

Civil society wants Works ministry out of districts, community roads construction



CSOs meeting with Infrastructure Committee of Parliament on 6th April 2016 to discuss the CSO proposals on the Works and Transport Ministerial Policy Statement FY 2016/17

The Ministry of Works and Transport has been asked to stay away from construction of various community and district road construction projects, and concentrate on formulation of policy and oversight.

Appearing before the Parliamentary Committee on Physical Infrastructure today 6th April 2016 to give their views on the 2016/2017 financial year budget for the Works and Transport Sector, the Civil Society Organizations said the Ministry has continued to get involved in the implementation of various road construction against its mandate.

“In spite of its mandate to formulate policy and provide oversight over the construction sector, the Ministry continues to budget for and carry out physical works on various district and community roads and bridge projects across the country,

contrary to its stipulated mandate,” said Sam Mutabazi, the Executive Director Uganda Road Sector Support Initiative (**URSSI**) a member to CSBAG’s Thematic Working Group on works and transport.

The CSOs under their umbrella body, the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) said although project execution by the Ministry was several years ago explained as an exercise that would cease when responsible agencies like Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) are established, the Ministry continues to perform roles out of its command.

Mr. Mutabaazi noted that the interference in construction works by the Ministry generates conflict of interest and also hinders coherent project execution leading to poor project results and misuse of resources. “We strongly recommend that the Ministry of Works and Transport sticks to its mandate of policy formulation, supervision of agencies under its guidance,” stated Mutabazi.

According to David Walakira the CSBAG Budget Specialist, Uganda National Roads Authority, should consider paying in local currency for all Government funded road projects as opposed to foreign currency in order to reduce the pressure on the Ugandan shillings. “Some contractors are challenging this directive, but we urge the government to stick to this option due to its benefits of stabilizing the local currency,” he noted.

Presenting their views, the CSOs however called upon the government to step up funding towards maintenance and upgrading of national roads and the legislators also reiterated this call.

In FY 2016/2017 the Works and Transport sector budget is set to increase by Sh 504b, which is approximately 25%, to Sh 3.8b. However the Works Ministry’s budget is set to reduce to Sh 401.42, while the UNRA budget will increase to sh 2,454.61b.

According to the Ministry’s Policy Statement, the wage and non-wage expenditure for the sector for the financial year 2016/17, is expected to witness a slight increase- the non-wage will increase by Sh 2.2 b.

Whereas out of the total sector budget of Sh3, 832.64 bn national road maintenance and construction will receive the largest share of Sh 2,454.61 b, MPs agreed they will demand that the budget for roads maintenance is further increased to maintain and upgrade different national roads.

However the committee chaired by Ephariam Biraroo, the Buhweju County MP said there is need to account for the money by responsible road agencies, and also ensure quality work. “Some resources meant for roads have been squandered and are not properly being accounted for. There should be efficiency for the little funds put in,” said MP Biraro.

Surprisingly MPs urged the CSOs to sensitize Ugandans on the cost of road construction, to avoid continued demands for paved roads which they said are expensive. “We should also tell Government to slow down on roads construction I know there is pressure from the local people but we are using a lot of money to tarmac roads which are not busy,” said Kumi MP Patrick Amuriat. “We urge you CSOs to help push government on the procurement of roads contractors, some of these contractors are very expensive, we should bring down the cost of making roads in Uganda,” said Amuriat.

The MPs also commended the CSOs on the issue of paying contractors in foreign currency saying payments should be made in local currency to promote our local currency.