1. Introduction

CoST has developed a series of Guidance Notes to provide advice to members on how to implement its core features of multi-stakeholder working, disclosure, assurance and social accountability. The notes lay out the key requirements, questions and steps that those responsible for developing a CoST programme need to consider.

The infrastructure sector has a significant social, economic and environmental impact on local communities. Men and women can experience these changes differently. In recognition of the principle of accountability to all citizens for the stewardship of public expenditure, it is important to consider any possible gender barriers to people contributing to and benefitting from accessing affordable infrastructure services,

Male and female actors from CoST Honduras convene following a training event.

as well as the potential for specific negative impacts of construction on women and girls. This also includes seeking equal opportunities in the construction industry itself which traditionally attracts and retains more men than women.[1]

This Guidance Note provides some guidelines that will help members to build their own capacity to model and encourage gender equality, which is primarily focussed on equality of opportunity.[2] It has been designed following the publication of Enhancing inclusive infrastructure: A review of gender equality in CoST Thailand (2020), which presented the findings of an audit studying gender within CoST Thailand.

The experience of conducting the gender audit in Thailand shed light on the need to raise awareness and provide guidance beyond CoST Thailand and mainstream gender considerations throughout the programme. This fits with the intended outcomes of the UNDP project FairBiz – Promoting a Fair Business Environment in ASEAN supported by the UK Government, the ASEAN Economic Reform Programme, which includes the adoption of open and transparent public procurement systems (including infrastructure) and seeks to ensure that the inclusion of women and girls remains a priority.

This note addresses gender equality as a core value and a cross-cutting theme in CoST programmes. It highlights opportunities and challenges in the process of integrating gender equality across the core features of CoST and outlines a self-assessment diagnostic tool that can provide support to programmes and stakeholders in undertaking and monitoring gender equality actions.

Although this Guidance Note is focussed on gender, its considerations could potentially apply to members of any minority or disadvantaged group, such as indigenous people, people with disabilities, and vulnerable populations. As such, this Guidance Note can be used more broadly to help deliver inclusive infrastructure.

[1] Only 12% of UK engineers are female compared to 47% of the overall UK workforce, Engineering UK (2018) Gender disparity in Engineering, available at: www.engineeringuk.com/media/1691/gender-disparity-in-engineering.pdf.

[2] See the UN Women definition of equality, available at: www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm.

2. Gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in CoST programmes

Achieving gender equality is one of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal 5) with targets and indicators set out to ensure equal opportunities and end all forms of discrimination and harmful practices against women and girls. In addition to the gender specific impact, evidence indicates that the promotion of gender equality has multiplier effects across the development spectrum and can help reduce poverty and inequalities, and build resilient societies, cities and institutions.[3]

"Gender mainstreaming is not about adding on a 'women's component', or even a 'gender equality component', to an existing activity. It involves more than increasing women's participation. Mainstreaming situates gender equality issues at the centre of policy decisions, medium-term plans, programme budgets, and institutional structures and processes."

Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.[4]

"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."

Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Anan.[5]

Box 1:

COST POLICY

Gender equality and non-discrimination is a principle stated in CoST's Safeguarding Policy and compliance is mandated to all staff, consultants and beneficiaries of the programme, including those whom we train and who use our services.

To be effective, gender equality needs to be integrated into the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a CoST programme, and should cut across the four core features – disclosure, assurance, multi-stakeholder working and social accountability. A cross-cutting approach creates a common thread and helps remove siloes within different areas of a CoST programme, creating opportunities for promoting inclusion at an early stage.

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[3] UNDP (2019) Gender Equality as an Accelerator for Achieving the SDGs, available at www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-equality-as-an-accelerator-for-achieving-the-sdgs.html

[4] UN (2001) Gender mainstreaming: Strategy for promoting gender equality, available at: www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet1.pdf

[5] UN (1998) Statements and messages, available at: www.un.org/press/en/1998/19980430.SGSM6544.html

3. Gender equality and CoST core features

To help remove the barriers to achieving gender equality and identify opportunities, it is important to consider three key questions at the outset:

1. Why are gender actions needed?

■ Based on the nuances of your context, consider what barriers may exist to gender equality.

■ Think about culture, social norms, traditions, entrenched stereotypes and roles, burdens and duties attributed to men and women that could perpetuate gender inequalities.

■ Think about gender-related policies and regulations applicable to your context and how they could contribute to or detract from gender equality in infrastructure.

■ Consider feasible and achievable ways to address those challenges that fall within the remit of CoST.

2. What are the consequences of not acting? In contexts where there appears to be gender under-representation, consider:

■ The impact of not having adequate gender representation within a CoST programme including the multi-stakeholder group and secretariat.

■ Possible negative outcomes of skewed gender participation in the decision-making process of a CoST programme.

■ How are citizens informed about gender inequalities and opportunities in public infrastructure if the right information is not made public in a transparent way?

■ Whether CoST is likely to contribute to an aspiration of accessible, inclusive, reliable, affordable and sustainable infrastructure that meets people's needs if nothing changes.

3. What is the intended impact of integrating gender equality?

■ Identify the short and long-term objectives to be achieved.

■ How will this contribute towards meeting CoST's long-term aspiration to model gender equity, and what are the pathways to change?

■ Identify the opportunities and actions to achieve these short- and long-term goals.

To guide implementation, specific aspects of each of the core features are considered in more detail below. They should be taken as illustrative rather than exhaustive approaches to achieving and/or sustaining gender equality within the programmes.

3.1 Core feature: Disclosure

Disclosure is the publication of data on infrastructure projects. Data is disclosed by procuring entities at key stages throughout the entire project cycle in the Open Contracting for Infrastructure Data Standard (OC4IDS) or CoST Infrastructure Data Standard (CoST IDS) format. The two standards ensure that data related to the purpose, scope, costs and execution of infrastructure projects is open and accessible to the public and is disclosed in a timely manner. Specified data points or 'items' defined in these standards relate to the identification, preparation, and completion of projects and the tender management and implementation stages of constituent projects.

When formulating a gender equality strategy around disclosure, CoST stakeholders and programme managers have the option of including gender-specific data points to be added to CoST IDS/OC4IDS. Depending on the context and the considered view of the MSG, items to be disclosed could potentially include items such as the proportion of women working on an infrastructure project and whether a gender-disaggregated assessment of needs was carried out as part of project preparation.

Items to be disclosed reactively by procuring entities could potentially include:

- Whether the projects' objectives identify how they will improve the lives of women and girls

- Whether the project is part of a national or sub-national strategy to promote gender-inclusiveness in infrastructure, such as a gender-sensitive procurement policy

- What steps, if any, have been taken in the project design to help address gender inclusion and bridge gender differences that may exist.

Box 2:

GENDER EMPLOYMENT ADDED TO OC4IDS IN HONDURAS

Honduras has an electronic platform - SISOCS - to access infrastructure information. This now includes a data point that requests procuring entities to disclose at project completion the ratio of jobs held by women. This came after the assurance team had noted that supervision contractors collect this information when the project is financed through external funds. The finding was used by the programme to request that all procuring entities commit to disclosing employment information disaggregated by gender, finally resulting in the inclusion of the corresponding data point in SISOCS.

CoST Honduras encourages gender equality across the programme and core features.

Box 3:

CONSULTING WOMEN IN PROJECT DESIGN

Consulting women as part of developing the project design can help to identify safety and security issues.[6] For example, consultations with women's groups in Liaoning, China found that poor lighting, infrequent bus services, and a lack of pavements and crossings were key issues for women travellers. The project design was adapted to improve secondary roads, traffic management, pavements and crossings, public transport services and streetlights. Consulting with women in Lima, Peru led to the introduction of teams of male and female drivers and conductors on public transport.[7]

A family waits at a bus stop in China.

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[6] World Bank (2010) Mainstreaming Gender in Road Transport: Operational Guidance for World Bank Staff – Transport Papers, available at: www.documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/669831468330934298/pdf/569540NWP0Tran10Box353751B01PUBLIC1.pdf

[7] DFID (2013) Social Dimensions of Transport: A resource for social impact appraisals, p15, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/227032/Social_Dimensions_of_Transport_for_externals.pdf

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3.2 Core feature: Assurance

Assurance is an independent review that validates the accuracy and completeness of the disclosed data and uses the data by turning it into compelling information, highlighting issues of concern and areas of good practice. It entails communicating issues both visually and in plain language. By making it easier for all stakeholders to be aware of what is happening, this helps to strengthen accountability mechanisms while allowing decision-makers to be more readily held to account.

When formulating a gender-sensitive strategy around assurance, CoST stakeholders and programme managers can, in consultation with the Multi-stakeholder Group (MSG), consider requesting assurance teams to collect available information on gender equality in relation to a project. This could include ascertaining:

■ whether there is an existing government commitment to the ILO Core Labour Standards, which include provisions relevant to gender issues

■ what mechanisms, if any, are in place to reflect such standards in public procurement policies and practices, and to monitor/ enforce their application

■ whether the bidding documents and contracts explicitly highlight a requirement for equality of opportunity, both in terms of companies bidding for the project and in the processes used by those companies to engage sub-contractors and local labour

■ whether there is a mandated requirement for gender-disaggregated employment data to be kept, and if there is, what that data reveals

■ what policy contractors have in place to protect local residents from gender-related violence by their employees, and the apparent effectiveness or otherwise of such policies and related reporting mechanisms

■ more generally whether contractors provide channels to report wrongdoing, gender-based violence and discrimination against women

■ assessing whether contracts include an explicit requirement for suitable toilet and accommodation facilities to be made available that can be safely used by women in the workforce, and if so, whether they are indeed evident and considered fit for purpose

■ considering the perspective of all stakeholders regardless of gender on project design and implementation and reporting whether these issues have been considered by procuring entities, professional service providers and contractors

■ making reference where appropriate to relevant good practices that procuring entities, professional service providers and contractors could adopt to better assess and meet gender needs.

In some circumstances it may also be helpful to consider:

■ assessing the participation of women-led companies engaging in bidding for contracts and the factors recorded as having contributed to their winning or failing to win those contracts

■ identifying how female participation in the assurance team can be achieved or strengthened without gender bias through activities such as mentoring, training and working with professional bodies to identify potential team members.

Box 4:

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN ASSURANCE

To promote gender equality in the assurance team CoST Uganda includes specific language in the terms of reference and related instructions developed to procure the assurance work that women are encouraged to apply and that a gender diverse team is appreciated for the task.

3.3 Core feature: Multi-stakeholder working

In order to be trusted by all parties, the activities related to disclosure and assurance must be seen to be independent. To this end, multi-stakeholder working brings together government, the private sector and civil society in a concerted effort to pursue the common goal of improving transparency, participation and accountability in public infrastructure. This is typically achieved through an Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG) where each set of stakeholders has an equal voice in leading a CoST programme in accordance with accepted principles. Decisions are made by the MSG are then implemented by the member secretariat.

When formulating a gender equality strategy around multi-stakeholder working, CoST stakeholders and programme managers can, without resorting to gender bias, consider for example:

- provisions in the MSG terms of reference requiring equality of opportunity in the process of becoming a member of the MSG, and a requirement wherever possible to ensure a level of gender balance within the MSG that will contribute to it being perceived by all stakeholders as being a competent, credible and relevant entity

- provisions in the MSG terms of reference to establish a reasonable gender balance in the composition of a member secretariat

- gender equality provisions for recruitment of all staff and consultants

- a regular space to discuss perceived barriers towards gender equality and the potential opportunities to improve the gender balance within the CoST programme

- a gender mapping of the existing opportunities, factors hindering gender equality, and possible strategies for addressing them

- if appropriate to context and feasible, provisions in the terms of reference for the assurance team to encourage gender representation within the team.[8]

3.4 Core feature: Social accountability

Social accountability refers to efforts made to ensure that the disclosed data and assurance reports are taken up and used by stakeholders – especially civil society and the private sector – to help strengthen accountability and deliver practical improvements.

When formulating a gender equality strategy around social accountability, CoST stakeholders and programme managers can for example, in consultation with the MSG, consider:

- capacity building and training activities to encourage participation, engagement and leadership of women

- strategies to encourage female participation during outreach activities, including ensuring that their voice is heard during Q&A sessions. In some limited circumstances it may be helpful to conduct sessions limited to one gender

- actions to discuss the potential, perceived or actual negative impacts of infrastructure projects on the health and wellbeing of local women and girls (including in relation to community trauma and abuse) and how to minimise harmful effects

- creating spaces for women and girls in rural and urban areas to discuss and engage in local economic development associated with infrastructure investment

- establishing gender champions across the CoST programme

- discussing the gender-related findings of assurance reports with procuring entities, with a view to raising awareness of any discrepancies between policy and practice and highlighting the role of data in policy development

- discussing the impact of gender inequalities in digital access and how to bridge these gaps to secure adequate information to women and girls.

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[8] In cases where a marked gender imbalance persists and risks undermining the perceived credibility of a CoST function, consideration should be given to the limited use of targeted measures to achieve gender representation. Such measures should not however entail the dilution of eligibility criteria, or discrimination on the basis of gender.

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Box 5:
AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF WOMEN IN UGANDA

CoST Uganda successfully increased the participation of women in community meetings known as 'barazas'. Meetings are held in easily accessible locations, and potential obstacles to women and girls' presence and participation are addressed through interventions such as the provision of childcare, transport and toilets. The baraza is announced on local radio at least two weeks before the event and notices are fixed in the communities as reminders three days prior to the date. Pick-up trucks with sound systems circulate within the community to promote the baraza and highlight some of the red flags on local infrastructure projects as outlined in a CoST Uganda assurance report. Community leaders are also involved in the mobilisation and promotion of the barazas, which helps to build trust around the event. During the barazas, CoST Uganda encourages women and young girls to voice their opinion by prioritising their questions concerning issues in the assurance report but doing so without excluding other demographics and considering the sensitivities of context. Gender, age and occupation data is collected as well as contact information of participants for any future follow up or engagement.

Women speak out on infrastructure issues at a CoST Uganda baraza.

Box 6:
WOMEN ORIENTED CAPACITY BUILDING IN GUATEMALA

In partnership with USAID, CoST Guatemala developed a series of social audit workshops to build the capacity of young community leaders to monitor infrastructure projects. Gender balance was integrated into the design of the workshops as CoST Guatemala identified and contacted women community leaders to encourage their presence and participation. Gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation was in place to collect and disaggregate data on the participants. In 2019, 209 young citizens attended the workshops, 72% of which were women. In 2020, 180 attendees participated with a 47.77% women presence. Covid and digital accessibility challenges contributed to a reduced participation in 2020, confirming a gendered digital divide and that capacity efforts need to be resilient to avoid short-lived outcomes.


A female social auditor completes training in Guatemala.

Box 7:
PROMOTING ROLE MODELS

In Uganda, Eng. Pamela Acheng has been involved in CoST assurance work since 2017 and CoST managers often use media, digital channels and engagement with procuring entities to discuss the role of women in the infrastructure sector. In 2019, assurance teams in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Ukraine had female engineers as part of the teams. To inspire the next generation, the CoST International Secretariat started publishing interviews with women participating in member programmes.
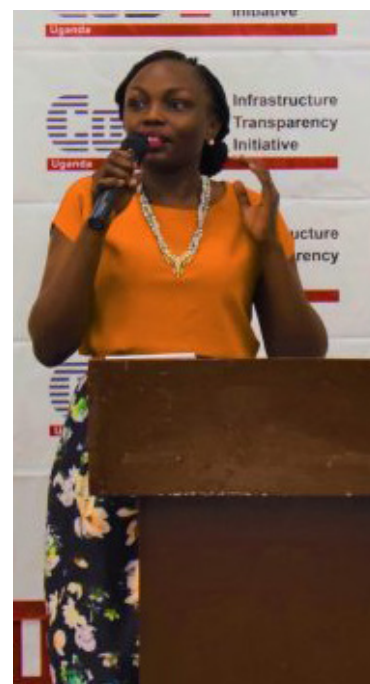
Eng. Pamela Acheng outlines key findings from a CoST Uganda assurance report.

> **Box 8:**
> **ENCOURAGING WOMEN TO STAY IN ENGINEERING**
>
> In 2019, with the support of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, CoST Honduras ran a training course for approximately 25 engineering undergraduates and 10 lecturers. The aim of the course, which entailed two days of classroom-based activities followed by one day on a major construction site, was to inform participants about CoST and train them in the CoST assurance process. Over three days, the course aimed to increase the proportion of undergraduates who stated that they intended to enter the engineering profession. This change of attitude was particularly marked among the female participants, who made up 35% of the total. CoST received anecdotal feedback that the reason for this change of attitude was an enhanced appreciation that CoST had provided about the role played by engineers in serving society through their overriding professional commitment to the public good.

CoST Uganda promotes gender-inclusive infrastructure on its Twitter channel and in the media.

4. A gender diagnostic assessment tool

A self-assessment tool can support CoST members to measure their level of gender equality in their programmes. The following questions, divided in three categories – policies and processes, structure and decision-making, culture and attitude – can guide member managers to understand where they are in terms of gender equality, areas in which they may be underachieving and the potential entry points to establish a gender-focussed approach. We recommend that the diagnostic assessment is developed as a group exercise and combined with multiple stakeholder views. To avoid 'yes' or 'no' answers, a classification system ranging from 0 to 5 can be used to measure the level of implementation and help set priorities for the programmes. An example of a self-assessment tool is included in the Annex.

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Box 9:

KEY STEPS TO ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE GENDER-EQUALITY APPROACH

Actions to consider:

- articulate a clear vision of modelling gender equality to guide the implementation of the programme and the core features
- be open to views from different groups, stakeholders and individuals from both genders, so that your vision of gender equality is holistic, co-created, inclusive, adaptable to context and considers systemic/cultural inequality challenges
- identify where to start, including for example on policies and processes, structure and decision-making, and culture and attitude
- roll out the gender strategy by defining clear and realistic targets and outcomes
- integrate the action plan into the overall strategy of the programme
- develop a capacity assessment as an internal activity or with the support of an external facilitator and identify a staff member to take responsibility for co-ordinating the work on gender equality and monitor progress towards targets and outcomes
- establish a review process to evaluate whether the measures that have been put into place are bringing the intended impact.
- Collect gender-disaggregated data for all programme activities (including its relation to employment and recruitment).

Pitfalls to avoid:

- considering the modelling of gender equality as a 'tick-the-box' exercise
- considering gender equality as a women's agenda
- embedding a gender perspective only in certain core features or areas of the programme
- setting targets that are not specific, measurable, achievable, relevant or time-bound
- failing to disseminate information on the CoST Safeguarding Policy and how the complaint mechanism works
- failing to collect gender-disaggregated data and failing to regularly monitor and evaluate progress and to redesign actions when necessary
- failing to communicate results and to share lessons among various parts of the programme, both horizontally and vertically
- focussing only on 'input indicators' (such as the number of gender-related activities and the number of women and girls that are programme beneficiaries) instead of 'outcome indicators' that describe the intended impact of these efforts (for example changes to the gender balance in decision-making structures within CoST).

As mentioned above, although focussed on gender, many of the considerations of this Guidance Note can apply to members of other minorities and disadvantages groups, such as indigenous people, people with disabilities, and vulnerable populations. CoST programmes are encouraged to use this Guidance Note more broadly to help deliver inclusive infrastructure.

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