



Construction Sector Transparency Initiative: Civil Society Engagement

The Construction Sector Transparency Initiative (CoST) seeks to raise the level of transparency in public sector construction. Piloted in eight countries across four continents, CoST has developed a country-led approach to making the global construction industry more transparent and accountable.

Within participating countries, CoST relies on a multi-stakeholder group comprising representatives of the public sector, private sector, and civil society. The use of a multi-stakeholder approach and the mobilisation of voluntary support have proven effective in creating a coalition for transparency in the construction industry at the country and international level.

Giving civil society a credible role at the table on transparency issues is quite a new approach in the construction sector. Typically, the government as purchaser and the engineering profession and industry as suppliers have clearly defined roles and contractual obligations. The role of civil society has generally been limited to consultation with people adversely affected by social, environmental or safety impacts of projects (see CoST briefing note 2).

But civil society organisations are also concerned about transparency and the proper use of public funds, while local community groups are particularly interested in projects designed to meet their infrastructure needs (health, water, education). Acting independently of government and industry, civil society members have an important role as observers and participants in construction. They should be actively involved throughout the project cycle, from planning to ensuring effective implementation. This note reviews the pilot experience with civil society engagement, the main lessons learnt and opportunities to ensure transparency provides for greater accountability in public construction.

Civil Society involvement at the country level

Table 1 shows the composition of the multi-stakeholder group (MSG) membership in each country. It can be seen that professional and business associations participated in the MSGs in all pilot countries. While these are generally organised on a not-for profit basis and therefore conform to a strict definition of what constitutes civil society, their interests may be more closely aligned to those of private industry and they are often regarded as industry representatives.

Table 1: Detailed Breakdown of MSG Memberships

Pilot Country	Government & Regulatory Representatives	Private Sector Representatives	Civil Society Representatives
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Urban Development and Construction Ethiopian Road Authority Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission Public Procurement and Property Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction Contractors' Association Consulting Engineers and Architects Ethiopian Grade I Contractors' Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethiopian Civil Engineers' Association Transparency Ethiopia Birhane Tibebe Art, Health, and Environmental Association
Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development National Audit Office Accountant General Director of Buildings Anti-Corruption Bureau Office of Director of Public Procurement Ministry of Statutory Corporation National Construction Industry Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Malawian Building and Civil Allied Contractors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Malawi Economic Justice Network Human Rights Consultative Committee Business Action Against Corruption African Institute of Corporate Citizens
Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Public Works and Highways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philippines Constructors' Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bantay Lansangan (Road Watch) (Chair)
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau National Construction Council Public Procurement Regulatory Authority National Housing Corporation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Architects' Association of Tanzania Tanzania Civil Engineering Contractors' Association Private engineer (Chair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern for Development Initiatives in Africa Tanzania mines and construction union, Front Against Corrupt Elements in Tanzania Ardhi University



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Pilot Country	Government & Regulatory Representatives	Private Sector Representatives	Civil Society Representatives
Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Construction (Chair) Office of Government, department of sector economy, government inspectorate Steering Committee on Anti-corruption Ministry of Finance, Investment Department, Ministry of Planning and Investment Department of General Affairs, State Audit Ministry of Transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vietnam Association of Construction Contractors Vietnam Federation of Civil Engineering Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vietnam Fatherland Front
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highways Agency DFID 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Happold Consulting Costain RICS Private engineer (Chair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transparency International
Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Works and Supply Office of the Auditor General Zambia Bureau of Standards National Council for Construction Zambia Public Procurement Authority Anti-Corruption Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Association of Building and Civil Engineering Contractors Zambia Institute of Architects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transparency International (Chair) Law Association of Zambia Civil Society for Poverty Reduction
Guatemala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Public Finance Ministry of Communications, Infrastructure, and Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chamber of Construction Chamber of Industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty of Architecture at the University of San Carlos (Chair) Citizen Action (Transparency International)

It is noteworthy that the CoST MSGs and forums have also attracted strong and prominent national representatives of broader civil society. In four countries (Ethiopia, Guatemala, UK and Zambia), civil society was represented through country chapters of Transparency International. In two further countries (Tanzania, Malawi), other local anti-corruption groups represented civil society. Broad development and human rights groups were included in the MSG in the four African countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia), academic institutions represented civil society in three countries (Philippines, Tanzania, Guatemala), while labour issues were represented by the construction workers trade union in Tanzania.

Table 1 also reveals that three countries (Philippines, Vietnam and the UK) had only one representative of civil society on their MSG. In two of these countries there were special circumstances to explain this situation:

Building on existing initiatives

In the Philippines, CoST developed from well-established initiatives, including Bantay Lansangan (Road Watch). The Philippines chose to have a small and tightly knit MSG with only one representative from each stakeholder group. While Road Watch has been the sole representative from civil society on the MSG until recently, it is actually a

network of organisations, including road users, governance advocates, road service providers, national road asset managers, government partners, regulators and enforcers, centres of expertise, and development partners, as well as media representatives. It also supports 101 volunteers in at least 13 regions of the country (Box 1). Participation in the CoST MSG – which has been legalised as an independent body to ensure sustainability - has strengthened these existing networks across user groups and service providers.

Expanding constructive engagement

In Vietnam, civil society is represented on the MSG by the Fatherland Front which is an umbrella organisation based on a mass participation and popular mobilization of citizen groups. Other civil society groups, outside of the Fatherland Front, do exist but their activity is limited. In order to broaden civil society representation, the Vietnam MSG has engaged with a wider group of social stakeholders and invited retired industry professionals to participate in the CoST process. It is also exploring opportunities to include local community members from CoST project areas.

In these ways, CoST has been able to secure the participation of civil society even in contexts where



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legislation may inhibit civil society activity. In Vietnam (as in Ethiopia) where the role of civil society is limited or less established, CoST created political space for dialogue where it was previously lacking.

CoST at the international level

International civil society organisations have recognised the benefits that CoST provides through multi-stakeholder governance and the disclosure of key infrastructure information into the public domain. While there is no international civil society organisation pressing for transparency in the construction sector (comparable to 'Publish What you Pay' in the extractives industry) CoST has sought to reach out to a wide constituency interested in transparency, accountability and multi-stakeholder processes. A number of international CSOs have shown interest and commitment to CoST, including the International Business Leaders' Forum, Transparency International and the ONE grassroots campaign of more than 2 million people.

With the disclosure of key information on construction projects in all pilot countries, interest in CoST has been growing. As a result of the national and international outreach, there are now increasing calls from bodies such as the G20 to increase accountability in construction.

Lessons of experience

Representation of interests

While CoST encourages a flexible approach to the representation of stakeholder groups on the MSG, the independence of CSOs should not be taken for granted. CSOs representing industry and the professions are important but their interests are often close to those of the private sector. Their participation must be augmented by CSOs representing communities and specific social interests. The CoST pilot has shown that civil society is particularly interested in value for money and how funds are used; project selection and location; level of service delivery; distribution of benefits; quality and safety of projects; and displacement of affected communities. Baseline studies that map civil society groups can help to understand the various interests and incorporate them into the MSG and wider accountability efforts.

Capacity building can strengthen engagement and credibility

Civil society engagement needs to take into account the varying capacities and incentives of civil society organisations. Such engagement may require building both technical and governance skills to ensure all stakeholders can play an informed and credible role at the table. In Vietnam, for example, where there was little experience of cross sector engagement, expert facilitation of the initial dialogue was needed to help establish ways of working together.

Representatives on the MSGs may also need help to reach out to the wider community. Civil society investment in time and human resources, including separate capacity building funding and networking, can ensure effective engagement across the sectors, and between the MSG representatives and the broader constituency.

Advancing CoST goals by linking with other initiatives

CoST is only one of a number of current initiatives that aim to improve the effectiveness of public investments in construction. Experience from the pilot suggests that the impact of the programme will be greatly enhanced when it is aligned with these other initiatives. Mapping of other relevant reforms and processes should therefore be part of the baseline study in each CoST country.

Initiatives of particular interest to civil society include the following:

- National and international access to information campaigns: In countries such as Zambia where there are several active transparency initiatives, MSGs and their civil society constituents can draw on their experience and work with local and international advocates for freedom of information to build a coherent call for greater access to information, both in law and in practice.
- Procurement and information management initiatives: The CoST pilot found that procuring entities often lack the capacity or resources needed to integrate transparency procedures into their procurement and information management operations. CSOs that are committed to improving such systems—such as professional associations, Procurement Watch in the Philippines, and the International Records Management Trust—can play a role in constructively challenging and supporting procuring entities and contracting agencies to strengthen their operations.



Box 1: Monitoring by CSOs—experience in the Philippines

Citizen-led initiatives for promoting transparency in public construction have a 25-year history in the Philippines. The oldest, formed in 1986, is the Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), which established itself as the country's pioneer citizen road monitoring group. In 2008 Bantay Lansangan (Road Watch) was formed to work to reduce corruption in the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) primarily through greater transparency.

Road Watch uses tools such as perception survey questionnaires to gather inputs from road monitors and road users for a road sector status report card. They review available records in DPWH units and evaluations of the condition, capacity, operations, and maintenance of national roads and bridges, as well as road safety. Road Watch also measures efficiency through a public expenditure tracking survey designed to monitor whether public funds actually reach communities; the survey collects information on the availability, amounts, and timing of released funds, project implementation, procurement processes, contracting, and performance of contractors and staff.

Getting access to needed information has been a perennial problem for citizen groups: in the field, monitoring the quality of engineering works can be difficult for lay people and difficult without continuous presence at the construction site. Getting information from government offices has also proved difficult in many cases, even though the Philippines Constitution guarantees the people's right to government information. Both CCAGG and Road Watch make extensive use of the media to share documents from government and results from their construction monitoring activities in the field.

Scrutiny by CSOs has contributed to changes from government and contractors in the quality of service delivery. For example, reports shared with the head of the procuring entity prompted DPWH to order the removal and replacement of the segment of the deficient road works. "We give them (government agencies) an opportunity to improve their processes by citing the gaps and deficiencies observed by our monitors," said Jay-Jay Cordova, a procurement observer at Iloilo Graft Watch. "If they do not rectify the procedure the next time we monitor, then we use the same report as evidence when we file a case against them." These taxpayers and beneficiaries of projects, whether technical experts or not, are holding the DPWH accountable and ensuring that projects meet set standards.

- **Social accountability initiatives: Linking CoST information with local community engagement and project monitoring can improve governance and performance in the infrastructure sector.** Disclosed project information may be tracked on an online map, for example, and used by civil society monitors to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of projects on the ground. Information disclosed by procurement agencies on a project's location, scope, cost, and time to completion can be verified in the affected communities. The monitors can share their findings with the MSG and procuring entities to highlight strengths and areas for concern, so as to increase accountability and responsiveness. Such engagement bridges the local communities with the national MSG and procuring entities, and can provide concrete evidence of the value of transparency in the construction sector.

Building demand

Though the scope of the CoST pilot was limited, due to time constraints, to the disclosure of key project information, it became clear that civil society can play a vital role on the demand side to raise awareness and access to information, and engage a wider range of stakeholders in the dissemination and take-up of information. Civil society can strengthen channels to address procuring entities, and build capacity for holding responsible bodies accountable.

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