

PROJECT LAUNCH REPORT

Introduction

The project launch was held on 8th March, 2021 on Zoom Platform and Facebook Live. The Project Launch marked the official start of project activities to promote greater public infrastructure transparency and accountability in Malawi. The launch was also an opportunity for individuals from the public, private and non-profit sector to appreciate project's scope and goals, and for the media to seek a fuller understanding of what the project will achieve and how it will impact the Malawian people.

Prior to the launch a documentary was developed with the aim of providing some background to the project partners and the issues the project seeks to address. The documentary, which featured some of key stakeholders in the public infrastructure development, was played during the virtual launch and lasted 6.32 minutes.

The launch started at 2.00pm Malawi time and was presided over by Mrs. Martha Kwataine, Presidential Advisor on CSOs and NGOs.

The 8th March, 2021 was Women's Day. The panel had a good representation of women.

Attendance

A total of 69 people had registered on Zoom prior to the event. However, 56 participants were able to join on the launch day. The Facebook live was followed by 7 people during the launch but the number of people who have engaged with the Facebook Live footage during the reporting period are 65 (and counting). The CoST Malawi Facebook has received more likes in the past three weeks. These likes can be attributed to the launch and other recent media articles on the launch (to a large extent) and CoST Champion.

Excerpts from the Speeches

Lyford Gideon, CoST Manager

Mr. Lyford Gideon observed that the country has been crying for transparency and accountability in the public infrastructure for so long and this project could not have come at a better. He pointed out a few public infrastructure projects which are riddled with controversy. He indicated that a multi-stakeholder approach to dealing with teething problems facing the sector was an ideal way of solving some of the challenges, and CoST is founded on this bedrock.

Felix Lombe, CEO AICC

Dr. Lombe started his remarks by observing that the guest of honour came from the CSO sector and the project will rely on her support in order to move forward. He also noted that cases of corruption are high; public procurement were still opaque and the CSOs didn't have the capacity to engage in the sector due to its technical nature. He also noted that capital injections in the infrastructure sector are huge; hence, the need for monitoring.

Linda Phiri, CEO NCIC

Ms. Phiri first narrated how CoST Malawi was formed. CoST Malawi was formed in 2008 as one of the pioneering countries. She attributed the formation of CoST Malawi to the political will that existed at the time. She then extolled some of the gains that have been made since CoST operations in Malawi. Some of the gains included the disclosure provisions in the PPDA act which make it incumbent upon the public procuring entities to disclose procurement data, including intention to award contracts, which were identified as some of the barriers to transparency in the sector way back during CoST's formative years in 2009. CoST also produces Assurance Reports which targets public construction projects in order to identify issues affecting the projects. Some projects with cost and time overruns were curtailed due to the assurance studies.

Evelyn Hernandez, CoST IS

Evelyn began by congratulating the project partners for the launch. She then discussed some of the activities CoST is engaged in Malawi whose aim is to encourage procuring entities to avail data in order for CSOs, media and the citizens use.

Richard Stern, President PTF

Richard started by introducing the work that PTF is engaged in since its establishment 20 years ago. He indicated that PTF uses Citizen Based Approaches (CBA) in its programming and supports CSOs to hold government accountable in public health and municipal councils/government. PTF also supports Citizen monitoring and believes that it is one way of encouraging transparency with respect to public financial management. The current project is situated very well in the PTF's focus and builds on similar work conducted in Ukraine and Moldova. He indicated that this project's activities involve learning by doing so that the project beneficiaries are given a chance to demonstrate what they have learnt. In summing, he thanked EU and the project team for the event.

Janet Mortoo, EU Delegation to Malawi

Janet reminded the audience about the President's mantra, clearing the rubble. She pointed out that there is a huge window of opportunity in the current administration. Going forward she sees CSOs as key in monitoring the usage of public resources and expenditure in public infrastructure projects. However, she bemoaned the lack of impact of most capacity building efforts in the sector. She implored the project partners to make a difference so CSOs and the citizens are able to conduct the monitoring exercises even after the project is over.

Bertha Phiri, Acting CEO, MEJN

Bertha welcomed the initiative on behalf of the CSOs in Malawi. She underscored the importance of this project considering the gaps in knowledge that exist in the CSOs. She also indicated that the project resonates well with MEJN and other CSOs which are regarded as watchdogs.

Nations Msowoya, Head EU/ACP Unit

He began by congratulating the consortium for winning the award but warned that more is expected. He pointed out that the sector has very few players despite a huge chunk of government budget is spent in the sector. He underscored the need for awareness and capacity of CSOs and people of Malawi so that they can hold public agencies to account. He noted that the consortium has a regulator which makes the project interesting since errant contractors can be disciplined if they are found to have disregarded some regulations.

He further implored the CSOs to follow the path taken by the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) which has set the bar in so far as holding public officers to account.

In closing, he noted that the government logo was missing on the communications.

Joe Ching'ani, CoST Malawi, MSG Chair

Joe began by introducing the Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG) highlighting some of the members and observers. He indicated that construction is key to the development of any country agreeing with other speakers before him that the construction sector is riddled with corruption and fraud. He highlighted the role media and CSO can play in increasing citizen engagement in the infrastructure by making good use of the IPPI platform, thereby instilling confidence and trust in the public systems if cost and time overruns were no longer an issue during the construction process.

He also sees transparency as an opportunity for all citizens to scrutinize public procurement processes. Coupled with the prevailing political will he believes that this project will help the country to open a new chapter in so far as good governance is concerned.

In closing, he thanked the EU for the support before inviting the guest of honour to launch the project.

Martha Kwataine, Presidential Advisor

Mrs. Kwataine indicates that she was greatly honoured to launch the project. She pointed out that the project resonates well with the current administration which stood on the platform of anti-corruption. She sees a lot of value in CSOs monitoring the infrastructure projects due to the wastage and dubious dealings. She lamented the loss of people's lives due to poor workmanship and dubious contracts. She called on to NCIC to reign in on the errant contractors so that there is sanity in the sector.

She indicated that government welcomes the project and there is need to put the grant funding to good use. She also appealed to CSOs to use the training and other opportunities through the project so that the project addresses the pressing needs at the grassroots level.

Plenary Issues

The major issue that took center stage was the need for assurance that politics will not stand in the way of project considering that a government agency is involved. The Presidential Advisor provided the assurance.

Some participants wanted to know the modalities for selecting CSOs and also how the project will make sure that CSOs outside the major cities are involved.

Feedback

Emails

Dear Kenneth,

~~Congratulations for launching this long-awaited project. Our nation needs such project to raise the level of accountability not only in the construction industry but in all sectors. It is so timely as it has come when the political will is high due to the change of government which we have. Keep up the good work and I pray that this project will be an example for the other sectors to emulate.~~

~~Wishing you all the best!~~

~~Roreen Mzembe~~

Dear Sir,

~~Thank you so much for the invitation to the launch we learned a lot of things that will allow to polish up our proposals before submission.~~

~~Kind regards~~

~~Gladys Mwale~~

~~Chief Executive Officer,
Malawi Institute of Procurement and Supply,~~

Zoom Chat

~~This is an excellent launch. Well done CoST~~

~~Benedicto Kondowe, CEO Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC)~~