

Presidential support drives infrastructure transparency, participation and accountability in Malawi

Our partners at the [Partnership Transparency Fund \(PTF\)](#) have recently [highlighted](#) how their collaboration with CoST Malawi has strengthened infrastructure transparency, participation and accountability in the country. This includes improving the ability of public procuring entities to publish data on their infrastructure investments. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) also use that data to monitor the construction of roads, water facilities and public buildings in their communities. This builds upon an earlier CoST Malawi [case study](#) that highlighted how the Multi-stakeholder Group (MSG) had navigated a corruption scandal, kickstarted citizen and media engagement and was incrementally institutionalising infrastructure transparency into government systems.

CoST Malawi is a MSG convened by the National Construction Industry Country (NCIC) with participants from government, civil society and the private sector that has driven changes in infrastructure transparency, participation and accountability for more than 15 years. Members of the MSG are:

- **Government:** Ministry of Transport and Public Works, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Office of the Director of Public Procurement, Buildings Department.
- **Civil society:** Malawi Economic Justice Network, Human Rights Consultative Committee, African Institute of Corporate Citizenship (AICC), Media Institute of Southern Africa (Malawi Chapter), World Bank (Observer), Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi.
- **Private sector:** Malawi Building, Civil Engineering and Allied Trade Association, Business Action Against Corruption, Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Malawi Engineering Institution.



This story builds on the MSG's earlier success by taking a deep dive into the impact its collaboration with the PTF has achieved with the financial support of the European Union (EU) including:

- **the importance of securing the support of the President of Malawi to make 'openness of infrastructure projects a norm,' including his role in passing legal reforms to mandate data publication based on CoST infrastructure data standard;**
- **improving the quality of the published data by integrating the OC4IDS into an informational platform and promoting this platform through 47 lobbying and awareness raising events alongside training officials on how to use it. These actions led to publication of data on 612 projects from the roads, water and public buildings sectors;**
- **using television and social media to engage up to 50,000 members of the public to understand the importance of infrastructure transparency;**
- **engaging journalists, including through the creation of an award to celebrate journalists whose reporting has influenced actions on infrastructure projects;**
- **trained 94 CSO, media representatives and public officials on how to use data to monitor public infrastructure procurement, enabling them to hold government institutions to account for example by highlighting non-compliance by contractors.**

Presidential support

In April 2021, the MSG secured the highest level of political support with the appointment of the President [HE Dr Lazarus Chakwera](#) as the [CoST Malawi Champion](#), the first Head of State to take on this role.

President Chakwera described CoST as a "blessing," and said an "openness of infrastructure projects must be the norm and not an option." President Chakwera's role as champion bolstered official support for CoST Malawi's work. The President has been keen on ensuring CoST Malawi thrives, receiving briefs and reports on the sector every three months and discussing them with the MSG.

At the launch of the [Information Platform for Public Infrastructure in Malawi \(IPPI\)](#) in July 2022, the President issued a directive requiring all procuring entities responsible for planning and implementing infrastructure projects to publish them before 31st August 2022. This directive provided the impetus for procuring entities to comply with the Public Procurement Act 2017 and supporting regulations that mandated the publication of data based on the [CoST Infrastructure Data Standard](#). This was a key stepping stone in institutionalizing infrastructure transparency into government systems with data on over a hundred new infrastructure projects published.

The President's office remains committed to overseeing improvements in infrastructure transparency and have developed a plan with CoST Malawi to sustain the publication of data on the IPPI by all procuring entities, ensuring citizens can access useable data to understand how their taxes have been used to deliver infrastructure in their communities.

Improving the quality of the published data

Hosted by NCIC, CoST Malawi re-designed the IPPI to incorporate the [Open Contracting for Infrastructure Data Standard \(OC4IDS\)](#). The OC4IDS supports the publication of open data in a standardised format enabling stakeholders to use the data to better understand the performance of the sector. The new platform was promoted across Malawi through 47 lobbying and awareness raising events with NCIC leading the training of officials from 53 out of the 61 Procuring Entities responsible for delivering public infrastructure. By 2024, data was published on 612 projects via the IPPI including from all the entities that were trained.

The upgraded platform also includes an [analytical dashboard](#) which analyses the published data in real time, helping stakeholders to access insights and evidence on project performance. As entities publish data, analytics produced by CoST Malawi have revealed which projects had missing data, the procuring entities that suffer from recurring delays in delivery and which firms are winning contracts. The data dashboard provides an interactive, easy-to-navigate interface with powerful visualisations that add value to the project data being made on the IPPI platform.

“ The IPPI is regarded as a source of information for media and CSOs. The platform is relevant to the national aspiration of transparency and accountability in public services delivery. With the platform, public officials will find it hard to collude and syphon public funds through non-existent projects.”

EU project mid-term Evaluator's report.

Using the media to promote IPPI

Launched in May 2023 in the presence of almost 100 stakeholders in person, and 30,000 people virtually, the IPPI is seen as a beacon of increased transparency for Malawi. Shortly after the event, the Minister of Information issued a directive requiring all Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to designate Public Relations Officers who would be responsible for publishing data on the IPPI, in line with the OC4IDS. Several entities complied with the directive and appointed information officials.

Since 2021, CoST Malawi has used live television and social media (Facebook) to attract citizens from all walks of life to participate in various interventions and demand accountability on infrastructure projects. They host a quarterly programme on the most watched TV station in Malawi, often engaging between 30,000-50,000 viewers. In one panel discussion, the Minister of Transport and Public Works, Honourable Jacob Hara participated, responding to citizens' concerns. This television and social media engagement is in addition to using mainstream media to increase civic knowledge and engagement.

To further boost advocacy efforts, a media prize was designed by CoST Malawi to celebrate journalists who report, and influence actions, on published infrastructure projects. Now in its 10th year, the most recent award was won in 2023 by a local journalist who wrote a story about the poor workmanship of the construction works at a hostel building at Mzenga secondary school in Nkhata-Bay. The building had developed cracks and was not habitable. Following the publication of the investigative journalist piece, the Nkhata-Bay council implored upon the contractor to redo the construction works at their expense and improve project supervision. The media further published a story on the government's lack of transparency in the construction of a martyr's memorial centre in Nkhata Bay District, Northern Malawi. This led to the government publishing the data on this project through the IPPI.

The growing increase in demand for transparency in Malawi across the media, CSOs and private sector continues to generate a lot of traction. Businesses that previously operated in silos, including financial institutions, are more openly discussing their contribution in the infrastructure development in Malawi, and the government has indicated its commitment to open spaces for conversations around reforms on private sector participation in public infrastructure delivery. These reforms have so far led to the election of a full composition of three private sector representatives on the MSG, where for many years the CoST Malawi MSG was composed of one private sector representative.

Training civil society to monitor infrastructure procurement

Alongside training procuring entities on how to use the IPPI, the African Institute of Corporate Citizenship trained 94 CSO and media representatives and public officials on how to innovatively monitor public infrastructure procurement processes using data from project contracts. Some trainees said they were empowered with advocacy and lobbying skills to question methods of project delivery, while government officials committed to sustaining the knowledge and skill they gained from the training.

“ We have been empowered in terms of advocacy and lobbying. From a programming point of view we can now comfortably handle and pursue governance projects.”

Global Hope Mobilization (GLOHOMO) Lead.

“ We will sustain the awareness raising campaigns, not only to contractors but to other key stakeholders like construction consultants.”

Ministry of Transport and Public Works, after their staff undertook training.

There has been a tangible impact of the training, with CSOs who attended then using the knowledge and skills they developed to influence the relevant government institution and procuring entity to introduce improvements to the delivery of three different sports facilities:

1. The quality of the National Aquatic Complex in Lilongwe was improved when the Ministry of Youth instructed the contractor to fix cracks in the building walls. The cracks were spotted by the GLOHOMO, a CSO who had been trained to monitor the construction of the 5,000-seater complex. CoST Malawi informed the Ministry of Youth about the CSO’s observations who responded positively by issuing the instruction and publish missing data about the project on the IPPI.
2. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development appointed a site engineer to help improve the quality of construction of the Mzimba Stadium. This followed the Communities in Development Activities (COIDA), a CSO who had been trained, identified gaps in the construction of the 20,000-seater football Stadium. **Monitoring visits** observed slow and poor-quality construction and lack of site supervision. Lobbying meetings and **media engagements** with the Mzimba district



council influenced the National Construction Industry Council (NCIC) and the Department of Buildings in Malawi to institute an investigation on the issues identified in the monitoring report. The NCIC also issued a stop order to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development on grounds of failure to engage registered consultants as Malawi laws demand. The engagements influenced the ministry to make changes, appointing a site engineer who introduced performance management controls into the project, ensuring reported defective work was fixed. The NCIC then lifted the order.

3. The Government commenced refinancing of the Griffin Saenda indoor stadium following CSOs identifying stalled construction works and design deficiencies. The 2,500 seated capacity stadium was constructed to facilitate an Africa Union netball tournament in 2022 and was destined to host future indoor games in Malawi and across the region. The 2022 games were held in an incomplete structure that would later be abandoned. Following advocacy work by CoST Malawi based on the evidence of the CSOs, the government commenced refinancing to complete construction.



CSO monitoring was also a catalyst for improving the sustainability of a new high profile six lane motorway in Lilongwe that will connect Parliament, Kenyatta drive, Kenyatta interchange and Mzimba drive. This motorway will reduce travel time from the city centre to the old town from 60 minutes to 10 minutes and include a dedicated cycle lane and pedestrian walkway. Construction works had not considered protection of the ecosystem and as a result, trees were cut down and logs were abandoned along the roadside. Stormy waters and soil that often would be held by the trees, had no catchment zones and this caused seasonal floods and dust in the dry spell. The pollutants from the roads became a health risk to the surrounding communities. After CSO engagement, the Roads Authority and Ministry of Transport and Public Works and the City Council developed a plan that included producing desks for schools from the abandoned logs and mandatory planting of trees along the motorway lanes.



Finally, trust between a district council and citizens was improved when CSOs trained by AICC highlighted to Mangochi Council that a contractor was not complying with the contractual obligation requiring citizen engagement. The CSOs were monitoring the construction of a new market, a new community school and a water and sanitation project that was partly powered by solar panels and hoped to improve the lives of 16,500 households. Following meetings between the CSOs and the Mangochi district council, the contractors were instructed to comply with the contract and consult with project beneficiaries. Citizens were provided with information to facilitate ongoing monitoring as construction progressed. This, helped to improve trust between the district council and citizens to facilitate the smooth delivery of the projects.



Conclusion and looking ahead

CoST Malawi has used the multi-stakeholder approach to improve the transparency, participation and accountability of infrastructure. This includes partners running training on publishing data, and on using published data to monitor infrastructure projects. Tens of thousands of people were then reached using television and social media. This has led to more infrastructure data being published and increased capacity within civil society to use that data to hold procuring entities accountable for their infrastructure projects. Procuring entities have responded, including fixing poorly constructed sports facilities. Importantly, engaging the President of Malawi, Dr. Lazarus Chakwera, as the Champion of CoST Malawi has contributed to sustainability of their work, and institutionalising infrastructure transparency into government systems.

CoST Malawi will be building on this work by:

- monitoring procuring entities to ensure they are publishing the required data;
- training officials to publish data and reviewing the IPPI to assess the quality and usefulness of the data;
- implementing the new CoST climate finance modules, using the prototype and guidance note.

Lastly, the CSO monitoring has helped the MSG to understand in more depth why procuring entities do not publish infrastructure data including the lack of designated officials to publish data, weak capacity on how to collect and upload data, and staff turnover. The MSG will be working on addressing these challenges.



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