

Analysis of Physical Asset Management Stakeholders in the Local Governments

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Abstract

Physical asset Management is of significant importance for effective service delivery in local governments. In the local governments, physical assets are managed as public utilities in providing quality services to the stakeholders under ‘public value’ regulations. For this matter, managers of local governments are enjoined to balance public values motives when managing physical assets under their care. Besides creating value in the physical asset during its use, maintenance, renewal and disposal, local government managers are obliged to balance the interest of all the stakeholders. The stakeholders are entitled to enjoy flawless, safe and secure services with the aid of excellent physical assets. Unfortunately, a review of the performance benchmarks of local governments in Uganda reveals lots of ambiguity on who the stakeholders of physical asset management are. Yet, physical asset management is a complex and collaborative phenomenon with diverse stakeholders each with differing objectives. Upon failure to achieve these objectives, physical asset management would be rendered ineffective. This paper identifies public local community and central government stakeholder groups as critical in the management of physical assets in the Local Government. I discuss the implications of the findings and develop a model for a comprehensive engagement of stakeholders for effective physical asset management in the local governments.

Key words: Physical Asset, Physical Asset Management, Local Government, Stakeholders, Services.

Introduction

Physical asset management (PAM) provides excellent physical assets (PA) to the local government (LG) for its functioning. Physical assets are managed as the means to promote quality service delivery to stakeholders of the LGs whose needs are met under normal institutional arrangement. Physical assets are used to provide flawless, safe and secure quality services to the beneficiaries. However, more often, this effort is scaled down due to negative factors that derail proper stakeholder analysis. For example, LGs are many times challenged when it comes to identifying PAM stakeholders as to the nature of the stakeholders coupled with inadequate data about them. In spite of this, effective PAM requires deep consideration of the interests of all the parties involved. Identification and analysis of the parties’ interest are lacking in the LG as evidenced in the statutory reports of the Office of the Auditor General and Public Procurement and disposal of public asset authority for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Frankly, the statutory reports are silent about LG PAM stakeholders. What are contained in them are just mentions-in-placing without singling out the stakeholders and their interests per se. in other words, the reports are ambiguous to the stakeholders leave alone their roles and responsibilities. It is evidential, the reports ignore the different stakeholders of LG PAM.

In additions, they do not discuss whether or not differences exist between PAM stakeholders at central government level to those in the LGs level. More still, they silent whether stakeholders have a stake in the well-functioning of LGs in PAM term. But, according to Bryson (1995), there are lots of individuals and/or groups who place claim(s) on LG's attention, physical assets or output. These individuals and/or groups are very much affected by the PAM outputs of the LGs as Freeman (1984) would argue. Quite often, these individuals and/or groups remain an un-analyzed making it hard for their interests to be catered for by the LGs. It appears there is a serious lack of stakeholder analysis in the LGs in respect to PAM.

The PAM phenomenon in the LGs is very complex. It contains a large number of stakeholders who are diverse in form of the employees, the direct and/or indirect beneficiaries and so on. With differing interests and concerns, these stakeholders are prone to conflict. In most cases, the conflict results into disagreement, not only amongst themselves but even with the LGs themselves. In consequence, the ability of the LGs to provide the desired anticipated quality service level is compromised with the allocated budget and time. It appears the disagreements are occasioned by the improper and improper analysis of the stakeholders. The little probably done seems not to cover all the diverse stakeholders involved in all that stages of managing a physical asset. In fact, any analysis, if at all, there is, is limited to the service providers and the employees. In all these, critical stakeholders the likes of the end users, the local communities, the general public, the central governments and the regulatory bodies are alienated. It is factual; the LG managers in Uganda have not fully been able to embrace the vast importance of the diverse individuals/organizations with a stake in the management of their physical assets.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the diverse stakeholders and their responsibilities in the management of physical assets in the LGs. This is intended to determine the relevance and the contribution of these stakeholders for effective PAM in the LGs. This study was conducted in consideration of the fact that minimal literature exists in this area especially in the context of Local Government in Uganda. Thus, the focus of this paper is on 89 LGs in Acholi land, statutorily established with obligation to incorporate the interests of the diverse stakeholders in the course of delivering service with the use of excellent physical assets. This paper is structured in three important sections as follows; section one provides the introduction, section two defines and justifies stakeholder analysis, section three examines the different stakeholders of PAM in the LG. Section four discusses the responsibilities of the stakeholders and develops a model for proper understanding of LG PAM stakeholders. Section 5 draws conclusion about the stakeholder model's impact on effective PAM in the local government.

Stakeholder Analysis, what is it and why?

Bryson (2004) contends that any public problem be it poor economic growth, poor learning performance, poor natural resource management, global warming, terrorism, embodies or affects copious groups, organizations and people. These groups, organizations and people can be well understood through analysis. Thus, stakeholder analysis is conducted to identify the interest groups, organizations and persons interested. Varvasovszky and Brugha (2000)

appraise stakeholder analysis as an approach, a tool or set of tools for generating knowledge about actors. It is an integrated tool along the program implementation formula. It is a tool which is in most cases reviewed and repeated in order to understand the groups, organizations and people affected and aids in understanding the behaviors, intentions, interrelation and above all the interests of the respective party. It is a useful tool for assessing the influence and resources which are brought to bear on decision-making or implementation process.

Balane et al. (2020) claims stakeholder analysis requires assessment of power level. This in relation to the interests and position of the actors relative to the policy at hand. It is a complex process that translates into the operationalization of the complex concepts embedded within the particular analysis. Accordingly, as Bryson (2004) advances, stakeholder analysis is in the present more important than ever because of the increasingly interconnected nature of the world with PAM being no exception.

Mayers (2005) stresses stakeholder analysis is a tool for identifying key actors. He adds that stakeholder analysis is also a tool used for the assessment of stakeholders' importance in relation to the program. The identification and assessment are often done for the purpose of engaging and empowering the stakeholders. This is beneficial for understanding stakeholders' behavior, intentions, interrelations and interests. Schmeer (2000) argues that stakeholder analysis offers a typology of institutions, people and organizations and most importantly interactions between them. Kettl (2002) reveal that reckoning out what the problem is and what blends could work are truly fraction of the problem, and seizing stakeholders in balance.

Bourne and Walker (2005) advocate for the analysis of stakeholders so as to map their power and influence. This is necessary to maximize stakeholders' influence and at the same time minimize any negative influence. Failure to do so, they warn would lead to countless failures. Lim et al. (2005) argue that stakeholders have capability and resources that can either make or break a program. Yang et al. (2009) caution poor stakeholder analysis leads to poor definition of scope and work, inadequate resource assignment and poor communication including unforeseen changes. All these are bound to cause delays and unnecessary losses in performance. For instance, Doloi (2011) maintains that cost overruns are unavoidable especially in a situation where there is major involvement of a multitude of stakeholders like in PAM. Othman and Abedlilatif (2011) highly recommend for the analysis of stakeholders in order to determine their expectations and requirements. This would help in managing their influence in relation to their take in any program implementation process. Instead, many individuals, groups and organizations are involved or affected or have some partial or full responsibility to use, maintain, renew and dispose of physical assets. In the shared power of PAM in the LGs, no one is fully in charge, no LG 'contains' the problem of effective PAM (Kettl, 2002).

The Local Government as a Public Entity and Consumer of Excellent Physical Assets

Local governments as public entities require highly excellent physical assets to succeed in their obligation to deliver quality services to the stakeholders (Ngwira et al. 2012).

Operationalization of obsolete physical assets is considered inefficient and as a result, local governments function dismally (Kaganova & Telgarsky, 2018). For instance, the purposes of a local government are two-fold all with the prime core embedded on excellent physical assets. Firstly, administratively, a LG supplies goods and services. Secondly, a local government represents and involves the citizens (stakeholders) in the determination of specific local public needs and the meeting of these local needs. Effective implementation of these purposes requires physical assets either directly or indirectly (Kaganova et al. 2006).

In the LGs, physical assets play a direct role in the delivery of education, health care, transport, water, policing and social services. All these constitutional functions of LGs are enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. Indirectly, with the aid of physical assets, a local government engages in governance, advocacy, service delivery, community planning, infrastructure development and local regulation. These functions impact the daily lives of individuals, families, organizations, businesses and communities based in the Local Government. As a critical responsibility, a local government creates, upgrades, maintains and preserves excellent physical assets necessary to provide people with access to economic, social and recreational facilities. Essentially, physical assets play an integral role in the economy and within the local communities of the LG (Kaganova, 2011).

Local governments in Uganda own, control and manage physical assets. Indeed, the provision of physical assets is the most functional significant activity of the LGs in the country. In reality, the central feature of decentralization in Uganda is that the LGs are responsible for the delivery of the majority of public services and functions. These functions cannot be done in absence of physical assets. Excellent physical assets enable LGs to provide services to primary schools, secondary schools, special and technical schools, hospitals, health centers, dispensaries, feeder roads, water supplies, agricultural extension services, land administration and community development. All these services have diverse stakeholders with peculiar interests on effective PAM. Reddy (2016) points out that LGs are envisaged to be critical to the process of attainment of sustainable development goals because LGs are at the coalface of service delivery and in direct contact with the local communities. It is of interest therefore, for the management in LG to fully understand their stakeholders in PAM for its effectiveness. As Reddy (2016) advocates, the notion of *localization* has to be taken very seriously by the national governments, which have to ensure that there is the required political, financial, managerial and technical support.

Local governments have a number of different stakeholders including clients, government regulators, civil society organizations, non-government organizations, development partners among others. Given this operating situation, a local government's PAM cannot be gauged only by its ability to own physical assets. Instead, the interests and considerations of all the stakeholders of PAM in the LG must be considered in evaluating the LG PAM performance, in particular in the cases where the physical assets are under some form of utilization, maintenance, renewal, and disposal.

By the same token, LGs own physical assets to provide a quality service to all the stakeholders at minimal cost, while generally operating to create value in the physical assets.

All the stages in the management of physical assets are to be tailored to value creation both for the physical asset and the local governments. No stakeholder's interest is to be underestimated in the value creation process. Rather than sidelining stakeholders, LGs must, similar to the central government, be gauged by their ability to meet the interests of all stakeholders while managing physical assets under their portfolio.

Identification of Stakeholders in Physical Asset Management

This section is purposed to identify the PAM goals in the LG from the point of view of each stakeholder groups. From the onset, the thesis of stakeholder theory is well articulated by Jones and Wicks (1999) as organizations have relationship with many constituents ("stakeholders"). They argue that the constituents both affect and are affected by the organizations' decision. From these premises, it can be argued that stakeholder theory is concerned with the nature of the relationship between the organizations and the constituents (stakeholders). This is in terms of the processes inclusive of outcomes both for the organizations and their stakeholders.

With the LGs operating as a public entity, an account of PAM stakeholders in the LG is required to form the basis for evaluating the LG functioning. In the words of Mitchell et al. (1997, p.856) a stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". LGs have a multitude of stakeholders who can affect or can be affected by decisions taken in regard to PAM, be it be council or management. There is a need therefore to analyze the different stakeholder groups to whom a local government is accountable when it comes to PAM. Studies conducted close to this subject have been those that sought to analyze the stakeholders of public sector organizations including LGs. For instance, Mack and Ryan (2007) although most of them have used normative arguments in classifying stakeholder groups (Gomes & Gomes, 2008). Anthony (1978) using normative argument identified five categories of stakeholders of public utilities including the governing bodies, investors and creditors, resource providers, oversight bodies and constituents. Comparatively, Bryson (1995) suggests a set of stakeholders of citizens, taxpayers, service users, and other level of government, employees, trade unions, political parties, interest groups and business as well as financial communities in a non-normative argument.

In spite of these, a sizeable number of empirical studies agree with some consistency in the grouping of stakeholders in the public sector as taxpayers/ratepayers, other resource providers, elected officials, other recipients of services, oversight bodies, internal management and such like entities (Stanley et al. 2008; Mack & Ryan 2007; Taylor & Rosair 2000; Cheng 1994). In most cases, these are more concerned with LG annual reports. Interestingly, while developing an accountability-related disclosure index in the LG context, Taylor and Rosair (2000) identify two broad stakeholder user groups. These are the 'participating parties' and the 'public'. The former comprises of the Treasury, the relevant ministries, the lobby group while the latter comprise of taxpayers and recipients of departmental goods and services. Still, more studies in the public sector classify stakeholders in two main groups, namely, 'internal' and 'external'. Boyne et al. (2002) articulate that the 'internal' stakeholder groups in the LG

are the managers, staff and councilors, while the ‘external’ ones are the taxpayers/ratepayers, other service providers, other recipients of services, oversight bodies and such like entities.

Generally, there are three kinds of stakeholders in a LG PAM setting. Each of the kinds of stakeholders have their own interest in PAM. Gomes et al. (2020) suggest that the various sets of stakeholders can be categorized as primary or secondary or external stakeholders. Relatedly, in this study the primary stakeholders are those who are directly affected, either negatively or positively by the implementation of PAM stages including LG employees, suppliers, clients or investors. These ones ought to be defined since they are vital for continual excellent execution of programs in the PAM stage implementation. The secondary ones are those who play some intermediary role yet have important impact on PAM stages implementation. They include the government bodies, legal authorities, the media and social groups. These may affect relationship with the primary stakeholders. The external stakeholders are the ones who may not have an important effect on specific PAM stage implementation including middle-men in spare part dealers.

Besides, other studies in the public sector categorize stakeholders into ‘internal’ and ‘external’ (Mack & Ryan, 2006; Boyne et al. 2002). Boyne et al. (2002) tell that the main internal stakeholders in the LGs are councilors, staff and managers. External stakeholders in the LGs, according to Mack and Ryan (2006) include local business, the public, taxpayers, resource providers, receivers of services and oversight bodies. In the LG context, Taylor and Rosair (2000) identify stakeholders into two broad categories, namely, ‘participating parties’ and the ‘public’. The former includes the Treasury, line ministries, and the lobby groups while the latter comprises of taxpayers and recipients of departmental goods and services.

For the purpose of this study, stakeholders of PAM in the LGs are classified into two. These are the public stakeholder group and the central government stakeholder group. The public stakeholder groups are those who are the actual end-users of the physical assets (Boyne et al. 2002). Equally, they are recipients of physical assets as well as their outcomes though with differing requirements. They are often part and parcel of the local community where the LG operates. Meanwhile, the central government stakeholder groups are those of the ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). They are typically attached to the central governments but have interest in the management of physical assets in the LGs. They affect the management of physical assets in the LGs through their policy-making, oversight overtures including monitoring and more still execute funding powers. They directly participate in the functioning of the LGs which in turn demand for accountability. Table 1 provides a description of both classifications of stakeholders in accordance with the purpose of the current study.

Table 1 Description of Stakeholders of Physical Asset Management in Local Governments

Stakeholder group	Definition	Goal(s)	Roles	Cross reference
Public/Community Stakeholders				
Employees	Employees of LGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure jobs, -Adequate wages, -Appropriate benefits - Fair treatment of -Career opportunities -Improved productivity, efficiency, and morale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use, maintain, renew and dispose of physical assets -Identify LG-specific needs and goals -Provide LG physical asset specific data -Assist in due diligence process 	Brønn et al., 2006; Urbany, 2005; Bocchino et al., 2003; Griseri, 1998
Service providers	Providers of services to LGs such as spare parts, new physical assets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maximize physical asset volumes -Minimize fees paid -Profit realization 	Provide specified services to the LGs	Gomes & Gomes 2009; Taylor & Rosair, 2000
Citizens	True beneficiaries of physical asset management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Quality service delivery -Less costly product/ services 	-Timely payment of rates/taxes	Taylor & Rosair 2000; Pilcher & Dean, 2009; Pilcher & Dean 2009; Gomes & Gomes 2009; Taylor & Rosair 2000; Kloot & Martin, 2000; Sinclair, 1995;
Councilors	Elected officials constituting the political wing of the LG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Advocates -Distribution of assistance -Political power -Publicizing community needs -Approving or denying proposed policy change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Policy direction -Formulation of by-laws and ordinances -Establish and prioritize goals and objectives to the public. -Approve decision criteria for selecting preferred PAM implementation option. -Approve recommended PAM implementation option. -Approve regulatory and legal frameworks 	Johnstone et al. 2013; Wahl, 2006; Freeman et al. 2004; Anderson, 1997;

Stakeholder group	Definition	Goal(s)	Roles	Cross reference
Users of physical assets	Predominantly the recipients of public goods and services, in this case the users of infrastructure asset Com-prises of the citizens and the public	-Quality services -Effective service delivery	Accountability -Communicate ability and willingness to pay for service -Express priorities for quality and level of service -Identify existing strengths and weaknesses in service	Boyne et al. 2002; Taylor & Rosair, 2000; Pollitt 1988
Community Special Interest Groups	Lobby or interest groups at the community level	-Accountability -Quality service delivery -Safe environment	-Advocacy	Millar & Lucas 2012; Boesso & Kumar 2009 a,b; Cummings & Guthrie 2007; Henriques & Sharma 2005; O'Higgins & Morgan, 2006; Gago & Antolin 2004; Cordano et al. 2004
NGOs, such as environmental bodies	LG interest groups	Varies depending on the interest group	-Advocacy -Provision of finances	Järvensivu, 2006
Civil society		-Advocate for gender responsive -Provision of technical assistance -Formalization of ongoing or periodic feedback mechanism	General welfare Conducive environment	Czibere & Rącz, 2016; Butkevičien et al. 2010; Gomes, 2004; Miller, & Wilson, 1998
Private sector		-Quality service delivery -Standard PAM implementation process	-Advocacy -Lobbying -Finances	Wojewnik-Filipkowska & Węgrzyn, 2019; Lambright, 2011
Lenders/investors	Comprise of capital owners and investors	-Protect their investment, -Highest returns possible	-Provide feedback on attractiveness of various PAM implementation options -Follow rules and procedures of competitive bidding process	Alm, 2010; Binta Samad, 2009

Stakeholder group	Definition	Goal(s)	Roles	Cross reference
Central Government Stakeholders				
National	Government at the national level	-Ensure LG accommodate growth -Keep LG PAM up to standards -Ensure safety, security, and efficiency of operations	-Maximize revenue -Provide universal access to service =Ensure affordable basic service -Promote fair competition -Attract investors -Improve public welfare	Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Leach et al. 1994
Line ministries (e.g., water, education, LG, health)	Strengthen LG sector	-Establish liaison units. -Development of performance framework linking ministry's program with LG goals -Develop performance measurement strategy -Input to budget and policy discussion	-Compliance -Accountability	Strojny & Jedrusik, 2018;
National audit body (Office of the Auditor General)	Statutorily mandated body to audit government books of accounts	-Potential oversight role of LG system (data audit)	- Enforce executive government accountability to parliament and public -Provides not only annotations on administrative malfunctions	Gomes, 2004; English & Guthrie, 2003;
Media	Both local and national	-Effectiveness and efficiency of government programs -Conflicting pressure	-Informing large segments of the population -Eliciting strong emotions -Inaccurate information dissemination -Uncovering issues and weakness	Gomes & Gomes, 2010; Parent & Deephouse 2007; O'Higgins & Morgan 2006; Henriques & Sharma 2005; Kuratko et al. 2004; Gago & Antolin 2004;

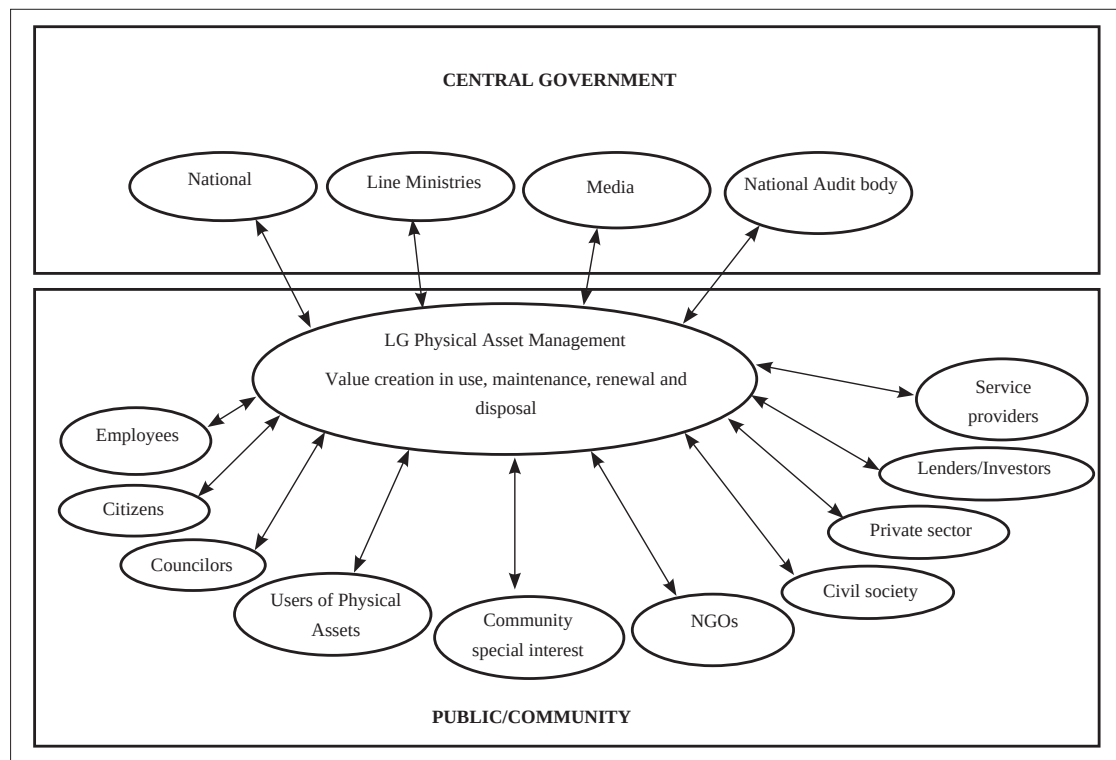
Table 1 presents the various kinds of stakeholders in the management of physical assets in the LGs. Bryson (2004) indicates that public organizations have adopted a strategic management approach to stakeholders. This is anchored against the backdrop of stakeholder disengagement yet the finite resource, like physical assets are needed to resolve the intractable socio-economic problems. It requires proper analysis of the various stakeholders. Gomes and Gomes (2008) call

upon public organizations to recognize and understand the expectation of their stakeholders. Table 1, is a response to this call, so that LGs can deliver responsive and effective quality services using excellent physical assets. After all, Martin (2003) reveals that interactions with stakeholders provide a mean for improving service delivery. He adds that this is possible through the exertion of pressures on bureaucracies that direct engagement of the stakeholders in the planning and the delivery of the services. In the next section, I develop a model to explain the roles each of the stakeholders in the management of physical assets in the LGs.

A Model of Stakeholders of Physical Asset Management Relationship

Based on the analysis of the different stakeholders in the LGs with their take on the management of physical assets, this article presents a model typical of stakeholder's roles and influences in the management of physical assets (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Local Government Physical Asset Management Stakeholder Model



In the proposed model of figure1, the main divisions of stakeholders are due to the separation of the public/community stakeholders and the central government stakeholders. Thus, it distinguishes public/community and central government stakeholders. Within each of these two groups, the different groups are separated to indicate their respective characteristics from which their functions/roles are derived as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Characteristics of individual stakeholder groups

Stakeholder	Description
Public/Community stakeholders	
Top management	An LG's top management, District Executive Committee, Heads of departments
Employees	Employees of the middle and lower level, affecting the use, maintenance, renewal disposing of physical assets determined by the scope of the work at hand
Service providers	Organizations and/or individuals delivering products or services for the use, maintenance, renewal and disposal of physical assets
Citizens	Direct or indirect beneficiaries of services provided by the use of physical assets
Councilors	Policy makers for the proper management of the physical assets
Users of physical assets	Organizations and/or individuals, determined by the scope of the use, maintenance, renewal and disposal of the physical assets. They are the actual users of the physical assets.
Community Special Interest Groups	Have special interest in the whole process of managing the physical assets, for example, they may have interest on environmental implications in the use of the physical asset.
Ordinary workers	Ordinary workers working in the stages of PAM and determined by the scope of the assigned task
Central Government stakeholders	
Central government	National government, constitutionally mandated to make and implement policies and laws with regard to the use, maintenance, renewal and disposal of physical assets.
Line ministries	Ministries supervising the course of the PAM, issuing certain administrative decisions or examining the compliance of the LG PAM with the law
National audit body (OAG)	Statutory mandated providing audit services for the LG PAM or determined by its scope, especially on value for money audit
NGOs, such as Environmental bodies	Organizations providing physical assets for the particular program or determined by its scope
Civil society	Citizens' welfare advocates
Private sector	Interested in profit maximization
Lenders/investors	Profit oriented merchants
Media	Voice of the voiceless, compliance checkers

Table 2 presents a bird's eye view of the characteristics of the different stakeholders in the management of physical assets in the LGs. To track performance and manage physical assets effectively, local government management must know and benchmark all the stakeholders of physical asset management and their partners in a complex, collaborative management environment. Knowing their characteristics is one way to appreciate their inclusivity in the respective stages of managing physical assets. This is meant to ensure that quality service is delivered to all. Stakeholder analysis means developing a meaningful relationship with and

between them. It is meant to ensure that the LGs understand and consistently deliver upon their expectations and needs. However, the LGs may fail to develop the type of relationships required.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper is to analyze the diverse stakeholders and their responsibilities in the management of physical assets in the LGs. An appraisal of stakeholder analysis as a tool for generating knowledge about actors indicates that there is a lot more work needed to disseminate the role of PAM and the need to formalize and consistently monitor it at organization level.

Recommendation

It is recommended that stakeholders give priority and due importance to PAM to enable consistent public service delivery. Efforts to sensitize and systemize the PAM should be elevated to be funded and facilitated by high level actors in the area of practice to further popularize PAM as a relevant area of study that helps to stabilize organizations and service delivery.

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