurement in Uganda was losing the trust of the private sector. Registered providers fell from **553 in 2017 to just 371 two years later**, whilst the average number of bids per tender was just 1.6.

Companies cited corruption, high costs, and unfair consideration as reasons to stay away — leaving government with fewer choices, weaker competition, and poor value for money.

To turn this around, Uganda launched *“Promoting fair business practices between the government and the private sector”* funded through the UK Government’s Business Integrity Initiative which sought to strengthen emerging markets by combating issues such as corruption and low competition.

CoST Uganda took decisive action to address the challenge. Firstly they showed a strong commitment to collaboration by building relationships with over **150** private sector stakeholders. Continuing from this they held targeted webinars and numerous meetings to raise companies’ knowledge of the procurement framework as well as companies’ awareness¹ on what data is published on the GPP and how they can use it, for example enabling businesses to analyse winning bids to better inform their future bids.

Furthermore, CoST Uganda continued their push for increased data publication, alongside also increasing the interest and capability of the media to investigate and publish stories on public infrastructure. They recognised these were important steps to build trust between Government and the private sector, whilst also increasing the attractiveness of Uganda’s business environment.

“ Procurement agencies told us they used to struggle to get even the minimum number of three businesses bidding for contracts. Without confidence in the system, nobody engages. Information sessions on specific tenders helped to build trust, along with increased disclosure. Now bidders are banging at the doors.”

Gilbert Sendugwa, Former CoST Africa Senior Regional Manager, 2020.



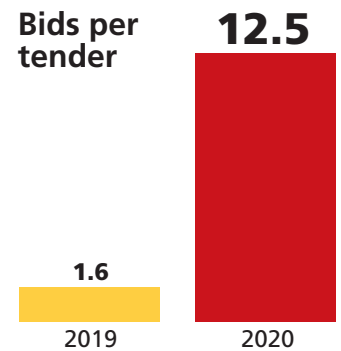
Uganda Hosts Africa regional workshop on private sector, December 2024.



¹ Of the 76 business representatives at a CoST forum in February 2021, only 3 confirmed that they knew GPP existed before the training by CoST Uganda.

Through taking this multi-stakeholder approach to increase trust and fairness in the public infrastructure procurement system, it has helped [increase the number of bids](#).

In addition, through a multi-stakeholder approach led by CoST Uganda and the Africa Freedom of Information Centre, alongside other civil society organisations, pressure was put on the government using evidence gathered during studies to make a call for policy change. This ensured an ongoing conversation between civil society; the private sector including Uganda Association of Civil Engineers (UACE) and Uganda National Association of Builders, Suppliers and Engineering Contractors (UNABSEC); and the Government. This included holding high-level meetings between the private sector and government, discussing private sector challenges during a high-level baraza meeting on Uganda's 4th independent review (assurance report), and ongoing involvement in several government committees working on the national procurement framework by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.



This constant dialogue enabled private sector to exhibit significant influence in making a series of policy recommendations to the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. These resulted in legal reforms to the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act and associated guidelines resulting in:

- halving performance securities (from 10% to 5% of the contract price) and bid securities (from 2% to 1%);
- removing bid validity periods and replacing these with bid declarations; and
- [new government guidelines](#) reserving 15% of contracts awards to Special Interest groups to promote inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities

These reforms help open the bidding process for more – especially small independent – contractors; enhancing competition and value for money.

Awarded for their achievements

The hard work and success of the multiple stakeholders involved in adopting the CoST approach in Uganda has not gone unnoticed; winning the inaugural [CoST Alfredo Cantero Award \(2022\)](#) for promoting transparency, citizen participation and accountability to improve lives through infrastructure. Followed by winning the Basel Institute of Governance's Anti-Corruption Collective Action Award (2023) for their work fighting corruption and promoting good governance in the infrastructure sector through policy reforms and increasing stakeholder participation.

Next steps

Looking ahead, CoST Uganda will continue to work with Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority to expand data publication in the GPP including: incorporating 'decommissioning' and 'operations and maintenance' to cover the full project lifecycle, expanding data collection to CoST's sustainability and climate finance data points, aiming to publish a formal disclosure mandate, and continuing their extensive stakeholder training programme.

For more information about anything in this story please visit the [CoST Uganda website](#), [CoST website](#), or contact [CoST communications team](#).