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Challenges of Road Maintenance in Uganda's Municipalities

Overview

Municipality roads make up 4,500Kms which represents 5.63% of the entire road network in Uganda. This network is maintained by the respective local governments using central government funds and to a limited extent, locally generated revenue. More than 80% of the municipality road network is in need of complete rehabilitation.

The bulk of funds received at the municipalities is provided by the Uganda Road Fund (URF) for road maintenance works. The Government of Uganda through the annual budget allocations to the Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) provides the operational funds. The annual budget allocations have varied between Ug shs 2.5 billion and Ug shs 4.2 billion in the previous three financial years. These funds are only sufficient to carry out works of less than 4kms in the urban centers.

Sixty nine percent of the municipality road network falls in the category of new construction or reconstruction. Due to developments in these urban centers new roads need to be opened up yet the URF funding does not allow for these activities.

This brief discusses the challenges faced by municipalities in maintaining their road network and makes recommendations for improving on the current situation.

Key Issues

- Inadequate funding which is not commensurate to work plans/budgets submitted coupled with late release of funds.
- Understaffing within the engineering departments due to ban on staff recruitment.
- Lack of required equipment at the municipalities and at Urban Roads Resealing Project.
- The road networks have outlived their design life span.
- Inadequate local materials for construction
- Lengthy procurement procedures.

Background

An efficient transport system is seen as an essential pre-condition for general economic development. To that effect, considerable resources are devoted to road construction and improvements. The resultant road networks usually have an asset value that represents a significant proportion of national wealth. It is therefore, important and appropriate that this asset is managed and protected in a business-like manner.

Road management has the purpose of maintaining and improving the existing road network to enable its continued use by

traffic in an efficient and safe manner. Road management can be seen as a process that is attempting to optimize the overall performance of the road network over time.

Effective and efficient road transport lowers input prices and, hence, production costs, and can lead to greater economic well-being.

The condition of road networks continuously changes as a result of the effects of traffic, climate and environmental conditions hence often requiring maintenance interventions. Although maintenance consumes resources, it is an ongoing activity. As such, it is a process rather than a project and the timing of these

interventions is important in order to avoid the roads running into a pavement reconstruction or upgrading phase. This is normally a relatively expensive activity and should therefore be postponed for as long as possible by carrying out effective and timely maintenance.

The road maintenance programme in municipalities is faced with implementation challenges of funding for the road network and lack of equipment to ensure adequate response to the dilapidated networks in these urban areas. The funds from the URF are inadequate to address the backlog on maintenance of roads in these areas.

In addition, these funds are conditional which relegates over 60% of their networks from qualifying for these funds. Local revenue is inadequate to fund the back log on these roads and it is usually not forthcoming and irregular making the situation even worse.

MoWT provides the collective technical support and supervision to the local governments under the District, Urban and Community Access Roads (DUCAR) department.

Efforts to fund the reconstruction or resealing of urban roads through MoWT, was limited by the meager resources allocated to the Urban Roads Resealing project (URRP).

The project has been operational (using “Force on Account” mode) since 1992 giving a total rehabilitated and bituminized road length of 162Kms covered in 48 urban centers / towns in Uganda.

The road network improvements achieved over the last 20 years is only 3.6% of the entire network and if this situation is not addressed road networks in municipalities is likely to collapse like what is being experienced in Mbale and Jinja Municipalities.



A dilapidated section of Naboia road in Mbale municipality as at August 2012

There are many challenges in the maintenance of roads in municipalities and these are discussed below.

Challenges faced in Municipalities

1. Inadequate funding

Funding for road maintenance works is currently not commensurate to work plans/budgets submitted by the municipalities. For example in FY 2011/12, planned road maintenance was for only 1,005Kms out of total network of 4,500Kms and periodic maintenance of 230 Kms and drainage works under URF. This reflected a significant drop in targeted outputs to 27.4% of the entire network.

Inadequate project operation funds for the URRP, currently funding from the MoWT of Ug shs 250 million to each urban council is not enough to cover both the pavement and drainage works concurrently. The road pavement rehabilitation cost to a double bituminous sealed surfacing has been estimated at Ug shs 800 million per km of 7m width road meaning that only 25% of the funding needed is actually allocated to the projects.

The releases to the municipalities are not timely and this brings about delayed payments to contractors and suppliers leading to claims and abandoning of works in some instances.

2. Under staffing

Technical support and supervision for the implementation of the road maintenance works at the districts is done by the Engineering department. Due to a public service ban on recruitment of personnel and the increase in the road network there is a need to recruit more personnel to support the municipal engineers in their supervisory role.

3. Lack of required equipment

Although Government procured similar equipment units (graders and trucks) for all local governments which can be used on unpaved (gravel and earth) roads this does not help much in urban areas where tarmac roads require completely different units for their maintenance programs. MoWT has only one resealing unit which is overwhelmed by demands from local governments and is often breaking down due to advanced age and requires replacement.

4. Old and dilapidated Network

The road networks have outlived their design life span. For example, Mbale municipal road network was last designed in 1954 and construction works were executed in the same year. This implies that the network required reconstruction in 1974 which has not been done up to present day and this has come with increase in traffic and inadequate drainage structures due to increase in runoff.

5. Inadequate local materials for construction

The materials used for road construction are

not readily available in these municipalities and this has led to price escalations. For example Tororo and Mbale municipalities get all the road construction material (aggregates) from as far as Kakiri on Hoima road in Wakiso district as there are no quarries in the region. Hence the biggest cost that is incurred is in haulage of materials.

6. Lengthy Procurement Process

The procurement system implemented at the local government level is quite challenging as it takes a long time to get the works implemented and this creates a lot of inefficiencies. In addition, it is hard to achieve any effectiveness with regard to implementing the work plan and often projects spill over into other financial years.

Conclusions

The municipal councils have insufficient capacity to handle their road maintenance and construction needs to effectively and efficiently address the needs of their transport system. The current funding level for the network in terms of maintenance and rehabilitation component for a period of over 20 years is worrying and if not addressed may lead to total collapse of the net as was experienced in 70s and 80s.

The current operational funds for the resealing project offer a target of 4kms of road per year in three different urban centers in the country. Although, four new resealing equipments have been procured under the Chinese funding for the same works at a regional level to increase on the output of this unit, this equipment has not been utilized due to lack of funds.

Inadequate staffing is affecting effective supervision of road works.

Recommendations

1. Increase the annual project operation budget from this financial year's Ug shs 3.6 billion to at least Ug shs 12.5 billion to give an annual physical works output of at least 16kms when operating at 65% plant utilization.
2. The road network should also be digitized as more roads have been coming up and annual condition assessments of the road infrastructure done. This will ease prioritization of interventions.
3. The inadequate staffing needs urgent attention so that municipalities can effectively manage their portfolio.

References

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