

Filling the Infrastructure Gap in the Americas –What do people really want?

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By Guest
Author

By Tracy Betts

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IDB-funded online survey to 33,500 internet users across the Americas reveals people's priorities in infrastructure.

Can you guess
the region's
priorities in
infrastructure?



Increasingly, the quality of our public infrastructure has been making headlines. Scenes of crumbling cement tunnels, rusted steel towers, and pothole-filled pavement are common in both developed and developing countries alike. More worrisome are the implications that the current state of the world's infrastructure has on growth, competitiveness, job creation, sustainability, and poverty reduction.

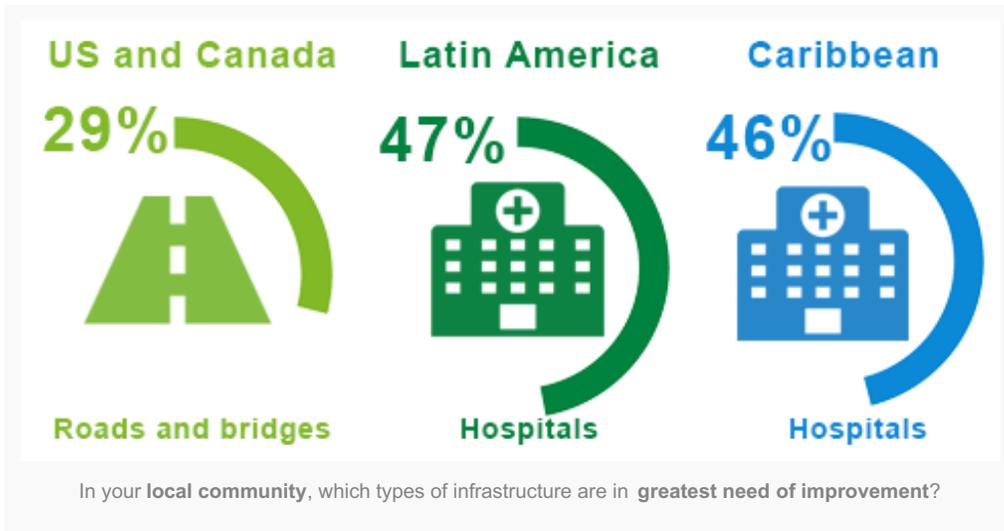
Given the critical role the topic plays in the [2030 Sustainable Development Agenda](#), multilateral development banks (MDBs) have been redoubling their efforts to promote investment in sustainable and inclusive infrastructure in their borrowing member countries, crowding in private capital to help fill an estimated \$1.0 to \$1.5 trillion global infrastructure gap[1]. For Latin America and the Caribbean, filling that gap would require an annual investment of \$300 billion per year, roughly twice the amount being spent today[2]. This is one of the topics to be discussed next month at the [2017 Global Infrastructure Forum under the theme "Delivering Inclusive and Sustainable Infrastructure"](#), which is co-organized by nine MDBs in partnership with the United Nations.

Yet exactly what type of infrastructure do people want? To answer this question, and in keeping with its commitment to listen carefully to its clients, the [Inter-American Development Bank](#) in late 2016 commissioned [RIWI](#) to administer a survey of randomized internet users across the Americas to capture their attitudes towards sustainable and inclusive infrastructure issues from a local, country and regional perspective.

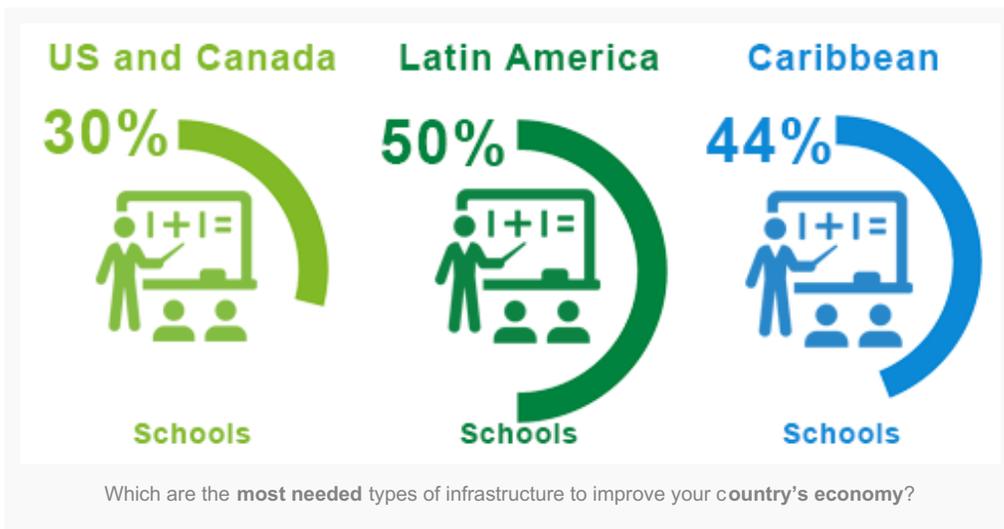
We heard from over 33,500 respondents and learned that in **Latin America**, 42% believe that **hospitals are the most important infrastructure priority in local communities**, while **water supply** is the top priority for the **Caribbean** (47%).



In terms of what was **most in need of improvement**, **hospitals** came in first throughout **Latin America** (47%) as well as the **Caribbean** (46%).



When asked about what is most needed to improve their country's economy –**schools were ranked the most important across Latin America** (50%) **and the Caribbean** (44%). In an [earlier survey, also commissioned by the IDB](#), **education and early childhood development** were considered the most pressing development challenge faced by the region.



We also learned that most respondents agreed that **the government and private investors should spend more to make infrastructure accessible to low-income people, rural communities and those with disabilities** (60%, 66% and 70%, respectively). This finding bodes well for our efforts to promote social inclusion and fight against inequality—one of the key priorities for the Bank’s work in the region.

As the development community comes together to discuss ways to fill the global infrastructure gap, we must not lose sight of the development outcomes we ultimately want to achieve. New bridges, ports, roads and energy sources are clearly vital for stimulating productivity and inclusive, sustainable growth. But so are hospitals, health clinics and schools. And while building and maintaining physical infrastructure is important, we should continue to ensure the quality of the services provided which, in turn, depends on the human capital needed to fully exploit the medium and long term benefits of these investments. In the big picture, as the survey results confirm, it’s about the lives we help to improve.

As part of the objectives of the Global Infrastructure Forum, we have been asked to “*encourage a greater range of voices to be heard, particularly from developing countries and identify and address infrastructure and capacity gaps...*” Here at the IDB, we’ve already heard from quite a few voices and hospitals and schools are what matter most to the people in our region.

[1] “Partnering to Build a Better World: MDBs’ Common Approaches to Infrastructure Development”, presented to the G20 Development Working Group and G20 Investment and Infrastructure Working Group, August 2015.

[2] Perrotti, D. E., and R. J. Sánchez. 2011. “La brecha de infraestructura en América Latina y el Caribe.” Natural Resources and Infrastructure Series no. 153. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Santiago.

Note:

Latin America refers to the following countries: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela.

Caribbean refers to the following countries: Bahamas, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago.

About the author:

Tracy Betts is the IDB’s Strategy Monitoring Division Chief.