Honduras
CoST Honduras

A case study by Oxford Insights. Commissioned by Hivos’ Open Up Contracting program. February 2020

Citizen engagement and participation is a key ingredient for building accountability, driving improvements and innovation, and increasing trust between actors within the public contracting process.

This case-study is part of a larger study that explores and compares the direct results and benefits of this citizen engagement and participation, and the various strategies adopted by different open contracting initiatives to achieve these benefits. The complete study and results are found [here](#).
Sources
For this case study, Hivos interviewed staff in CoST Honduras (CoST-H), CoST’s international secretariat in London (CoST International), within the government of Honduras and in other anti-corruption organizations in Honduras. We reviewed CoST Honduras’s annual assurance reports and other documentation available on their website, as well as World Bank reports, news articles, and reports from other research and advocacy institutions.

Context and Beginnings
Honduras joined the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative (CoST International) in August 2014, nine months after the election of President Juan Orlando Hernández. Hernández had extended the rule of the National Party by taking over from President Porfirio Lobo. The party’s return to power in 2009 appeared to mark the end of a moment of deep political uncertainty. That year, the military had helped remove the reforming Liberal Party president Manuel Zelaya from office. He had sought to hold a referendum on changing the constitution so that he could pursue a second term as president.¹

Neither Zelaya nor Lobo’s presidential terms notably reduced the residual corruption in Honduras. As the noted expert on global corruption Sarah Chayes puts it, ‘corruption is built into the functioning of [its] institutions.’² In 2013, the year of Hernández’s election victory, Transparency International (TI) reported that Honduras remained ‘plagued by widespread corruption, criminal activities and impunity.’³ Similarly, the Bertalsmann Transformation Index 2012 said that governmental attempts to limit corruption were popularly seen as ‘mere burnishing campaigns for by the political elite’.⁴ Honduras ranked 140th out of 175 countries in TI’s 2013 Corruptions Perceptions Index, while its percentile rank in the World Bank’s Control of Corruption indicators that year was 18.03.

Honduras has seen a ‘rapid growth in investment in large-scale infrastructure’.⁵ In such circumstances, offering private companies contracts to build major projects becomes a convenient way for corrupt officials to reward associates and to direct public funds to themselves.⁶ City mayors, for example, may ‘[promote] infrastructure projects that their own companies participate in implementing’.⁷ The Fondo Vial (Road Fund) scandal, exposed by CoST in 2017 and explored below, also shows this dynamic. By 2011, this road maintenance body was

---
frequently awarding contracts to companies controlled by criminal gangs, allowing the funds to be siphoned off.

Alongside this corrupt activity, public access to infrastructure contracting information was poor, making it difficult for citizens, the media and civil society organizations to know what the proper results of an infrastructure project should be. Projects were frequently delayed, poorly constructed or simply ‘never completed.’

In part as a result of this corruption, the state of infrastructure in Honduras at the time of the CoST initiative compared relatively badly internationally. The WEF Global Competitiveness Index 2013-4 ranked Honduras 115th out of 148 countries in terms of its infrastructure quality, and also listed corruption and an inefficient government bureaucracy as the main barriers to doing business in the country.

Project development
Within this context, shortly after taking office, President Hernández announced a new anti-corruption strategy, with infrastructure named as one of the five important areas to target. The Honduran government invited CoST to begin work in summer 2014, with the aim of increasing transparency on infrastructure projects. Its founding Memorandum of Understanding was signed between civil society organizations, including the national chapter of Transparency International, private sector advocacy groups, and three government bodies: the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Services; the Presidential Directorate of Transparency, Modernization and State Reform, and the Institute for Access to Public Information. A government ‘champion’ was named: the then-Minister for Infrastructure, Roberto Ordóñez.

The Honduras chapter follows CoST’s global approach. Firstly, it is built around a multi-stakeholder group (MSG), containing civil society, private sector and governmental representatives. The MSG’s role is to inform CoST’s decisions and approach, and to identify issues in specific projects to pursue at the national level.

Secondly, CoST lobbies for the disclosure of infrastructure-related contracting information. In Honduras, this has resulted in the introduction of a 2015 executive decree requiring that government bodies publish all data listed in the CoST Infrastructure Data Standard. CoST Honduras also worked with the World Bank to establish SISOCs (Sistema de Información y Seguimiento de Obras y Contratos de Supervisión, or Information and Monitoring System for Works and Supervision Contracts) in 2015, an online portal through which nine government

---

8 Interview with interviewee P9, 2019; interview with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019; interview with interviewees P17 and P24, 2019.
12 The Open Contracting Partnership have been working with CoST International to develop a new Open Contracting for Infrastructure Data Standard which will be introduced on SISOCs; Fernz, B. (2019). The #OC4IDS: A new standard for infrastructure transparency. Open Contracting Partnership: https://www.open-contracting.org/2019/04/17/the-oc4ids-a-new-standard-for-infrastructure-transparency/.
entities publish their contracting data (including project cost, contractor and duration). The portal expanded to cover data on public-private partnerships (PPPs) in 2018.\(^\text{13}\)

Thirdly, CoST runs assurance on selected projects, assessing how much information has been disclosed for those projects, evaluating their performance and isolating cross-cutting issues. CoST Honduras has released six assurance reports since 2015, with each focusing on a different set of projects. The most recent, for example, only examined PPPs. Importantly, CoST involves citizens in its assurance efforts, offering training on monitoring projects in person and interpreting contracting data published on SISOCS.\(^\text{14}\) At the beginning of CoST’s engagement, they brought together Citizen Transparency Commissions (CTCs) that had separately been doing similar monitoring work, helping them work together to share their approaches and expertise.

Finally, CoST follows up on its assurance reports by promoting social accountability. CoST Honduras’s ‘social accountability school’ provides online training for citizens, journalists, businesspeople and local government officials, or NGO workers, on how to read a contract and understand the procurement cycle. The aim is to increase the ability of a wide section of civil society to identify potential instances of corruption, mismanagement and waste, raise these issues publicly, and advocate for solutions or reforms.\(^\text{15}\)

**Project goals**

Our interviews with current and former CoST Honduras allowed us to reconstruct and summarize their goals at the start of the initiative:

1. Influence and encourage the government to consistently publish more data on infrastructure contracts, expenditure, and construction progress.
2. Help increase the capacity of citizens to understand infrastructure contracts and delivery, so that they can publicize where projects are being poorly managed or money is lost to corruption, and pressure the government to act.
4. Ultimately, reduce corruption and waste in the infrastructure sector, and ensure that citizens can access higher-quality infrastructure.

---


\(^\text{15}\) Interviews with various interviewees, 2019
Impact

Impacts on Civil Society

Citizens have become more active in monitoring infrastructure projects. This is arguably the most basic measure of CoST-H’s success. Having spent time, money and resources in training citizens to track the progress of projects, and encourage citizens’ advocacy, finding no evidence of increased citizen engagement would represent a serious failure. CoST-H reported, however, that they have witnessed a ‘cultural change’ among citizens, with people demanding more contracting information from the government.\textsuperscript{16} CoST-H have trained 550 citizens to monitor projects and 175 to use SISOCS.\textsuperscript{17}

An explicit focus on education and training has assisted this. Part of CoST-H’s training for citizens is through the School of Social Audit Infrastructure (Escuela de Auditoria Social en Infraestructura, or EASI), though it should be mentioned that EASI’s focus is broader than just training local community monitors. They also train journalists and civil servants, for example. The EASI staff we spoke to were positive about its effects on educating people about public procurement and the regulations governing it in Honduras. When citizens are more aware of the procurement rules and processes, they are better placed to engage in the process and to advocate against corruption. In the interviewee’s words, ‘People are now empowered to know when something is done correctly or not’.\textsuperscript{18}

Citizens are beginning to self-organize their own approaches and responses to problematic projects.\textsuperscript{19} That is, locals are not only using the skills they have learned from CoST-H’s training (for example, examining individual contracts) under CoST-H’s direction. Their independent efforts have included the ‘Social Audience for Infrastructure’, a volunteer group organized ‘autonomously’ that follows CoST-H’s approach,\textsuperscript{20} and citizen ‘monitoring network[s]’ in three municipalities that track road projects, inform CoST-H about the problems they notice, and call for government bodies to solve these issues.

One example further demonstrates citizens’ increasing desire to demand transparency from the government, and their capacity to do so. A group of citizens wanted to assess an ongoing road project, but were able to find no public details on it. They quickly wrote letters to a range of government authorities, informing them that transparency laws had been broken. The citizens insisted not just that they received the relevant information, but that it was also made public. The government acted on this the next day. To CoST-H, this stood out as a ‘very empowered action’ and a clear symbol of their progress in the country.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Interview with interviewee P9, 2019.
\textsuperscript{17} Open Contracting (2019). Bedrock for better public infrastructure in Honduras. Open Contracting Stories. Available at: https://medium.com/open-contracting-stories/bedrock-for-better-public-infrastructure-in-honduras-1e3952610045
\textsuperscript{18} Interview with interviewee P24, 2019.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
CoST-H and citizens’ monitoring groups have successfully challenged and changed poor practices on specific projects. Of course, increased citizen engagement and careful monitoring have little value if they do not result in improved infrastructure and more efficient project management. CoST-H staff cited the example of a CoST-H assurance team and citizen monitoring group visiting a road construction project and discovering workers burning asphalt in open containers by the roadside. This practice was specifically prohibited in the contract as it is a health danger. The assurance team reported this to the construction company, who made sure the asphalt burning stopped, and introduced new policies to prevent the issue recurring.  

On another project, CoST-H’s team realized that construction workers were working without hard hats or high-visibility jackets. With access to the project documents, CoST-H quickly demonstrated that this was a contractual violation, and were able to force the required changes.

However, it is not clear how widespread such changes are. In these two cases, CoST-H’s direct interventions, partly driven by citizens’ monitoring groups, have resulted in tangible changes to projects that have helped protect individuals. From the evidence we have seen, however, we are unable to make claims about the frequency of such cases. For example, contractors possibly recognize that small concessions are easy ways to buy political capital without their having to tackle the sources of large-scale wastage.

In the case of training for citizens it is also hard to get a formal assessment of impact. One interviewee involved in the training school EASI stated that they do not as yet have a ‘success measurement tool’, but collect anecdotal evidence from the stories they hear from participants. The interviewee did believe that, on the basis of this evidence, ‘the impact is in fact much bigger than what we expected initially’.

**Impacts on Government**  
According to CoST-H’s own measures, government entities have become more transparent since CoST-H began work in 2014. For each project examined in an assurance report, CoST-H counts how many of the data points in CoST International’s Infrastructure Data Standard are available through SISOCS. These data points refer to things like the name of the project, the name of the procuring body, and the project cost. CoST-H makes an initial count (proactive disclosure), asks the government body to upload any missing information (reactive disclosure), and then calculates the percentage of possible data points finally disclosed.

Before their first assurance report, CoST-H rated overall disclosure at just 27%, across 51% of all projects in online government procurement databases. In the First Assurance Report, in 2015, average disclosure for the specific projects considered began at 85%. It rose to 95% in 2018 (Fifth

---


23 Interviews with interviewees P10 and P11, 2019.

24 Interview with interviewee P17, 2019.
Assurance Report; also including data from the government’s central open data portal, Honducompras), and fell again to 69% in the sixth.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1}
\caption{Rates of disclosure in Assurance Reports 1-6.}
\end{figure}

CoST-H say that the lower proportion in the sixth report is a result of only focusing on PPP projects: presumably, it is harder to get information from the private companies who commission or run public-private partnerships. As this shows, however, the variable results are apparently partly explained by different projects being assessed in different reports. To provide more support for the case that transparency is increasing, the methodology should take into account every project in the SISOCs database. Nevertheless, as this measure effectively tracks compliance with the 2015 executive decree demanding projects-related transparency (see next section), this is a useful measure, and the high scores are promising.

When we spoke to an interviewee from another anti-corruption CSO in Honduras, they confirmed that open government, including open contracting, has had ‘a very clear and specific positive impact’ on transparency in procurement.\textsuperscript{26} They said that civil servants now better understand ‘the rules and regulations surrounding contracting and procurement processes’, that open contracting has contributed to this, and that the effect has been especially noticeable in the infrastructure sector.\textsuperscript{27} Much of this can be attributed to CoST’s work.

\textbf{CoST Honduras have helped to introduce a number of regulatory changes.} The first was the 2015 executive order that demanded that all government bodies publish infrastructure-related

\textsuperscript{25} Source for figures: CoST assurance reports available at \url{http://costhonduras.hn/recursos/aseguramiento/}.
\textsuperscript{26} Interview with interviewee P25, 2020.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
data on the SISOCS platform, itself designed by CoST with the World Bank.\textsuperscript{28} Since nearly all of CoST-H’s subsequent monitoring and assurance activities require information published on SISOCS, this is arguably their most important far-reaching impact on procurement processes.

Others have followed. In one case, CoST-H’s assurance monitors realized that the project design for a road paving project had not considered how communities in the road’s path would be resettled.\textsuperscript{29} The project had been delayed without the issue being resolved. CoST-H subsequently ‘worked closely with the Ministry of Infrastructure’ to develop a requirement that all new infrastructure tenders would include resettlement provisions.\textsuperscript{30}

Elsewhere, CoST-H discovered that some projects suffering particularly severe delays had designs that had not been updated for 14 years. They successfully lobbied for new rules that all public contracting bodies must present updated project designs before going to tender.\textsuperscript{31}

CoST-H are apparently wary of getting directly involved in the procurement process. This is ‘risky’, one person said. In particular, it seems they are careful not to be associated with specific contract award decisions: ‘we don’t want to open the envelopes’, they continued.\textsuperscript{32} This suggests that transparency-focused lobbying should focus on providing advice on processes, regulations and best practices, without transparency advocates being connected to how specific projects are delivered. Ultimately, the government must remain accountable for this.

More radically, CoST-H have helped identify grand corruption, resulting in a reform to the structure of government. One of CoST-H’s most notable successes is their role in the dissolution of the Road Fund (Fondo Vial). This was the government body tasked with maintaining all Honduran roads. By 2011 it had been ‘captured’ by organized crime gangs and corrupt politicians, who collaborated to set up ‘ghost companies’ to win tenders from the Road Fund, and siphon off the funds.\textsuperscript{33} In 2017, the central government intervened, closing down the Road Fund and moving its mandate to INVEST-Honduras, the body that oversees major infrastructure investments.

A government interviewee stressed that this was ‘only possible because of two reports’, one of which was CoST-H’s Second Assurance Report.\textsuperscript{34} Building on strong prior suspicions of corruption, this found that the Road Fund disclosed just 52% of the required information proactively, and when prompted, provided only a further 13%. The La Prensa newspaper also

---


\textsuperscript{29} From the evidence available, it is not clear how many citizen monitors were part of this assurance team, if any.


\textsuperscript{32} Interview with interviewee P9, 2019.

\textsuperscript{33} Interviews with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019.

\textsuperscript{34} Interviews with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019; the second report referred to here was published by the Honduran chapter of Transparency International, ASJ. It found that the Road Fund was not contracting competitively.
cited the poor disclosure rate in the Second Assurance Report as a cause of the reform.\textsuperscript{35} Following the report’s publication, CoST-H’s MSG widely publicized the findings, building pressure on the President to shut down the fund.\textsuperscript{36} Here, then, CoST-H’s reporting and advocacy directly led to an anti-corruption reform.

Although these landmark cases point to evidence of impact on corruption, some of our interviewees were more cautious about the effects of CoST-H’s work. In one interview with a member of a different CSO, it was stated that there has been a positive overall trajectory, but corruption levels remain high. This interviewee further highlighted that although there have been important changes to legal frameworks for public procurement, these laws are not always well enforced.\textsuperscript{37}

Finally, CoST-H’s work has led to a ‘huge cultural change’ in government.\textsuperscript{38} Government interviewees described a significant change within the government, with staff working hard to meet the new requirements to disclose information on SISOCs. Before these changes, it was simply not in the ‘DNA’ of the government to disclose data to such an extent. One person even described this shift as ‘shocking’ in its extent, putting ‘everyone on their heels’.\textsuperscript{39} As this suggests, it has been difficult to adjust the speed of the change.

Some interviewees outside the government spoke more positively about the change in culture. One interviewee stated that one of the major shifts has been that civil servants now have a better understanding of open contracting and the laws they need to follow, as well as understanding that procurement is an ethical issue. Nevertheless, they also stressed that ‘nothing has become easy’.\textsuperscript{40}

**Enabling factors**

Central government support was crucial to CoST-H’s early successes and growing influence. Multiple interviewees emphasized the importance of ‘political will’ and a favorable administration as CoST-H began its work: in the words of one person, the center of government, including the presidency, has been CoST-H’s ‘champion’, and this ‘investment’ has motivated those working with CoST-H (members of the MSG, for example).\textsuperscript{41} CoST-H has also benefited from close relationships with government officials: a ‘good rapport’ gets ‘results’ and provides quick access to information.\textsuperscript{42}

Other crucial relationships have been with sites of good practice within the government. The well-regarded INVEST-Honduras, for example, helped by directing funds from the Millennium Challenge Corporation to CoST-H. Beyond the material impact, however, this encouraged the

---


\textsuperscript{36} Interviews with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019, 2019.

\textsuperscript{37} Interview with interviewee P25, 2020.

\textsuperscript{38} Interviews with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with interviewee P25, 2020.

\textsuperscript{41} Interview with interviewee P9, 2019; interview with interviewee P11, 2019.

\textsuperscript{42} Interview with interviewee P9, 2019; interviews with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019.
government body to properly understand CoST’s aims and methods, thus legitimizing their work.\textsuperscript{43}

Of course, CoST International was to set up CoST-H by a relatively young presidential administration, perhaps keen to appear to be tough on corruption as a way to gain early political capital. Governments react to incentives before them at particular political moments. While one interviewee said that they believed that the current ‘strong political will’ was resilient,\textsuperscript{44} governmental support can always be fickle as administrations’ incentives change. So far, however, CoST-H seem to have benefitted from the government’s interests.

\textbf{CoST-H has a strong public reputation and the ability to mobilize the press.} If there is always a risk of a less supportive government, CoST-H must be able to exert influence in other ways. One interviewee referred to CoST-H’s ‘influence on public opinion’ as having grown to the extent that they ‘have a brand now’.\textsuperscript{45} Attracting media attention is a crucial element, as demonstrated by CoST-H’s response to the Road Fund corruption controversy. Their ability to gather press attention to their Second Assurance Report, exposing the Road Fund’s poor disclosure rate, helped make the issue politically pertinent.

CoST-H’s emphasis on public dissemination also combines well with their training work: they run a specific, 5-week training program for journalists on how to conduct investigations using open data. One interviewee reported that running this training has sometimes been a challenge because few journalists are used to using data in their work.\textsuperscript{46} CoST-H also runs a media award to incentivize journalists to work with this procurement data.\textsuperscript{47} One such winner, Josue Quintana, had investigated the effects of a new toll road on local communities, using ‘CoST’s assurance reports and the SISOCS database to write the story’.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{CoST-H build good relationships with other transparency-focused citizen groups.} From the beginning, CoST-H has worked to incorporate and expand already existing organizations into their network of advocates and multi-stakeholder groups, rather than operating in isolation. As discussed above, once CoST-H’s engagement had been announced, separate Citizen Transparency Commissions began collaborating and focusing on infrastructure. One interviewee said that EROC (Espacio Regional de Occidente, or Western Regional Space), one such organization in the west of the country, had been especially influential. They had developed their own expertise and monitoring practices, and shared this with the other CTCs.\textsuperscript{49} As this suggests, and as identified by one interviewee, broad ‘cross-stakeholder collaboration’ is very important to fostering civic participation.\textsuperscript{50} This has been able to get more citizens and civil society organizations on-side.

\textsuperscript{43} Interviews with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019.
\textsuperscript{44} Interviews with CoST Honduras staff, 2019.
\textsuperscript{45} Interview with Interviewee P9, 2019.
\textsuperscript{46} ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Interview with Interviewee P11, 2019.
\textsuperscript{49} Interviews with interviewees P10 and P11, 2019.
\textsuperscript{50} Interview with interviewee P11, 2019.
Empowering citizens to monitor projects relies on clear communication. With these relationships established, CoST-H’s success has depended on using appropriate language and forms of communication to involve citizens. One person stressed that many people who CoST-H train are only educated to secondary-school level; it is therefore important to present open data in ‘layman’s terms’. Another noted that the SISOCS portal had been designed specifically to be used by citizens monitoring projects, so that contract information can be quickly found and photos easily uploaded. Finally, in cases where technical specialists have been sent to assess particular infrastructure projects, CoST-H has learned that they should be accompanied by ‘communicators’; alone, these specialists have struggled to speak to citizens about the social and environmental issues that are especially salient locally.

Barriers
Most of the difficulties that CoST-H faces will sound familiar to people with experience of government reform programs and transparency advocacy: an often obstinate government and a lack of resources. Added to this is the possibility that the organization is too critical of the government, thereby discouraging allies within government bodies.

Many government entities are still resistant to opening up data on their infrastructure projects. Despite the successes in particular areas of government (INVEST-Honduras, for example, consistently scores highly in its disclosure rates, as shown on Chart 1 above), the practice of publishing projects information is not yet habituated throughout government. One person told us that there remained ‘line ministries with huge setbacks’, with another saying that there are ‘processes and even people that are highly questionable’. A transparency campaigner outside CoST-H also said that, in general terms, accountability remained a major barrier: while laws are in place, they are not always properly enforced. This would seem to apply to disclosure requirements. A Transparency International Honduras (ASJ) report in 2017 found that ‘five key agencies only compl[ied]’ with 42% of procurement laws and 21% of transparency laws’ between 2013 and 2015.

Despite the ‘culture change’ in relation to transparency noted in some parts of government and described above, CoST-H’s Sixth Assurance Report ‘recommend[ed] increasing training on the value of open data’, implying that many officials do not see that there is an advantage to transparency. Public pressure may also remain insufficient to force opaque government entities

---

51 Interview with interviewee P9, 2019.
52 Interview with interviewee P11, 2019; Interviewee P9 said that SISOCS was hard to use, specifically in terms of large data downloads. Summary data analysis is arguably less important for citizens monitoring the delivery of individual projects.
53 Interview with interviewees P10 and P11, 2019.
54 The recurrent issue in highly corrupt countries of threats to transparency advocates is, of course, present in Honduras, but was not raised at length in our interviews.
to change their practice. CoST-H’s fifth report stated that the SISOCS portal is ‘not well known by the public, in terms of its existence and type of information available’, suggesting that social sanctions on the government for not publishing remain weak.\(^{59}\)

Like many transparency advocacy organizations, CoST-H has experienced resourcing constraints. With just one person working in Honduras at the start of the project, CoST-H told us that a ‘lack of human resources’ had been an important ‘limiting factor’.\(^{60}\) Moreover, CoST-H currently operates predominantly at the level of central government: ‘it is very hard for the program to reach the local level’, one person told us. Further funding and resources would extend their reach here.

Staffing and capabilities shortages make publishing, maintaining and using data difficult. One government official commented that keeping up with the volume of data required to be published on SISOCS required entities to hire ‘a lot of people’, and was a persistent ‘challenge’.\(^{61}\) It is unclear whether this is a result of not fully considering government user needs in SISOCS’ design, or whether increased disclosure requirements will inevitably need governments to increase their payroll. Further research should explore this question.

CoST-H risk discouraging governmental efforts to be more transparent by being too ready to identify corruption. Their assiduousness in pursuing irregularities in contracts might be counter-productive. Government staff told us that, while they had worked closely with CoST-H and strongly supported their aims, CoST-H should be careful about ‘going beyond a point of no return’.\(^{62}\) That is, complex infrastructure projects will often involve unplanned contract amendments and extensions. In some cases this is indeed used as a way to illegally funnel additional money to contractors. However, one government official said that, even where there are legitimate reasons for contract changes, CoST-H have a tendency to publicly ascribe this to corruption. Since this is a potential misrepresentation of what is going on in government, this actually works against the idea of transparency, this person said. Moreover, it risks forcing talented and ethical government officials into the private sector, as they are afraid of being labelled corrupt.\(^{63}\)

Government staff suggested that CoST-H staff and members could undergo training on project management in government to help resolve this.\(^{64}\) At the very least, the issue shows that, even where transparency advocates must be consistently forthright in their criticism of the government, good communication and mutual understanding between government and civil society is also crucial.

---


\(^{60}\) Interview with interviewees P10 and P11, 2019.

\(^{61}\) Interview with interviewees P15 and P16, 2019.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.
Lessons
In addition to their reflections on what had enabled or hindered CoST-H’s success, our interviewees offered accounts of what might be applicable to similar initiatives in other countries abroad.

Leave enough time to train citizens in technical matters. The inherent challenge within citizen monitoring is teaching non-specialists how to recognize highly technical aspects of complex infrastructure projects, as well as interpreting what they see in relation to potentially lengthy and jargon-laden contracts. CoST-H staff emphasized that training citizens therefore takes a lot of time. This should be properly planned for while taking account of differences between different sectors. Monitoring energy infrastructure for example, is more complicated than monitoring a single-lane road project.65

Help the community to train its own members. Despite the technical subject matter, CoST-H staff stressed that project monitoring skills need not always be passed from specialist trainers to community members. This means working with community leaders to help them pass on skills to other community members so that knowledge will be sustained without deliberate input from CoST-H. A crucial part of this approach is to ensure that there is equal gender participation in this process. One person reflected that the ‘most empowered’ or ‘most committed’ community leaders are women, so providing them with monitoring skills will have the widest impact within the community.66

Recognize that members of multi-stakeholder groups are volunteers, and therefore need careful engagement from people running the project. The multi-stakeholder group (MSG) that guides CoST-H’s interventions will include professionals from across government, civil society and the private sector, but they may well be giving their time to the MSG on a voluntary basis. One interviewee said that they therefore need ongoing and dedicated help from CoST-H, particularly in terms of tracking their progress.67

---

65 Interview with interviewees P10 and P11, 2019.
66 Ibid.
67 Interview with interviewee P9, 2019.
Bibliography


Colophon

June 2020

Photo on first page: Construction workers (photo from Unsplash)

© Hivos

Contact information

Hivos

P.O. Box 85565

2508 CG The Hague

The Netherlands

http://www.hivos.org

email: info@hivos.org