

Minutes of CoST Board Meeting No.56

18 to 20 March 2025

PARTICIPANTS	
Board	International Secretariat (IS)
Rajiv B. Lall (RBL), Chair	Joanne Coysh (JC)
Kittidej Chantangkul (KC), Private Sector	Manuel Gonzalez (MG), CoST IS
Rueben Lifuka (RL), Co-opted	John Hawkins (JH), CoST IS
Petter Matthews (PM), CoST IS	Evelyn Hernandez (SH), CoST IS
Gloria Patricia Rincón Mazo (PR), Government	Olive Kabatwairwe (OK), CoST IS
James Mwangi (JM), Private Sector	Justine Wharton (JW), CoST IS
Claire Schouten (CS), Civil Society	Melina San Martin (MSM), CoST IS
Eyasu Yimer (EY), Civil Society	
In attendance	Observers
Chrik Poortman (CP), Special Advisor	Laurianne Povey (LP), FCDO
Isaac Aidoo, CoST Sekondi-Takoradi (Item 1)	Shiv Humfrey (SH), FCDO
Chanon Chamnankit, CoST Thailand (Item 1)	

	Discussion & decisions	Resp.	Deadline
Item 1. Chairman's welcome and opening remarks			
1.1	<p>CP was unable to travel to London but joined the meeting remotely from Washington DC. It was agreed that RBL would Chair the meeting.</p> <p>RBL welcomed those present in London and those joining on-line. He referred to a successful meeting with FCDO that was held prior to this meeting. Further details were shared during the meeting and are summarised under item 9.</p>	N/A	N/A
1.2	<p>Isaac Aidoo, Manager of CoST Sekondi-Takoradi and Nitiyaporn Imjai, the Secretary of the CoST Thailand MSG, were invited to make presentations, having been winners at the Annual CoST Awards held in London on 27th</p>	EH	June 2025

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	February 2025. The presentations will be shared with Board Members. The board thanked them for their presentations and congratulated them on their awards.		
Item 2.	Approval of the minutes & matters arising – Papers A & B		
2.1	The minutes from the 55 th meeting were approved as accurate.	N/A	N/A
2.2	It was clarified that point 3.4 in paper B the action list is related to the agreement with the US Department of State.	N/A	N/A
2.3	MoU between CoST and EAP is finalised and approved.	N/A	N/A
2.4	FCDO has requested an independent review. The IS will prioritise the review and then continue with the development of the strategic plan once it is complete.	N/A	N/A
Item 3.	Safeguarding		
3.1	The IS was asked by a Member MSG to carry out a review of an externally funded project that fell under its auspices. The request followed allegations made by public officials. An experienced regional consultant was appointed to carry out the review. The CoST manager was eventually exonerated and the review explained that she had been unfairly treated. The review also reported that the original allegations appeared to be vexatious.	N/A	N/A
3.2	This experience demonstrated that it is a challenge for the CoST to safeguard those involved in CoST activities at a national level. They operate in a different jurisdiction and will usually be subject to the conditions of a contract of employment.	N/A	N/A
3.3	EH proposed re-structuring the Safeguarding policy as different sections address different policies and procedures including whistleblowing, complaints, equal opportunities, procedure to respond to concerns and a code of conduct. Some changes of language are needed e.g. survivors rather than victim. The policies and procedures will be updated for the next Board meeting.	EH	June 2025
3.4	The IS will also carry out due diligence with Members who receive grants to ensure they are able to observe and comply with the policy.	EH	July 2025
3.5	Clarity is required on the legal obligations of individual Trustees. It is also important to have the right culture. Organisations often identify persons of trust that individuals can approach that go beyond the formal focal points.	EH	June 2025

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3.6	The updated policies and procedures should be adaptable where possible to the context. The Board should be guided through the final version on their legal obligations and the procedure if there was a complaint against individual trustees.	Next meeting	June 2025
Item 4.	Risk register		
4.1	The risk register was recently updated to reflect the changing political landscape and any increased financial risk. Normally the top five or six risks are shared in the financial report, but it is sometime since the Board saw the full register.	N/A	N/A
4.2	The risk register should be less dense and more of a 'living' and operational document.	N/A	N/A
4.3	Safeguarding risks should be separate from health and safety.	JH	June 2025
4.4	The register should be re-structured to present a summary of each of the top three or four risks in each category. The governance sub-group should take a greater role in reviewing the risk register.	JH	June 2025
4.5	The register should consider the implications of changes in the anti-corruption, climate change, diversity, equity and inclusion landscapes.	JH	June 2025
Item 5.	Board Membership		
5.1	Oleksii Sobolev formerly stepped down as a Board Member representing government on 31 December 2024. The election for his replacement will take place over the next three months. The new trustee representing government will be elected in the LATAM region.	PM	June 2025
5.2	The Board approved the re-appointment of CS for a second three-year term representing civil society.	N/A	N/A
5.3	The Board approved the terms of reference (paper G) for a Special Advisor to the Board. It also approved the appointment of CP as the Special Advisor.	N/A	N/A
Item 6.	Membership policy		
6.1	The Board is supportive of the proposed Membership policy including a single membership category. It requested changes to the final policy, including the three commitments under the eligibility criteria, being moved to the application process.	EH	April 2025
6.2	An alternative formal arrangement may be required if there are legal concerns about an MoU. The website can be updated to reflect the single membership category, and the	EH	TBC

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	policy can be fully operational, once it receives final approval.		
6.3	The performance monitoring policy will be updated to be consistent with the Member policy.	EH	September 2025
6.4	The Member policy may need to be updated to reflect the independent review findings.	EH	December 2025
Item 7.	Applications to join CoST as a Member		
7.1	The Board approved the application from Zambia to join CoST as a Member. The application was submitted by the National Construction Council (NCC), a parastatal, with a letter of support from the Minister of Infrastructure, civil society and the private sector.	N/A	N/A
7.2	Zambia has recently joined the Open Government Partnership which will help to provide a broader platform for engagement. The work plan includes an action to learn from the National Construction Industry Council in Malawi which hosts CoST Malawi. NCC is required to retain a list of infrastructure projects and has a monitoring team that they will be trained to carry out the CoST assurance process. A formal letter from the Board to be sent to NCC including a request to share more information on civil society engagement.	EH OK	April 2025
7.3	The Board approved in principle, the application from the city of Cali in Colombia. It was recommended that the applicant clarifies the day-to-day point of contact, how the current legal framework enables the publication of data on infrastructure investments and that a strategic plan is developed. The application is based on a commitment in an OGP action plan that gives confidence about the seriousness of intent. A letter from the Board will confirm these points.	EH MG	April 2025
Item 8	Financial report		
8.1	The Board approved the financial report including the expenditure for 2024 and the budget for 2025.	N/A	N/A
8.2	The Board was supportive of the new budget framework based on six objectives. It would like additional information on the activities behind the objectives and how this links to the income from the different sources of funding. It would also like to understand if it could be further developed within the context of the MEAL framework.	N/A	N/A

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8.3	The Board would like clarity on the overspend on Member grants as indicated in Annex A for the report.	SH JH	N/A
8.4	The Board passed on its thanks and best wishes to SH for his hard work in supporting CoST over the last nine years.	N/A	N/A
Item 9	Member performance		
9.1	<p>Member performance is categorised by three levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding performance consistently exceeding expectations and demonstrating results. Meeting expectations where performance meets the standards expected of members Needs improvement where performance is not consistently meeting expectations and further development is necessary. 	N/A	N/A
9.2	The Board agreed that letters will be sent to CoST Thailand, CoST Jalisco, CoST Sekondi-Takoradi and CoST Malawi congratulating them on their outstanding performance.	EH OK MG	April 2025
9.3	The Board agreed that letters will be sent to CoST Uganda, CoST Kaduna, CoST Nusa Tenggara Barat, CoST West Lombok, CoST Panama, CoST Guatemala, CoST Ecuador, CoST Dominican Republic and CoST Costa Rica on meeting expectations, recognising their achievements and proposing improvements.	EH OK MG	April 2025
9.4	The Board approved letters to CoST El Salvador, CoST Bogota and CoST Mozambique indicating that improvements are required.	EH OK MG	April 2025
9.5	The Board approved a first formal review of CoST Ethiopia due to its poor performance based on the performance policy procedure. The CoST Ethiopia MSG to be informed.	EH OK	April 2025
9.6	<p>The Board recognised that the rise of populism and authoritarianism represented a challenge to CoST, especially to MSGs. The changing geo-political context is likely to challenge CoST's principles and values.</p> <p>It will be necessary to review how we position and communicate what we do, without compromising our principles and values. This will be a relevant question in the context of the independent review and the strategic plan.</p> <p>We will also need to consider how we engage with populist and authoritarian governments.</p>	JH PM JW EH	Nov 2025

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Item 10	Theory of Change and Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning		
10.1	The theory of change (ToC) has developed over the years until the current version that was included in the business plan. JC has been engaged to carry out a review of the ToC to identify if any changes are required and the extent to which it is being used to capture change.	N/A	N/A
10.2	The early findings from the review of the ToC indicate that whilst it captures the majority of changes that are expected, it has not been used internally as a management tool and it needs to be more accessible to an external audience. There is also a lack of understanding of the type of impacts that Members should be aspiring to achieve. Managers also struggle to understand the ToC and to map how change occurs within their context.	N/A	N/A
10.3	The next steps are to engage with Members to help them develop locally owned ToCs. These can also be used to inform the global ToC.	MSM JC	
10.4	The Board emphasised that improving MEAL and communicating impact was a priority. CP indicated that this might need to be prioritised over an increase in membership. The IS will review the budget to see how it can increase the resources in MEAL.	JH PM JW EH	May 2025
Item 11	Partnering with the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office		
11.1	The Board was informed of a successful meeting between RL, CS, PM and JH with a senior Director at FCDO who expressed FCDO's continued support for CoST. FCDO were interested in CoST's relationship with the US Department of State and its engagement with the private sector. There was also discussion around framing CoST around efficiency, economic growth and digital.	N/A	N/A
11.2	The Board was informed of the different mechanisms that CoST is partnering with FCDO. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The annual core funding that is made available via the FCDO Green Cities and Infrastructure Programme. • A project funded through FCDO's fiscal transparency team that is testing new data points aimed at promoting transparency in the selection and appraisal of projects. The funding is part of 	N/A	N/A

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	<p>FCDO's Responsible Infrastructure Investment Campaign.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying how CoST can bring added value to FCDO's GCIEP Deep Offer Countries such as Ghana, Mozambique and Indonesia. Promoting CoST's tools and standards through a UK Expertise Offer which may lead to the delivery of technical assistance by CoST to an FCDO partner government. Delivering a regional workshop in Latin America aimed at the private sector with funding from the UK Embassy in Panama. 		
11.3	LP reiterated FCDO's support for CoST and the proposed plan for 2025-26. The Board thanked LP and SH for their on-going support.	N/A	N/A
Item 12	Independent review		
12.1	The Board was made aware of the UK Government's decision to reduce official development assistance (ODA) from 0.5% of GNI to 0.3% by 2027. This may have implications for CoST despite FCDO's continued support for the organisation. The recent suspension of CoST's agreement with the US Department of State, plus other bilaterals reducing ODA spend means that CoST will need to identify different funding options within the next 18 months. This may include mobilising private and institutional investment.	N/A	N/A
12.2	The Board endorsed a proposed independent review to be commissioned by FCDO. The purpose of the review is to evaluate how successful CoST has been in utilising FCDO resources over the last five years. It will also look forward to indicating how CoST can develop a sustainable operational model that optimises impact given the current funding context. The findings will be used to inform the FCDO business case for potential future funding of CoST, and will also inform the development of the strategic plan. The Board will be consulted as part of the independent review process and be informed of the timeline.	JH	June 2025
Item 13	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and theories (SWOT) analysis		
13.1	The Board and the CoST IS team were split into two breakout rooms to conduct a SWOT analysis exercise.	N/A	N/A

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13.2	<p>The strengths included a strong brand and international recognition and influence, with a robust value proposition and the right combination of skill, knowledge, professionalism and purpose-driven leadership across the Board and the IS.</p> <p>There is a high degree of trust among funders, with a long-standing relationship with the FCDO, and strong multi-level partnerships and networks with a diverse regional presence.</p> <p>The IS has regional expertise and enjoys the trust and respect of members.</p> <p>The organisation's international and decentralised structure allows for diverse perspectives, wide geographical coverage and localisation.</p>	N/A	N/A
13.3	<p>The weaknesses included inadequate risk assessment on the international operation, underexploited sources of revenue and sometimes inadequate capacity of CoST Members were discussed as current weaknesses.</p>	N/A	N/A
13.4	<p>It was discussed that the offer to non-members should be made clear and communication strengthened.</p> <p>Impact monitoring and communications were identified as areas for improvement, as well as the need to ensure consistency in the use of the brand locally and across member geographies with greater recognition of local partners.</p> <p>It was agreed that the IS can benefit from stronger internal communications and systems to enhance the monitoring function and create stronger decision-making processes around prioritisation. overcome the challenges of non-reserved funds. We also need to build an unrestricted reserve fund.</p> <p>The need to promote a learning and knowledge culture was highlighted to prevent critical knowledge from being concentrated among a limited number of key individuals.</p> <p>The Board also highlighted the need for Board Members to make a better use of the available resources.</p>	N/A	N/A
13.5	<p>The opportunities included strengthening private sector relationships to increase influence and mobilise funding. The growing demand on investment and climate for growth and development, particularly around digitalisation and</p>	N/A	N/A

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	<p>technology, was also discussed as an opportunity to harness interest and diversify CoST's offer.</p> <p>The general increase in demand for high-quality information and the opportunity to leverage the use of technology were discussed as potential catalysts.</p>		
13.5	<p>The threats included political instability in some member countries was discussed as a threat that disrupts operations.</p> <p>Changes in the international development environment pose challenges around funding related to priorities and technology shifts, which might increase competition from other organisations with a similar mission.</p>	N/A	N/A
13.6	The CoST IS will use the results of the SWOT analysis to inform the strategic plan and independent review.	JH	On-going
Item 14	Funding partners		
14.1	Earlier in the meeting the Board had been informed of the current funding relationship with FCDO and the US Department of State. It was also informed that the current funding arrangements with GIZ and the World Bank had ended. The IS will open the question on future GIZ funding after the German coalition government has been formed. The current agreement with IADB ends in May but it is anticipated that a time extension will be agreed.	N/A	N/A
14.2	Further engagement with the African Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Asian Development Bank should be considered as part of a fundraising strategy.	N/A	N/A
14.3	The Board advised that a dedicated person on fundraising and business development might be required. It also advised on prioritising funding the international programme. IS to identify how this could be achieved.	JH PM JW EH	June 2025
Item 15	Any other business		
15.1	<p>Future Board calls will take place on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29 April 2025 at 13.00 BST possibly as part of independent review consultation • 25 June 2025 at 13.00 BST when the Annual General Meeting will be held • 22 September 2025 at 13.00 BST and • 24 November 2025 at 13.00 GMT. 	JH	April 2025

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	JH to send out Teams meeting invites.		
15.2	There is likely to be an in-person Board meeting later in the year. Board Members may also be asked to visit Member programmes. The CoST IS will inform the Board Members at the earliest opportunity.	CoST IS	May 2025

These minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Rajiv Lall

18 June 2025

Rajiv Lall
Chair

Date