

## PROBLEMS OF STANDARDIZATION, SPECIFICATION AND MONITORING OF ROAD WORKS IMPLEMENTED BY DISTRICTS IN UGANDA

### 1. Introduction

Roads in Uganda are categorized in a hierarchical order with national roads at the top followed by District and Urban roads and, Community Access roads at the bottom. The Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) is responsible for development and maintenance of the national roads while the Higher Local Governments (districts and municipalities) - are responsible for District and Urban roads. The Lower Local Governments (sub-counties) are responsible for community access roads but are guided by the district roads engineer. While the predominant mode of service provision is through contracting works to the private sector in what is called Public Private Partnerships, districts and municipalities still undertake road works usually maintenance under force account arrangements.<sup>1</sup>



A study by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) on Governance in the Water and Road Sectors in Uganda brings three aspects that impact on the quality of district roads to the fore (i) absence of standards for roads, (ii) lack of specification of works under force account and (iii) inadequate monitoring and supervision of road works. The study was carried out in

five districts of Uganda including Nebbi, Soroti, Ntungamo, Mbale and Wakiso. The study focused on road works undertaken over three financial years (2007/08 to 2009/10). A total of 145 roads projects were covered by the study; routine maintenance (56 percent), periodic maintenance (30 percent), rehabilitation (12 percent) and road opening (1 percent). In terms of length, the road works covered over 1,400 km of roads with an average width of four meters. Over 680 kms of road received routine maintenance while 660 km received periodic maintenance. Less than 115 km

<sup>1</sup> The recent acquisition of machinery for road works by districts may signify a reversal back to direct undertaking of road works by local governments.

**Table 1: Condition of the Road Network in Uganda**

Road Classification	Length (Km)	Paved		Roads in Poor Condition	
		(Km)	%	(Km)	%
National	10,800	3,000	27.8	3,640	36
District	27,500	-	-	14,300	52
Urban	4,800	450	9.4	1,316	27
Total	43,100	3,450	8.0	19,259	45

Source: Road Sector Development Project 3 Review (2008)

of road was rehabilitated and less than 15km of new roads opened.

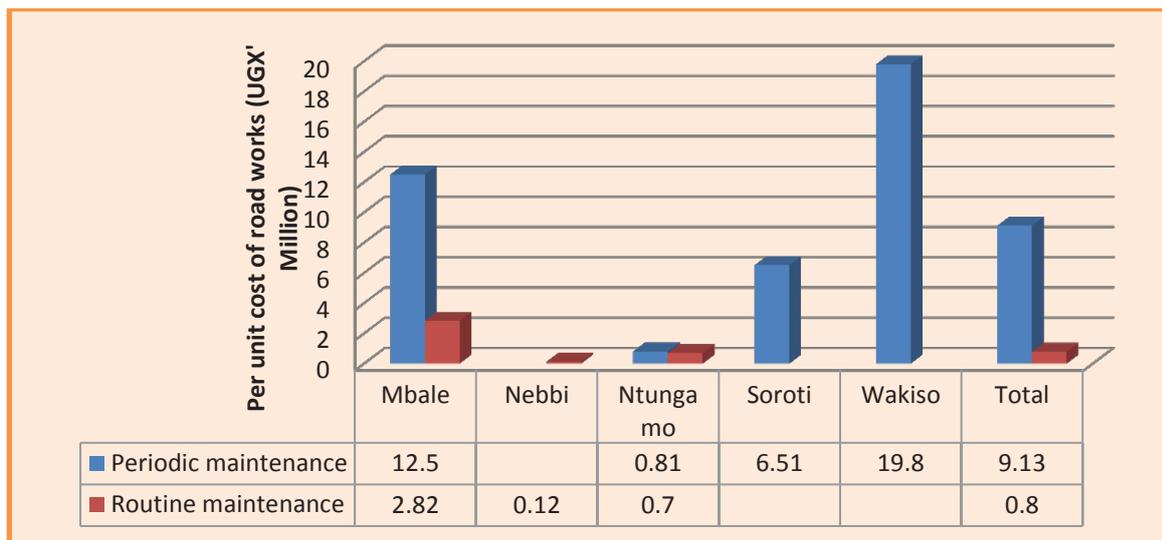
## 2. The Condition of Roads in Uganda

It is estimated that 45 percent of roads in Uganda are in poor condition. District roads are worse with 56 percent in poor condition. Yet roads are the major mode of transport in Uganda linking areas of production to

markets as well as facilitating mobility of people. Over 90 percent of cargo freight and passengers in Uganda move by road.

Funding to the sector has increased more than threefold over the last decade in line with prioritization of roads by government. Additional funds for maintenance of roads have been garnered from the Uganda Road Fund which was introduced in 2008. In spite of these

**Figure 1: Unit costs of periodic and routine maintenance of gravel roads (UGX' Million)**



Source: District roads contracts (2007/08- 2009/10)

improvements, funding and sector outcomes remain far below the required level. The underfunding of roads especially at local government level notwithstanding, the question of whether the roads could not be better even at the current level of funding lingers on in many people's minds.

## 3. Standards for road works commissioned by districts

Standards are especially important for infrastructure

projects not only for purposes of safety but also as benchmarks against which the works are costed and later evaluated. The ACODE study revealed huge variations in the unit costs of similar road works across and within the study districts. For instance, the per unit cost of both periodic and routine maintenance of gravel roads was higher in the two more urban districts of Mbale and Wakiso compared to Ntungamo and Soroti and Nebbi.

The district engineers cited inadequacy of funds as

the primary reason for the huge variations in costs. They explained that more often, districts have to make do with the meagre financial resources. The engineers have to work on as many roads as is possible sometimes paying little attention to standards which results into sub-standard works. The value for money spent in this manner is highly questionable. It may be better to work on a few kilometres of roads while observing the required standards than working on so many kilometres of road in a haphazard way. The Ministry of Works and Transport which is charged with formulating policy should guide districts on the minimum per unit cost for different types of road works below which it is unviable to undertake road works. This standardization can be region or district specific and should also cover technical specifications of the roads including width, surface, drainage structures among other things. Also, the process of development of operation details and guidelines should be expedited to ensure that the newly acquired plant and machinery by districts are put to proper use. In the interim, the Ministry of Works and Transport together with the Ministry of Local Government ought to guide districts on how to use the road maintenance equipment.

#### **4. Non-specification of works under force account**

Specification of works is very important in contract monitoring and ultimately the outcome of works. A review of records at the district revealed that details for over 60 percent of works undertaken by the districts under force account arrangements were not specified beyond the type of works- routine maintenance. This practice weakens accountability because unlike under contractual arrangements with private contractors, there is no separation of roles between the implementation and supervision. Monitoring by political leaders and citizens becomes difficult as it is not clear what exactly is to be done. Indeed the results from the ACODE study showed that, under force account arrangements, road works for which details of works were specified scored better on quality than roads for which details of works were not specified. The Chief Administrative Officers and political leadership at district level which also oversees service delivery should ensure that the district engineering departments provide details of the road works in their work plans clearly indicating the timelines for completion of road works. Without these details, it becomes difficult to hold the district roads department accountable.

#### **5. Monitoring and Supervision**

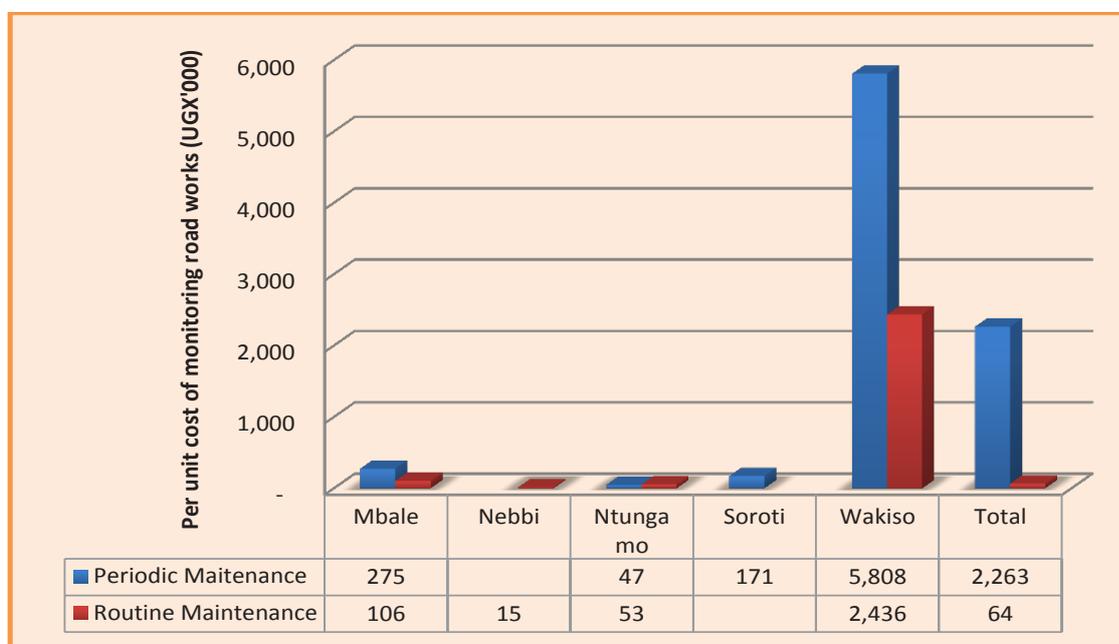
Monitoring and supervision are important for physical works because they are the means through which both progress and adherence to contractual terms is established. There are glaring indications that suggest that monitoring and supervision are particularly weak for roads in the context of decentralized service provision. Information on performance of the sector is exceptionally difficult to come by at the district, Ministry of Works headquarters in Entebbe and the Ministry's web site. It is not clear whether the districts submit quarterly reports to the Ministry of Works as required and how the Ministry uses the reports. It is worth mentioning that the Uganda National Roads Authority and the Road Funds fair better at providing information than the districts and the Ministry of Works.

The ACODE study revealed inconsistencies in monitoring and supervision at a micro level. Allocation of funds for monitoring and or supervision was used as a proxy for actual monitoring and supervision. The argument is simply that, monitoring and supervision of road works contracted is unlikely without finances. A total of 24 of the projects out of 145 did not have funds earmarked for monitoring. For those where funds were set aside for monitoring, the average cost of monitoring per km, was UGX 2,263,000 and UGX 64,000 for periodic and routine maintenance respectively.

Interestingly, the results suggest that roads for which funds were set aside for monitoring or supervision in the budget were of poor quality (more likely to be categorized as poor) compared to those for which no funds were set aside. This may imply that these funds may not necessarily have been put to this use, especially where the works are undertaken by the government. This can still be attributed to absence of separation roles which undermines supervision.

There is need to strengthen monitoring and supervision of road works by districts. Particularly monitoring and supervision of works contracted out must be taken more seriously and must be budgeted for. Also, the Ministry of works should collect and avail more information about roads in the country. Sanctions should be enforced against districts that fail to adhere to the reporting guidelines. Fast tracking the establishment of regional centers would enable the ministry provide better supervision and oversight of district road works.

**Figure 2: Per unit cost of monitoring road works (UGX'000)**



**Source:** See, Bogere, G., et.al., (2013). **Governance Aspects in the Water and Roads Sectors: Lessons from Five Districts in Uganda.** ACODE Policy Research Paper Series, No.59, 2013. Kampala.

### About ACODE and CBTIC

The Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) is an independent public policy research and advocacy think tank registered in Uganda with operations in the Eastern and Southern Africa sub-region. Our mission is to make public policies work for people. Through our work, we empower citizens to demand for justice and promote public participation in the decision making processes that affect livelihoods and the environment. ACODE has become the premier organization that facilitates policy dialogue and debate on emerging and cutting edge public policy issues.

The Citizens' Budget Tracking and Information Centre (CBTIC) is one of ACODE's premier initiatives that seek to put control of public expenditure and the budget in the hands of citizens. The goal of the Centre is "to increase accountability and transparency in the allocation and utilization of both local revenue and donor funds by raising citizens' awareness." Funding for the CBTIC is provided by The Netherlands Embassy, Kampala, the Hewlett Foundation and the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) through core funding.