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Research Article

Public Procurement Reforms and Their Impact on Transparency in Developing Economies

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Abstract

Public procurement-the process by which governments purchase goods, works, and services-is a crucial component of governance and economic development. In numerous developing countries, public procurement accounts for a substantial portion of national spending, often estimated at about 30% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and serves as a lever for delivering public services and infrastructure. However, procurement processes have historically been prone to corruption and inefficiencies, undermining development outcomes. This article examines how public procurement reforms implemented over the past two decades have impacted transparency in developing countries. It defines public procurement and its role in governance, outlines major reform types (legal frameworks, e-procurement, capacity building, anti-corruption measures), and analyzes links between these reforms and improvements in transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Using case studies from Nigeria, Kenya, India, and Bangladesh, the paper illustrates successes and challenges in reform implementation. Despite notable progress-such as the introduction of e-procurement systems that curb discretion and digitize the tender process-persistent challenges like political interference, weak enforcement, and institutional capacity gaps continue to hinder full transparency. The study finds that while reforms can significantly enhance openness and accountability (e.g. through online procurement portals and stronger legal oversight), their effectiveness depends on robust institutional frameworks and sustained political will. The article concludes with recommendations for strengthening procurement reforms to ensure transparency is sustained and corruption curtailed, including legal and institutional measures, technological upgrades, capacity development, and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords

Public Procurement, Reforms, Transparency, Developing Economies

1. Introduction

Public procurement refers to the process by which public authorities (governments, ministries, agencies) acquire works, goods, and services from the private sector to fulfill public needs [2]. It is an essential function of government, underpinning the delivery of public infrastructure (such as roads, buildings) and services (such as healthcare, education), and it accounts for a substantial portion of public expenditure. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, public procurement spending averages about 12.9% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [1], while in

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developing countries it is estimated around 30% of GDP and over 30% of total public spending [1]. In some regions like sub-Saharan Africa, procurement can account for up to 50% of government expenditures, reflecting its critical role in budget execution and service delivery [3]. Given this magnitude, the governance of public procurement has significant implications for economic development and public trust. Effective procurement can stimulate trade, support private sector growth, and ensure value-for-money in public projects [4]. Conversely, poor governance of procurement can lead to waste, cost overruns, and the failure of projects to deliver intended benefits [5].

Transparency in public procurement is widely recognized as a cornerstone of good governance. A transparent procurement process-one that is open, visible, and accessible to all stakeholders-enables scrutiny and accountability, deters corrupt practices, and helps achieve optimal value for money [6, 7]. Indeed, transparency is a formidable check on corruption, fostering competition among suppliers and allowing civil society and the public to monitor procurement decisions [6]. Where information on tenders, criteria, awards, and contract execution is openly available, it becomes harder for officials to favor cronies or for bribes to influence outcomes. By contrast, opaque procurement processes create “black holes” where public funds can be diverted or mismanaged without detection [8, 9]. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 57% of all foreign bribery cases involve corrupt payments related to public procurement [10], underscoring that procurement is one of the government activities most vulnerable to corruption. In many developing countries, systemic corruption has often manifested through procurement manipulation-whether via rigged bids, kickbacks, or inflated contracts-and reducing these malpractices is central to broader anti-corruption and governance reform efforts [11].

Over the last two decades, growing awareness of the developmental cost of procurement corruption and inefficiency has prompted widespread reforms in public procurement systems across developing economies. International organizations such as the World Bank, OECD, and United Nations have advocated for procurement reform as part of good governance agendas, linking it to improved public financial management and better development outcomes [12, 4]. Governments have introduced new procurement laws and regulations, established oversight institutions, and adopted modern tools like e-procurement to increase openness. These reforms seek to institutionalize transparency and accountability in the procurement cycle-from needs assessment and bidding to contract award and implementation-thereby ensuring that public contracts are awarded fairly and competitively, and that public money is spent effectively for citizens’ benefit [13]. For instance, Morocco’s recent overhaul of its procurement decree aimed to unify and simplify procedures, mandate open competitive bidding, enhance transparency through a web portal, and improve oversight and dispute resolution mechanisms [14, 15]. Such initiatives illustrate the comprehensive approach many countries are taking to reform procurement in pursuit of greater transparency and efficiency.

Despite these efforts, the pace and effectiveness of procurement reforms have varied widely across countries. Some developing nations have achieved notable successes-embedding transparency in their procurement systems and seeing corresponding reductions in corruption and cost savings-whereas others have struggled with partial implementation or continued political interference. This article examines public procurement reforms and their impact on transparency in developing economies, with a focus on how different reform measures contribute to or fail to achieve greater openness and accountability. The analysis is grounded in real-world examples from selected countries (Nigeria, Kenya, India, and Bangladesh) that have pursued procurement reforms in recent years. These cases provide insights into both the successes (e.g., the rollout of electronic procurement systems that curbed opportunities for fraud in Bangladesh [16, 17]) and the challenges (e.g., persistence of vested interests circumventing rules in Nigeria [18]) experienced in practice. Key questions addressed include: How have legal and institutional reforms helped improve transparency? What has been the role of technology (e-procurement) in making procurement more open? Have capacity-building efforts in procurement professionalization yielded better compliance and oversight? What obstacles continue to undermine transparent procurement, and why do they persist despite formal reforms?

By exploring these questions, the article contributes to an understanding of the link between procurement reform and transparency outcomes. It identifies patterns across countries regarding which reforms are most effective and what contextual factors influence success. Furthermore, the discussion will tackle the ongoing challenges that limit transparency-such as inadequate enforcement of rules, political patronage, and lack of information accessibility-and propose recommendations to address them. The Ministry of Works in Abuja, Nigeria, which handles large public works contracts, is highlighted as an example where transparency reforms are critically needed and slowly being instituted at the federal level. Overall, this study underscores that public procurement reform is not a one-off event but a continuous process of strengthening governance structures, and that achieving true transparency requires not only sound regulations and modern systems but also the political will, institutional capacity, and civic oversight to enforce them.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, a literature review defines public procurement and reviews major types of procurement reforms implemented in developing economies over the past two decades. Next, the methodology of the study is explained. Then, the article presents case studies of procurement reform experiences in Nigeria, Kenya, India, and Bangladesh, illustrating concrete measures, outcomes, and challenges in each context. This is followed by an analysis of how these reforms have influenced transparency, accountability, and efficiency, and a discussion of persistent challenges that hinder transparency despite reforms. Finally, the paper offers recommendations for strengthening procurement reforms to sustain transparency and curb corruption, and concludes with reflections on the way forward.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Public Procurement: Definition and Role in Development

Public procurement is broadly defined as the purchase by governments and state entities of goods, works (construction), and services from external sources to fulfill public objectives [2]. It encompasses the entire process of acquiring what the government needs to function-from initial planning and budgeting, through the tendering and bid evaluation stages, to contract award, execution, and final payment [19]. As such, public procurement is a core component of public financial management and service delivery. Through procurement, governments build roads and schools, equip hospitals, obtain essential goods, and hire expertise to implement programs. The efficiency and integrity of procurement thus directly affect the quality and cost of public services and infrastructure available to citizens [4, 3].

The role of public procurement in governance and economic development cannot be overstated. It operates at the intersection of the public and private sectors, translating budgetary allocations into tangible outcomes on the ground. A well-functioning procurement system helps ensure that public funds are used effectively to achieve development outcomes, providing value for money and timely delivery of projects. For instance, when procurement is conducted competitively and transparently, the government can obtain higher-quality goods and works at lower prices, stretch its budgets further, and avoid project delays [5]. Additionally, public procurement can be leveraged as a tool for economic policy: large government contracts can stimulate local industries, create jobs, and attract investment. Indeed, procurement spending (often 15–30% of GDP in many countries [20, 1]) makes governments some of the biggest buyers in the economy, with significant influence on markets. Fair and open procurement processes can foster greater competition and private sector development, including opportunities for small and medium enterprises, thereby contributing to inclusive growth [4, 13].

Conversely, weak or corrupt procurement practices pose serious risks. When procurement is non-transparent or inefficient, public projects may be awarded to less qualified contractors due to bribes or favoritism, leading to substandard execution and wasted resources. Poor governance of procurement can turn public investments into liabilities – for example, funds for a road might be embezzled or a poorly built road might collapse, undermining development goals [21]. Furthermore, corruption in procurement erodes public trust in government and deters honest businesses from participating in public tenders. In extreme cases, procurement scandals can become major political crises. Therefore, strengthening public procurement systems has been recognized as critical for improving governance, reducing corruption, and achieving better development results. International initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implicitly acknowledge this link, with targets on accountable institutions and effective spending (SDG 16) directly relevant to procurement reform.

Notably, public procurement is also an arena for advancing social and policy objectives beyond cost efficiency. Many countries now integrate goals such as sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity into procurement. For example, some governments practice sustainable or “green” procurement by considering environmental impacts in purchasing decisions, or promote gender-responsive public procurement by seeking to increase the share of contracts awarded to women-owned businesses [22, 23]. These broader objectives underscore that procurement reform is part of a wider governance agenda – one that aims to make public spending not only cleaner and more efficient but also more strategically aligned with development priorities.

2.2. Procurement Reforms in Developing Economies: Objectives and Types

Procurement reforms refer to deliberate changes in policies, laws, processes, and systems governing public procurement, aimed at overcoming weaknesses and aligning practice with principles of transparency, accountability, fairness, and efficiency. In developing economies, especially since the early 2000s, a wave of procurement reforms has been driven by several converging factors: the need to combat pervasive procurement-related corruption, pressure from international donors and trade agreements to adhere to good practices, the desire to improve public expenditure outcomes, and technological advances enabling new tools like electronic procurement. The overall objective of these reforms has been to modernize public procurement systems to make them more open, competitive, and performance-oriented, thereby reducing leakages of funds and improving the quality of public services.

Major types of procurement reforms implemented in developing countries over the past two decades include:

1) Legal and Institutional Framework Reforms

Perhaps the foundational step in many countries was the enactment of comprehensive public procurement laws or regulations to replace outdated or fragmented rules. These new laws typically embed international best practices (often influenced by the UNCITRAL Model Law on Public Procurement or guidelines from the World Bank and OECD) – for example, mandating open competitive bidding as the default method, establishing clear evaluation criteria, and requiring disclosure of award information. Alongside new laws, independent regulatory agencies or procurement authorities have been created for oversight. For instance, Nigeria's Public Procurement Act 2007 was a landmark reform establishing the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) as a regulatory authority to monitor and enforce procurement rules [24, 25]. Similarly, Kenya's Public Procurement Law (first enacted in 2005 and updated in 2015) set up a Public Procurement Regulatory Authority to oversee compliance. These legal reforms institutionalize transparency by providing a formal framework that delineates how procurement must be conducted and who is accountable. They often include provisions for advertising bids publicly, standardized tender documents, bid protest mechanisms, and sanctions for violations. A World Bank review noted that such governance and legal framework reforms are critical but must be complemented by capacity building and technology to be effective [26]. Many countries also abolished ad-hoc tender boards and replaced them with more structured tender committees and approval thresholds to curtail discretionary decision-making (as was done in Nigeria, where old tender boards were scrapped in favor of ministerial tenders committees under the new law) [27]. In sum, legal and institutional reforms provide the skeletal structure for a transparent procurement system – setting rules of the game and creating bodies to implement and monitor those rules.

2) E-Procurement and Digital Transparency Initiatives

A transformative trend in procurement reform has been the adoption of electronic government procurement (e-GP) systems. E-procurement involves using online platforms to conduct procurement processes (from advertising bids to receiving supplier offers, evaluating bids, and publishing contract awards). The rationale is that digital systems automate and standardize procedures, minimize human discretion, and make information accessible to all in real time [28]. This greatly increases transparency and efficiency if implemented well. For example, Kenya in 2025 mandated all public procuring entities to shift to an end-to-end e-procurement platform, with the explicit intent to "institutionalize transparency" and eliminate the opacity and manual leakages that plagued its system [29, 30]. An effective e-procurement system logs every action (creating an audit trail), publicly displays tender notices and awards, and can even allow citizens to track progress. Bangladesh's e-GP system is a case in point of success: by 2022, roughly 80% of the country's public procurement expenditure was handled through the online e-GP portal (up from just 2% in 2017) [16]. This digital shift in Bangladesh has led to *all* procurement records being preserved online for audit, reduction of opportunities for bidder collusion or intimidation (since bids are submitted anonymously online), and substantial savings in costs [31, 17]. Research confirms that e-procurement can significantly improve transparency, especially in countries with robust institutional frameworks to support it [32]. However, it is noted that simply digitizing without proper change management may not automatically reduce corruption [33]. Thus, reforms typically involve not just procuring software, but also training users and updating regulations to integrate e-procurement. Many countries have also joined the Open Contracting movement, publishing their procurement data in standardized open formats (Open Contracting Data Standard) to enable public analysis and oversight. The creation of open contracting portals (such as Nigeria's National Open Contracting Portal – NOCOPO) reflects this push for data transparency, though utilization of these portals remains a challenge in some cases [34].

3) Capacity Building and Professionalization

Recognizing that rules and technology alone are insufficient if the people running procurement lack expertise or integrity, a lot of reform effort has focused on building the capacity of procurement officials and institutions. This has taken various forms: establishing specialized training programs and certifications in procurement, creating procurement cadres or units in ministries (for example, many countries now have a Procurement Department in each ministry, as seen in Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Works in Abuja which has a dedicated Procurement Department [35]), and developing procurement manuals and guidelines to improve execution. International development agencies and local governments have sponsored extensive training to familiarize public officials and bidders with new procurement procedures and e-procurement systems [36, 37]. Some countries have set up procurement professional bodies or networks to share best practices. The professionalization aspect also involves improving the career incentives and ethics of procurement staff – for instance, rotating staff to avoid collusion, enhancing merit-based recruitment and remuneration to attract skilled personnel, and inculcating a culture of compliance. A Brookings study on Nigeria highlighted addressing workforce skill gaps as a key reform area: modern procurement requires skills in project management, market analysis, and e-systems, which many officials currently lack [38, 39]. Without capable and honest staff, even the best laws might be subverted. Therefore, capacity-building reforms aim to ensure that procurement entities at all levels (federal, state, local) can actually implement the new transparent procedures and resist undue pressures.

4) Anti-Corruption Measures and Transparency Oversight

Given the vulnerability of procurement to graft, reform programs often include targeted anti-corruption initiatives. These include strengthening audit and control mechanisms, establishing independent complaint review bodies, involving civil society in monitoring, and increasing sanctions for malfeasance. For example, many countries set up a procurement audit unit or authority that conducts regular ex-post reviews of contracts to detect irregularities. Some have empowered anti-corruption agencies to oversee major procurement (Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, for instance, has prosecuted procurement fraud in high-profile cases). Transparency measures such as mandatory disclosure of procurement plans, award decisions, and contract performance information are codified in law or policy. In Uganda and Kenya, civil society organizations have been invited to observe tender openings or sit on procurement committees as independent monitors in certain projects. Another innovation has been the adoption of open contracting and citizen engagement in procurement – publishing accessible data and creating feedback loops so that citizens can report issues or track project delivery. Bangladesh's reform included launching an online citizen portal where the public can monitor implementation of procurement contracts and even participate in social audits at the community level [40]. Such engagement can create external pressure for transparency. Reforms have also tried to address collusion and fraud through measures like bidder debarment (blacklisting companies involved in corruption) and requiring ethics codes or asset declarations for procurement officers. In sum, these anti-corruption and transparency-specific reforms complement the legal, tech, and capacity efforts by focusing on accountability. As an example of institutionalizing reform, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Works now not only has a procurement department, but also a Reform Coordination and Service Improvement Unit with an anti-corruption mandate [41], reflecting an internalization of transparency objectives within high-spending ministries.

Collectively, these types of reforms reinforce each other. A new law establishes transparency requirements; e-procurement provides a tool to fulfill those requirements in practice; training ensures officials can use the tool and follow the law; and oversight mechanisms verify and enforce compliance while deterring backsliding into old corrupt habits. International support has often underpinned these reforms – for example, the World Bank's funding and expertise were instrumental in countries like Bangladesh (via a series of Public Procurement Reform Projects) [36, 42] and helped draft new procurement codes in African countries. The United Nations and OECD have also promoted principles of integrity, transparency, and value-for-money that many developing nations have adopted in their regulations.

It is important to note that reform is a continuous process rather than a one-time fix. Many countries have had to amend procurement laws multiple times or issue new regulations as challenges emerge (for example, to close loopholes or adapt to technology). The ultimate goal remains to achieve a procurement system that is transparent and accountable enough to withstand political or private pressures and deliver efficient outcomes. The following sections will look at how these reforms have unfolded in specific country contexts and what impact they have had on transparency and governance of public procurement.

3. Methodology

This article employs a qualitative, comparative case study methodology to examine the relationship between public procurement reforms and transparency in developing economies. The research is based on an extensive desk review of literature and policy documents combined with analysis of four country case studies (Nigeria, Kenya, India, and Bangladesh). Data were gathered from scholarly articles, government reports, legal texts, and publications by international organizations (such as the World Bank, OECD, and UN) that document procurement systems and reforms. By triangulating information from these credible sources, the study builds a detailed picture of reform measures implemented and their outcomes.

The case study approach was chosen to provide concrete illustrations of how reforms play out in practice and to capture contextual differences. The selected countries represent large developing economies that have all instituted procurement reforms in the past two decades, albeit with varying emphases and results. Nigeria and Kenya offer perspectives from sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria exemplifying a resource-rich federal state struggling with implementation gaps, and Kenya demonstrating recent strong political will through a bold e-procurement mandate. India provides the context of a major Asian economy where procurement reforms have centered on technology and process improvements (like the Government e-Marketplace) even in the absence of a singular procurement law. Bangladesh is included as a notable success story in digitizing procurement and achieving transparency gains through sustained reforms. Using these cases allows comparison across different administrative and political environments.

For each case, relevant reforms (legal changes, introduction of e-procurement, institutional developments, etc.) were identified and their impact on transparency and corruption indicators was analyzed using secondary data. Where available, empirical results from studies (such as transparency indices, savings achieved, or number of bidders) are cited to substantiate the analysis. The study also examines reports of ongoing challenges in each country to understand why certain issues persist.

No primary data collection (such as interviews or surveys) was conducted for this research; instead, the analysis relies on existing evidence and evaluations from the literature. This includes quantitative findings (e.g., percentage of contracts processed online, cost savings due to reforms, or survey-based corruption indices) and qualitative assessments (e.g., expert commentary on political interference or case examples of procurement outcomes). By reviewing multiple sources, the study ensures a balanced and well-informed perspective.

The methodology is essentially a form of documentary analysis and comparative synthesis. It first establishes a conceptual framework from the literature on what constitutes procurement reform and why it is expected to improve transparency. Then, through the country cases, it observes how those theoretical expectations align with actual experiences. The discussion section draws cross-cutting lessons on the conditions that enable reforms to deliver transparency gains, as well as the common obstacles observed.

Finally, based on the analysis, the article formulates recommendations. These recommendations are grounded in the evidence from the cases and the broader literature, aiming to be applicable generally to developing economies seeking to bolster transparency through procurement reform. The academic tone of the study is maintained by critically engaging with sources and avoiding anecdotal claims that are not supported by documented facts or credible analysis.

Limitations of this methodology include its reliance on available documentation – biases in reports or gaps in data could influence findings. However, by using reputable and peer-reviewed sources wherever possible, and by comparing multiple country contexts, the study mitigates some of these limitations. The approach is appropriate for the exploratory and analytical nature of the research question, which seeks to understand reform impacts rather than measure them precisely.

In summary, the method integrates literature review and case study comparison, providing both depth (within each country narrative) and breadth (across different environments) in examining how public procurement reforms affect transparency in developing economies.

4. Procurement Reform Initiatives in Selected Developing Countries

To illustrate the dynamics of procurement reforms and their impact on transparency, this section examines four developing countries that have undertaken notable reform efforts: Nigeria, Kenya, India, and Bangladesh. Each sub-section provides a brief overview of the country's procurement reform trajectory in the past two decades, examples of specific measures implemented, and observed outcomes or challenges, especially regarding transparency and accountability.

4.1. Nigeria

Nigeria presents a case of an extensive procurement reform framework that has faced hurdles in implementation. Prior to the 2000s, Nigeria's public procurement was notoriously opaque and inefficient, governed by loose regulations that enabled widespread corruption (such as contract awards based on patronage and inflated project costs). In response, and spurred by international pressure, Nigeria embarked on reforms in the early 2000s. A critical milestone was the Country Procurement Assessment Report (CPAR) conducted in 2000 by the World Bank in collaboration with the Nigerian government [43]. The CPAR identified severe weaknesses and recommended foundational changes: enacting a dedicated procurement law, establishing an oversight body, overhauling tender boards, and instituting transparent procedures [44, 45].

Acting on these recommendations (albeit slowly), Nigeria passed the Public Procurement Act (PPA) in 2007, which for the first time provided a comprehensive legal framework at the federal level [24]. The PPA 2007 created the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) as a regulatory agency to issue guidelines, monitor compliance, and enforce the law. It also called for a National Council on Public Procurement to oversee policy (though, tellingly, this high-level council has *still not been constituted* as of the present, due to political delays) [46]. Under the Act, open competitive bidding became the default method for awards, and procuring entities are required to publicly advertise bids and publish contract award information. The Ministry of Finance and the BPP developed standardized bidding documents and procurement thresholds delineating the approval authority for contracts. The Federal Ministry of Works in Abuja (responsible for large infrastructure projects) is an example of a ministry that had to adapt to the new regime: it established a Procurement Department and a Reform and Anti-Corruption Unit to align with the 2007 Act's requirements [35, 41]. These units are intended to ensure that the ministry conducts tenders transparently and complies with procedures, especially important given the high value of road and construction contracts it handles.

Despite this robust legal framework, Nigeria's federal procurement reform has been marred by slow and incoherent implementation [47]. It took seven years after the CPAR for the law to be passed, and many provisions have lagged in practice. Challenges noted by observers include a persistently high rate of corruption, political interference in contract awards, and inadequate enforcement of rules [48]. For example, while the PPA requires open advertising of bids, in practice many federal Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) have been accused of using loopholes to avoid open tender-such as unjustified use of selective tendering or splitting contracts to stay below competitive bidding thresholds. Indeed, a 2025 analysis remarked that Nigeria's procurement remains a "black hole where opacity thrives, records vanish, contracts are inflated, and cronies profit at the expense of millions" [8, 9]. This colorful description highlights the reality that powerful interests often bypass official processes. The BPP has limited capacity to oversee thousands of contracts across the federation and has struggled to sanction violators, especially when they are politically connected.

One significant reform area in Nigeria has been the push for electronic procurement (e-procurement). The BPP introduced an online database for publishing procurement notices and results (the NOCOPO – National Open Contracting Portal) as well as an e-procurement pilot system. Subnational governments in Kaduna and Ekiti States pioneered e-procurement portals ahead of the federal government, showing positive initial results in transparency [49]. However, at the federal level, adoption has been very limited. By 2023, Nigeria still did not have a fully operational end-to-end e-GP system for all MDAs. The NOCOPO, while a good open data initiative, is underutilized and not regularly updated by agencies [34]. Many procurements thus happen outside the public eye, with documentation sometimes deliberately kept off-record. High-level resistance – likely because a fully transparent digital system would curtail opportunities for rent-seeking – has been identified as a barrier [34, 50]. The cost of this inaction is high: the World Bank estimated that implementing e-procurement could save Nigeria up to $270 million annually, yet a pilot investment in 2020 (₦1.6 billion spent on procurement software and training) has not yielded much because it wasn't rolled out broadly [51].

There have been some pockets of progress in Nigeria. For example, the *Ekiti State* government's e-procurement system reportedly increased competition for state contracts and reduced average bid prices, according to local reports. Civil society groups and the media in Nigeria are also increasingly active in scrutinizing procurement (e.g., tracking budgets and contracts awarded). The Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) and other bodies have tried to bring transparency especially in large public-private partnerships (PPP) and works projects. Moreover, Nigeria's government in 2016 joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and made commitments to open contracting, indicating political acknowledgement of the issue (if not full delivery).

The challenges that persist in Nigeria include: political interference and lack of will, as seen in the non-constitution of the Procurement Council (which deprives the system of strategic guidance and independent oversight); weak enforcement – very few officials have faced consequences for breaching procurement rules; capacity issues, where many procurement cadres are not adequately trained or empowered to resist pressures; and loopholes in the legal framework, such as exemptions (security-related procurement often bypasses standard rules, which in Nigeria's context of defense spending has led to major corruption scandals [52]). Additionally, the judiciary's slow handling of corruption cases means even when fraud is exposed, accountability is delayed or denied. A Brookings study found that in Nigeria, the absence of political will, delayed e-procurement implementation, direct political interventions in procurement processes, and lack of access to procurement data are key barriers to transparency [53]. It suggested amending the 2007 Act, streamlining bureaucracy, and truly digitizing procurement as urgent steps [54].

In summary, Nigeria's reform journey shows a strong legal foundation and formal commitment to transparency, but uneven execution. The impact on transparency so far has been modest – procurement information is more available than two decades ago and grossly inflated contracts (like the infamous cases before the reforms) are somewhat less common, yet the system remains far from fully open. Procurement reforms in Nigeria have collided with entrenched interests, limiting their transformative potential. The case underscores that laws on paper must be coupled with leadership and enforcement in practice. The Federal Ministry of Works in Abuja, for example, may have a procurement unit now, but if that unit's recommendations can be overridden by political orders, then transparency is not truly institutionalized. Nigeria illustrates the difficulty of translating procurement reform intentions into reality when governance challenges are broad; nevertheless, it also demonstrates why the effort remains crucial – given the billions of dollars at stake and the clear evidence that more transparent procurement could redirect funds toward development (e.g., the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (anti-graft agency) revealed that between 2018 and 2020, about ₦2.9 trillion (roughly $7 billion) was lost to procurement fraud in Nigeria, resources that could have built needed infrastructure and services) [55].

4.2. Kenya

Kenya has been recognized as one of the more proactive African countries in reforming public procurement, although it too faces ongoing challenges. Kenya's reform process kicked off in the early 2000s, around the same time as Nigeria's, driven by corruption concerns and donor recommendations. The Public Procurement and Disposal Act of 2005 established a modern legal framework, replacing a previous regime that was viewed as opaque. This Act (and its subsequent 2015 update, the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act) introduced mandatory open tendering for most purchases, detailed regulations on evaluation, and set up institutions like the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) and an independent Public Procurement Administrative Review Board for handling bidder complaints. These steps significantly improved the formal transparency of Kenya's procurement processes by delineating clear procedures and allowing aggrieved bidders to seek redress, which in turn deters arbitrary contract awards.

Kenya also implemented notable policies to make procurement more inclusive and transparent. One such policy is the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) program, introduced in 2013, which reserves 30% of government contracts for enterprises owned by youth, women, or persons with disabilities. While this is primarily a socio-economic policy, it required creating registries and certification for eligible firms and publicly reporting on contract allocation to these groups, thereby adding an extra layer of openness and accountability regarding who benefits from public contracts [56]. By design, AGPO sought to break the stranglehold of established (often politically connected) firms and broaden participation, which can indirectly reduce corruption by diversifying the vendor base.

In terms of technology, Kenya initially incorporated some electronic tools into its Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS) for procurement, but progress was fitful. By the late 2010s, Kenya recognized that partial digitization via IFMIS was insufficient (it had modules for supplier registration and bidding, but many processes were still done manually or off-system) [57]. The turning point came in 2023-2025, when the government demonstrated high-level commitment to full e-procurement. In June 2025, the Kenyan government issued a directive that all public procuring entities must transition to the new e-GP (Electronic Government Procurement) system and conduct all procurement electronically [29]. This was a bold move signalling top-level political will to enforce transparency. The e-GP system in Kenya is envisioned as an end-to-end platform handling everything from e-tender advertising, bid submission, evaluation (with digital records), to contract award and management [28]. If properly implemented, this would make it possible for every step to be tracked and audited, drastically reducing opportunities for interference (since the system would log who did what, when) [28].

The rationale, as stated by Kenyan officials, is that e-procurement will block leakages and institutionalize transparency [58]. The system is expected to increase competition by lowering barriers to entry (suppliers can bid online from anywhere) and by assuring them that the process is fair. It should also enable real-time public disclosure of procurement data. For example, each tender's details and eventual winners could be viewable on a public portal, making Kenya's procurement one of the most open in Africa. The decision to mandate this transition was partly influenced by the success of peers: Rwanda's comprehensive e-procurement (the "Umucyo" system) and even Bangladesh's progress were cited as models demonstrating that digital reforms yield significant benefits [59]. Indeed, Rwanda's system was praised for increasing competition and saving public funds [60], which Kenyan reformers found compelling.

Kenya's reforms have shown some positive outcomes already. According to the country's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, procurement-related graft remains a big portion of corruption cases, but the existence of a legal framework and review mechanism has enabled more complaints to come to light and some tenders to be halted or re-tendered for fairness. Civil society and media play an active role in Kenya; for example, investigative journalists have exposed procurement scandals (like the 2016 National Youth Service scandal involving fake tenders), leading to public outcry and legal action. These exposures are facilitated by the fact that there are procurement records and rules to measure against – an outcome of reforms.

However, Kenya is not without its challenges. Implementation of e-procurement has been delayed before (the IFMIS e-procurement rollout faced resistance and technical hitches). There's acknowledgment that *technology alone is not a panacea* – it must be backed by enforcement and oversight [61]. Past audits in Kenya have found issues such as "splitting" of procurements by officials to avoid open tender thresholds, collusion among suppliers, and political interference especially at county government levels. The devolved government structure (47 county governments with their own procurement) introduced after 2010 has added complexity; while it brought procurement decisions closer to local communities (potentially allowing more local scrutiny), it also multiplied the number of entities that need monitoring and the opportunities for corruption at local levels. Not all counties have strong capacity, and corruption scandals in county procurements have been frequent.

To address such issues, Kenya's reform agenda pairs e-GP with measures like independent oversight and civic engagement. The OGP commitments by Kenya include adopting the Open Contracting Data Standard and involving citizens in budget and contract monitoring [62]. For example, publishing procurement data in open data portals is meant to enable tech-savvy citizens or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to analyze trends and detect anomalies (like a single company winning disproportionate bids). The government also emphasizes training: as part of the 2025 e-GP directive, extensive capacity building for procurement officers and suppliers was planned, to ensure they can use the system and understand the new processes [63].

In summary, Kenya's procurement reforms have been characterized by steady strengthening of legal provisions and a recent aggressive shift to digital transparency. The impact, in terms of transparency, is promising: if the e-GP rollout is successful, Kenya could dramatically reduce discretion in procurement and set an example in the region. The fact that the mandate came from the presidency indicates a level of political backing that is crucial for such reforms to stick. The expected outcomes include reduced fraud (since any attempt to manipulate a digital tender is more easily traceable) and improved efficiency (faster processing, less paperwork). Indeed, Kenyan officials have expressed that the e-procurement platform will build public trust as every stage of a procurement can be monitored [28]. A challenge going forward will be ensuring consistent use across all agencies and dealing with any pushback. The Kenyan case highlights that *political will and leadership are key*: policies like the 2025 directive show that when leaders decide transparency is non-negotiable, the bureaucracy can be compelled to change course.

4.3. India

India is another vast developing economy that has pursued procurement reforms, particularly leveraging technology and centralized platforms, although it differs from Nigeria and Kenya in lacking a single unified procurement law at the national level. In India, public procurement is governed by a combination of general financial rules, guidelines issued by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), and a plethora of state-specific and sector-specific regulations. Recognizing the need for a more coherent framework, the Government of India drafted a Public Procurement Bill in 2012 aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in procurement [64]. That bill, however, did not pass in Parliament, and subsequent attempts to enact it have stalled [65]. Despite the absence of an overarching law, India has taken significant administrative and technological measures that function as reforms to improve transparency.

One of the flagship initiatives is the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), launched in 2016. GeM is an online procurement portal designed to streamline and make transparent the purchase of common goods and services by the central government and many state governments. It operates like an e-commerce platform where vendors and products are listed, and government buyers can directly procure items or services using standardized processes. GeM has revolutionized routine public procurement in India by providing a transparent, efficient, and paperless system with minimal human interface [66, 67]. By 2022, GeM had achieved an annual transaction volume of over $12.5 billion [68], and it continues to grow. The platform has built-in features that promote transparency and accountability: for example, it automatically enforces price comparisons, records every transaction detail digitally, and makes much of the information (such as prices and selected suppliers for common items) publicly visible. Because GeM requires all sellers to register and all buyers to order through the system for designated categories, it reduces the scope for off-book purchases that could favor hidden cronies. It was noted that GeM has brought in transparency in public procurement, redefining the landscape by eliminating cumbersome paperwork and offering a clear audit trail [66]. An official World Bank blog lauded GeM for not only streamlining procurement but also enabling broader policy goals such as sustainable purchasing and inclusion of small businesses [69, 70]. Over half of GeM orders by volume have gone to micro and small enterprises, and tens of thousands of women-led businesses have successfully used the platform to transact with the government [70, 71]. This indicates that a well-designed e-procurement platform can improve openness (everyone sees the same marketplace), reduce favoritism, and empower a wider range of suppliers – all contributing to a more transparent and equitable system.

Beyond GeM, India has mandated e-tendering for most high-value contracts across ministries and public sector units. The Central Public Procurement Portal (CPPP) is an online platform where all central government tender notices and bid results are published for public viewing. Many state governments have their own e-procurement portals as well. The digitization has significantly increased transparency because any interested party can find tender opportunities and results online, rather than such information being limited to insiders. It also curtailed the earlier practice of short tender notice periods or obscure newspaper ads that favored certain bidders – now tenders are widely accessible. Moreover, the use of e-procurement in India often includes electronic bid submission which reduces face-to-face interactions that could facilitate bribery.

Another area of reform is the increased emphasis on integrity and audits. The Central Vigilance Commission issues detailed guidelines to ensure transparency, like requiring that tender evaluation criteria are disclosed in advance and forbidding negotiations with bidders (except in certain cases like single-source). These guidelines are regularly updated to close loopholes. India's Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) also plays a role in ex-post scrutiny of procurement, and public accounts committees in legislatures discuss audit findings. Transparency is further promoted by the Right to Information (RTI) Act, under which citizens and activists frequently request procurement documents to expose irregularities (for example, RTI requests have brought to light issues in procurement ranging from defense acquisitions to local road works, forcing explanations or corrections).

India has seen some notable successes from its reforms: the GeM portal has reportedly saved substantial amounts by aggregating demand and driving prices down through competition, and it cut out middlemen fees. A study estimated that the digitization of procurement processes and oversight mechanisms in India reduced leakages in certain schemes. However, challenges remain. One challenge is that India's procurement landscape is decentralized and heterogeneous – not all agencies strictly follow best practices, and in many states, procurement corruption continues to make headlines (for instance, state-level scandals in public works or procurement of school supplies). The defense sector and state-owned enterprises, which are huge spenders, have sometimes been exempt from or slow in adopting new norms, leading to continued vulnerabilities.

Also, the fact that the Public Procurement Bill has not become law means India relies on a patchwork of rules, which can be less enforceable. There have been calls from experts for a comprehensive law to cement transparency requirements across all levels of government [72]. On the other hand, even without a single law, India's approach has been pragmatic: use executive orders and technology to advance transparency where possible. For example, the Finance Ministry periodically issues procurement reform directives (like prohibiting certain single-source contracts or tightening conflict-of-interest provisions).

In summary, India's procurement reforms demonstrate the power of technology and centralized platforms in bringing transparency, even if legislative reform is incomplete. The impact includes far more information in the public domain about procurements than before, greater competition (with small businesses and startups now able to sell to government via GeM), and reduction of human discretion in many transactions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often emphasized that platforms like GeM are key to eliminating corruption and ensuring "minimum government, maximum governance." India's case also underscores the importance of complementary measures like vigilant auditing and citizen oversight (RTI activism) in sustaining transparency. The presence of active media and civil society in India has meant that lapses in procurement are more quickly reported, which itself acts as a deterrent. However, the country still has work to do in terms of enshrining all these practices into a uniform framework and extending them to all sectors. Nonetheless, the progress with e-procurement (especially GeM) is a model that other countries have studied as a way to harness technology for clean procurement [66, 73].

4.4. Bangladesh

Bangladesh is often cited as a public procurement reform success story among developing economies, especially in terms of leveraging reforms to achieve greater transparency and efficiency. In the early 2000s, Bangladesh's procurement system was plagued by corruption, delays, and political influence (much like its South Asian neighbors). The government, with strong encouragement and support from the World Bank, initiated comprehensive reforms that unfolded in phases.

The first phase was the enactment of the Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2006 and accompanying Public Procurement Rules 2008. These established a uniform legal framework for all government purchases, introducing standard bidding documents, formal advertisement requirements, transparent bid evaluation criteria, and a two-tier bid complaint resolution mechanism. Importantly, the 2006 law created the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) under the Ministry of Planning as the nodal agency to oversee and support procurement reform [42]. CPTU was charged with drafting policies, monitoring compliance, and building capacity. This institutional reform provided sustained leadership for what followed.

The second phase (late 2000s to mid-2010s) focused on capacity building and pilot innovations. Thousands of government officials and bidders were trained on the new law and procedures [36, 37]. The government and World Bank also ran awareness campaigns to change entrenched behaviors (since earlier, collusion and intimidation in bidding were common – local strongmen would physically prevent competitors from submitting bids). Meanwhile, CPTU began developing an electronic procurement system. By around 2011-2012, pilot e-procurement was introduced in four key procuring entities: the Roads and Highways Department, Local Government Engineering Department, Bangladesh Water Development Board, and Rural Electrification Board [74]. These agencies account for a large share of development projects, so piloting with them had significant impact.

The third phase (mid-2010s to early 2020s) was the scale-up of e-Government Procurement (e-GP) nationwide and deepening of transparency measures. Bangladesh rolled out a centralized e-GP portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) that eventually was adopted by over 1,300 public organizations countrywide [75]. By 2022, as noted, 80% of all public procurement in Bangladesh was being processed through e-GP [16] – an extraordinarily rapid adoption compared to many countries. The e-GP system covers the full cycle: agencies post tender notices on the portal, bidders submit bids electronically, evaluations are done through the system, and contract awards are published online. It also has modules for contract management and payments. This has greatly increased transparency: all tender notices and awards are publicly visible, and since bids are encrypted and submitted online, the once rampant practice of physically blocking competitors or tampering with bids has been eliminated [76, 77]. Bidder participation expanded dramatically – the number of registered bidders in the e-GP system reached over 100,000, indicating a far wider competition pool than the earlier manual system where often only a few local firms would bid due to collusion or access issues [78].

The impact of Bangladesh's reforms on transparency and efficiency has been well documented. A World Bank results report in 2023 highlighted several outcomes: average procurement lead time (from invitation to contract signing) dropped from 100 days to 53 days [78], showing faster, more efficient processing. About 7% savings in costs were achieved in e-GP tenders compared to similar manual tenders [17] – likely due to increased competition and better control over bid rigging. These savings amounted to an estimated $1.4 billion saved in 2023 alone for the government budget [17]. Such savings can be redirected to more development activities. Transparency has tangibly improved as well: every step leaves a digital trace, making it easier to audit and identify any malfeasance. The e-GP system retains all documents and data, which means auditing is more effective (previously, files could be lost or manipulated). There is also an online complaint submission and tracking feature, which has helped to reduce the influence of powerful actors – bidders can lodge complaints electronically if they suspect unfair treatment, and those complaints and their resolutions are recorded [79].

Another innovative aspect is citizen engagement. Bangladesh launched a citizen portal that publishes procurement contract information in accessible formats, and in dozens of localities citizen groups have been mobilized to monitor the implementation of projects (e.g., checking if a road built under a contract is as per specifications) [40]. By institutionalizing this openness, the reforms have built external accountability. Anecdotal evidence suggests contractors are now more cautious about deviating from contracts because they know citizens might be watching and reporting. The combination of transparency and social accountability has begun to shift norms – for instance, in some locales known for collusive bidding, open competition has started occurring as the electronic system and community monitoring break old cartel arrangements.

Critical to Bangladesh's success was high-level political commitment sustained across governments. Despite changes in administration, the procurement reform (which could easily threaten vested interests) was kept on track, largely because the economic gains were evident and there was pressure from donors to maintain integrity in the use of aid funds. The Prime Minister's office itself monitored progress of e-GP rollout, signaling to bureaucrats that this was a priority. Bangladesh also invested in change management: it spent considerable effort on training both officials and suppliers (over 30,000 stakeholders trained [37]) so that everyone could transition to the new system. This helped build a coalition of support for reforms – many honest suppliers and officials became proponents of e-GP once they saw its advantages over the old chaotic system.

Of course, Bangladesh still faces challenges. Some procurement – especially in sectors like defense or certain state-owned enterprises – may not yet be fully under e-GP or as transparent. There are reports that politically connected firms still find ways to win a disproportionate share of big contracts (possibly through influence at the project design or bidder pre-qualification stage, which are harder to make fully transparent). And while e-GP has reduced petty corruption (like bribes to obtain tender documents or to submit bids), high-level corruption could still occur (e.g., rigging specifications or influencing who gets invited in limited tenders). So continued vigilance is needed. Moreover, maintaining the e-GP system's integrity requires ongoing cybersecurity and data protection measures, as well as updates to keep it user-friendly.

Nonetheless, Bangladesh stands out for how far it has come. In the 2000s, Transparency International Bangladesh surveys used to show public procurement (especially in works) as one of the most corruption-ridden areas. Today, there is far more information and confidence in the system's fairness than before. The reforms have institutionalized transparency to a large extent – the default expectation now is that tenders are electronic and visible to all. The country's experience illustrates that with the right mix of legal reform, capacity building, and political backing, even a country with limited resources can modernize procurement to be markedly more transparent. It also highlights the substantial development dividends: GDP has been modestly boosted by more efficient investment (the World Bank estimated that e-procurement contributed roughly $1.4–1.6 billion per year to GDP by speeding up project implementation and reducing waste [80, 81]).

In summary, Bangladesh's procurement reforms over the past two decades have had a transformative impact on transparency. Key factors in its success were: a clear legal framework (PPA 2006) as a backbone; a strong central agency (CPTU) driving the changes; phased implementation of e-GP with proper training; and embedding transparency not just as a principle but via concrete tools (portals, data, citizen monitoring). The case offers a model that other developing countries look to when aiming to digitally transform their procurement for better governance outcomes.

5. Impact of Procurement Reforms on Transparency, Accountability, and Efficiency

The country cases above provide concrete evidence that public procurement reforms, when effectively implemented, can lead to significant improvements in transparency, accountability, and efficiency. This section synthesizes those insights and broader findings from research to analyze the link between procurement reforms and these governance outcomes.

Transparency: The clearest impact of procurement reforms has been an increase in the transparency of procurement processes. Across the cases, reforms have made information that was previously hidden or hard to access now publicly available and timely. For example, after reforms, it is now common practice (and often legally mandated) to publicly advertise tender opportunities, whereas before many contracts might have been awarded through direct, unannounced deals. In Bangladesh, tender advertisements and awards are published on the e-GP portal for anyone to see, marking a dramatic shift from the opaque manual system [16, 75]. In Nigeria, although compliance is uneven, the legal requirement is that bids be publicly solicited and contract award decisions are to be documented; civil society can and does request those documents to shine light on outcomes. The result is that procurement is far more "visible" than before, which acts as a deterrent to misconduct. When officials know that their decisions can be scrutinized by auditors, the media, or the public, they are less likely to engage in blatant favoritism or fraud [6].

Electronic procurement has been a game changer for transparency. By moving processes online, it creates a digital paper trail and often an open window for the public. The introduction of e-procurement in places like Kenya and Bangladesh means that every bid submission, every modification, and every award is logged and can later be reviewed [28, 79]. Additionally, e-procurement platforms typically have features such as dashboards or data portals that allow aggregated analysis of procurement (e.g., how many contracts were awarded through competitive bidding vs. single-source, which companies are top recipients, etc.), facilitating oversight and policy analysis. A 2024 study quantifying procurement transparency globally found that countries with robust e-GP systems tend to have higher transparency scores, especially when combined with strong institutions [32]. The study noted that e-procurement systems promote transparency by providing information in open, machine-readable formats and reducing human discretion, but the effect is most pronounced when institutional quality (like rule of law and controls on corruption) is also high [82]. This implies that technology amplifies transparency when governance structures are supportive.

Accountability: Transparency and accountability are closely linked – transparency enables accountability by providing evidence of what transpired. Procurement reforms have enhanced accountability in several ways. First, clearer rules and evaluation criteria mean decision-makers must justify their choices against objective standards, making it easier to hold them to account if they deviate improperly. For instance, if a contract is awarded to a higher-priced bidder without a valid reason, a well-defined legal framework allows that decision to be challenged by competitors or reviewed by oversight bodies. Kenya's establishment of the Public Procurement Review Board empowered aggrieved bidders to hold procuring entities accountable by appealing awards, leading to cancellation or correction of flawed awards in some cases. Second, the creation of oversight institutions (like Nigeria's BPP or Bangladesh's CPTU and Procurement Review Panel) provides dedicated bodies that can investigate procurement decisions and sanction violations, thereby increasing the likelihood that misdeeds are caught and punished. While enforcement is imperfect, the existence of such institutions is a step toward accountability that did not exist before reforms.

Moreover, the availability of data due to reforms has enabled external accountability mechanisms to function. Civil society oversight has been strengthened: NGOs and journalists now use procurement data to expose irregularities and pressure governments to act. In India, the combination of the RTI Act and online tender information has allowed activists to uncover patterns like the same firm repeatedly winning contracts at inflated prices, which spurred inquiries. In Nigeria, investigative reporting (e.g., by Premium Times or BudgIT, a civic tech group) has leveraged procurement records to question dubious contracts, forcing government explanations or cancellations. This external scrutiny is a direct product of greater transparency and has led to greater accountability for procurement officials.

Additionally, reforms often institute internal accountability mechanisms such as required internal audits, approvals by tender committees rather than single individuals, and separation of duties (one person issues the tender, another evaluates, etc.). These reduce the chance of single actors manipulating outcomes without being checked by colleagues. The result is a more accountable process where multiple eyes review decisions. In Bangladesh's reformed system, for example, technical evaluation committees and approval committees must sign off in the e-GP, and their names are recorded – a deterrent for any one member to insert bias without others knowing.

Efficiency and Value for Money: While the focus of this article is transparency, it is important to note that increased transparency and accountability in procurement are generally associated with improved efficiency and value for money. When procedures are open and competitive, more bidders typically participate, which can drive down costs and improve quality. Indeed, evidence from various countries supports this: *Competition has increased* post-reform, with metrics such as the average number of bids per tender rising where e-procurement or better advertising is in place. In Bangladesh, for instance, the average number of bidders per tender grew, and as noted earlier, the government observed around 7% cost savings in e-GP procurements [17]. In Rwanda's case (as referenced in the Kenya discussion), the introduction of e-procurement saw increased bidder participation and significant savings for the government [60]. Thus, transparency reforms correlate with economic gains – less money wasted on inflated contracts or lost to corruption means more can be spent on actual service delivery.

Efficiency is also gained through process streamlining that often accompanies reform. E-procurement has reduced processing time (Bangladesh halved its procurement lead time [78]) and reduced administrative burdens (India's GeM eliminated paperwork and physical steps, cutting down the procurement cycle for standard goods). By speeding up procurement, projects can commence and finish sooner, contributing to development outcomes on schedule. There is also an argument that transparent systems attract higher quality suppliers (including international firms) who might otherwise shy away from opaque markets. This can improve the quality of bids and final outputs, again meaning public money achieves better results.

Another aspect of efficiency is the reduction of disputes and project failures. When procurement is transparent and fair, contractors are chosen on merit and are clear about contract terms, which tends to result in smoother project execution. In contrast, corrupt procurement might select an incompetent contractor (who bribed to win) leading to project delays or failures – a huge inefficiency. Over time, as reforms take root, one expects fewer stalled projects and cost overruns attributable to malfeasance. However, quantifying this is difficult; it is more anecdotal but visible in certain sectors (e.g., more roads completed on time in Bangladesh's later years compared to earlier when many contracts were abandoned due to kickback issues).

Anti-Corruption Outcomes: Transparency reforms directly target corruption in procurement, and there are signs they help reduce it, though corruption is tenacious. Surveys and corruption perception indices often show improvement in the procurement domain post-reforms. For instance, businesses surveyed in some countries have reported that it has become easier to access public tenders and that petty bribes for obtaining tender documents or information have decreased thanks to online systems [83]. Also, the ability of officials to demand kickbacks is curtailed when processes are more automated (as there are fewer hidden corners to exploit). The dramatic statistic from Nigeria's EFCC that ₦2.9 trillion was lost in a two-year period to procurement fraud [84] also serves as a baseline that reforms aim to shrink. If Nigeria were to fully implement e-procurement and enforce rules, those losses could drop substantially. In countries like Georgia and Ukraine (beyond our core cases), which implemented open procurement systems, data analyses have shown a decline in certain risk indicators (like single-bid tenders and cost escalations), implying reduced corruption risk. While achieving a corruption-free system remains aspirational, procurement reforms *do* create hurdles for corrupt behavior and increase the likelihood of detection, which itself has a deterrent effect.

It should be noted, however, that the link between reforms and outcomes is mediated by the broader institutional context. As Khorana et al. (2024) found, institutional robustness (e.g., rule of law, quality of bureaucracy) is a key determinant of how much transparency improves [82, 85]. For example, if a country has strong political commitment and independent media, transparency reforms will likely lead to meaningful accountability (as seen in Kenya's new push). If those factors are weak, transparency might increase (information is available) but accountability might not follow (no one acts on the information). Therefore, while reforms create the preconditions for transparency and accountability, sustaining them requires supportive institutions and continuous political support.

In conclusion, the impact of procurement reforms on transparency, accountability, and efficiency has been largely positive in the cases examined:

1) Transparency: Reforms have greatly increased the openness of procurement processes and information availability, making government contracting more visible to oversight and the public [6, 28].
2) Accountability: With better rules, oversight bodies, and data, officials are more answerable for procurement decisions, and there are mechanisms (internal and external) to challenge and correct wrongdoing [53, 61].
3) Efficiency & Value: Reforms (especially e-procurement and competitive rules) have enhanced competition, reduced costs, accelerated processes, and by deterring corruption, they ensure funds are used more for their intended purposes rather than diverted [17, 59].

These improvements ultimately serve the citizens: more transparent procurement means citizens can trust that public funds are being used for genuine public benefits, and they may even participate in monitoring. More efficient procurement means citizens get the roads, schools, or medicines they were promised, on time and at better quality. In essence, procurement reforms contribute to better governance and development effectiveness, aligning with the notion that public procurement can be a "tool for development" when properly managed [3].

6. Persistent Challenges Hindering Transparency

Despite the gains from procurement reforms, many developing economies continue to grapple with challenges that impede full transparency in public procurement. These challenges are often deeply rooted in the political and institutional environment, meaning that legal or technical fixes alone cannot eliminate them. Key persistent challenges include:

1) Political Interference and Lack of High-Level Commitment

One of the foremost obstacles is when political leaders or powerful officials interfere in procurement processes to favor certain contractors or divert funds. In countries like Nigeria, the *absence of sustained political will* to fully implement reforms has been noted as a major barrier [86]. Political leaders may undermine procurement rules by pressing agencies to award contracts to cronies or donors, or by exempting certain "strategic" projects from open bidding. This interference can manifest in subtle ways (like tailoring specifications for a favored bidder) or overtly (canceling tenders won by someone else). When high-level commitment to transparency is inconsistent, bureaucrats receive mixed signals and may revert to old opaque habits. Even in Kenya, which currently shows strong will at the top, there have been periods where political patronage overrode formal procedures, such as in some emergency procurements. Overcoming this challenge requires not just laws but a change in political culture, where leaders prioritize the public interest over patronage – a long-term endeavor.

2) Weak Enforcement and Institutional Capacity

Another challenge is that even if good rules exist, enforcement may be weak due to limited capacity or corruption within oversight institutions. For example, the agency responsible for procurement oversight might be understaffed, underfunded, or even compromised by political influence. In Nigeria, the BPP has finite resources and struggles to monitor the volume of procurement across the government, and its recommendations (like debarring corrupt firms or correcting processes) can be ignored by more powerful bodies without consequence. Similarly, audit findings in many countries often uncover procurement breaches, but follow-up action (disciplinary or legal) can be very slow or nonexistent. Courts also play a role – if the judiciary is slow or corrupt, holding people accountable for procurement fraud is difficult. The result is a gap between rules and practice: people might flout rules if they believe penalties are unlikely. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation of procurement projects was highlighted in Nigeria as an issue, meaning problems are not detected or corrected in time [48]. Building capacity is hard; it involves training, retaining skilled personnel, and insulating institutions from undue influence.

3) Resistance to Change and Cultural Factors

Public procurement reforms often face inertia and active resistance from those who benefited under the old opaque systems. Government procurement staff used to discretionary powers may resent new systems that increase oversight or workload (like having to learn e-procurement). Contractors who thrived on insider deals might lobby against or try to sabotage reforms. In some places, there is a longstanding culture of secrecy in government operations that doesn't change overnight with a new law. The *behavioral aspect* is significant – as Brookings research in Nigeria pointed out, sometimes innovative approaches (like behavioral nudges) might be needed to change how individuals approach corruption [87, 53]. Moreover, general corruption levels in society influence procurement; if overall governance is weak, those norms seep into procurement too.

4) Inadequate Use of Technology or Poor Implementation

While e-procurement holds promise, its implementation can be flawed. Some countries adopt e-procurement partially or leave loopholes (e.g., using it only for advertisement but still evaluating offline with little transparency). Technical glitches, unreliable internet connectivity, or lack of user training can also hamper the effectiveness of e-procurement, potentially causing stakeholders to lose confidence and revert to paper processes. In Kenya's earlier attempt with IFMIS, such issues arose and needed addressing. Furthermore, if data from e-procurement systems is not published in user-friendly ways, transparency is limited to internal access. For example, a system might record everything but not provide public dashboards, thus requiring citizens to file information requests to get data – a hurdle to transparency. Ensuring that reform technology is *fully utilized and maintained* is an ongoing challenge. In Nigeria, as mentioned, the national procurement portal exists but is underutilized and inconsistently updated, undermining its purpose [34].

5) Fragmentation and Exemptions

Many countries have multiple procurement entities with varying levels of reform uptake. While one ministry might comply with new processes, another (perhaps security or presidential projects) might be exempt or choose not to. Defense procurement is often a big exempt area due to national security claims, yet it's also an area with huge corruption risks. Likewise, state or local governments might not be covered by a federal reform or might lag behind. In India, one challenge is precisely this fragmentation – not all states or agencies follow the same standards, creating uneven transparency. Exemptions and special regimes (like emergency procurement, state-owned enterprise procurement, etc.) can become backdoors for non-transparent practices if not carefully regulated.

6) Lack of Comprehensive Data and Transparency Culture

True transparency requires not just making some information available, but comprehensive disclosure in accessible formats. Some governments comply with the letter of transparency laws by releasing basic info but not the more detailed data (like bid evaluation reports or contract implementation status). Lack of access to comprehensive procurement data was cited as a challenge in Nigeria [88]. If citizens cannot get full information (for example, only the winning bidder's name is disclosed, but not the competing bids or the criteria scores), then transparency is partial. Moreover, if data is not kept up to date or is hard to navigate, it fails to inform stakeholders effectively. There's also the matter of whether citizens and civil society have the capacity to analyze and use the data – transparency's impact is limited if no one is examining the published information. This ties to a broader "transparency culture" – governments need to be proactive in releasing information and the public needs to expect and demand it, which in some places is still developing.

7) Institutional Weaknesses and Coordination Issues

Public procurement doesn't happen in isolation; it involves budgeting, planning, and execution phases that span multiple units. If the wider public financial management system is weak (e.g., budgets unrealistic, cash not released on time, etc.), it can pressure procurement officers into shortcuts. Also, inter-agency coordination might be lacking – for example, anti-corruption agencies and procurement regulators may not effectively share information on suspect contractors or patterns, meaning known issues slip through. In Africa, a noted challenge is ensuring procurement reforms are part of a holistic governance reform so that improvements in one area are not undermined by another (like a transparent tender followed by corrupt contract management stage).

8) Socio-Economic and Market Constraints

In some developing economies, the pool of capable, honest suppliers can be limited. If there are only a few companies for a task, they might collude regardless of the process transparency. Or, if large parts of the economy are informal, getting those businesses to engage in formal procurement is tough. Transparency can shine a light on corruption but doesn't by itself create more competition or capacity in the private sector. Reforms need to be paired with efforts to support a competitive supplier market, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Otherwise, one could have very transparent tenders that still result in high prices or mediocre delivery because of limited bidder options.

In essence, these challenges show that procurement reform is as much a political and managerial challenge as it is a technical one. Achieving transparency is not just about installing e-systems or passing laws; it requires changing incentives and behaviors entrenched over years. Countries like Nigeria highlight that if corruption is systemic, procurement reforms must be part of a broader anti-corruption strategy to succeed, and even then change is slow.

The persistence of these challenges despite reforms suggests several things. One, reform is iterative – initial reforms may tackle some issues, but new strategies are needed to address the ones that remain (for example, once open bidding is established, the next challenge might be preventing collusion among bidders, requiring another layer of measures). Two, stakeholder engagement is crucial – without buy-in from both officials and the public, reforms can be bypassed or ignored. Three, leadership continuity matters – a single champion can start a reform, but institutionalizing it needs longer-term commitment and often legal force so that it outlives individuals.

Acknowledging these challenges is important for realistic expectations. Transparency in procurement in developing economies has improved but is not absolute; pockets of opacity and avenues for corruption survive in various forms. The key is to continue refining reforms to close these gaps. For instance, strengthening enforcement (through better resourcing and independence for oversight bodies), enhancing whistleblower protections, fostering political consensus that procurement integrity is a non-partisan goal, and reinforcing ethics and integrity training for public officials can gradually chip away at the obstacles.

In summary, common hindrances to transparency in procurement include political meddling, weak enforcement, cultural resistance to change, imperfect technology adoption, exemptions that create loopholes, incomplete data transparency, and broader institutional weaknesses. Recognizing and addressing these issues is essential in the next stage of procurement reforms, as discussed in the recommendations below.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Public procurement reforms have become a pivotal element of governance improvement efforts in developing economies, driven by the imperative to make public contracting more transparent, accountable, and efficient. This article has explored how such reforms-ranging from legal overhauls and the establishment of regulatory bodies to the adoption of e-procurement systems and targeted anti-corruption initiatives-impact transparency in the procurement processes of developing countries. Through a comprehensive review of literature and detailed case studies of Nigeria, Kenya, India, and Bangladesh, we find that reforms have indeed made meaningful strides in enhancing openness and curbing some forms of corruption, though significant challenges remain.

Public procurement serves as a conduit for delivering development, and when managed well, it can maximize the returns on public spending and foster trust in government. The reforms of the past two decades underscore a global recognition that transparent procurement is essential for good governance and economic development [13, 3]. Countries that have modernized their procurement laws and processes tend to exhibit more competitive bidding, fewer delays, and better-quality outcomes, illustrating that transparency is not an abstract ideal but a practical prerequisite for efficiency and value for money.

Building on the analysis and challenges identified, this section offers recommendations to strengthen procurement reforms in developing economies in order to sustain transparency and curb corruption. These recommendations are grounded in best practices and lessons from international experiences:

1) Strengthen Enforcement and Oversight Mechanisms: Laws and systems must be backed by robust enforcement. Governments should empower independent procurement oversight authorities with the mandate and resources to conduct regular audits and reviews of procurement processes. This may involve granting these bodies greater autonomy (e.g., secure tenure for agency heads, independent budgets) so they can act without political pressure. Investing in training specialized procurement auditors and using data analytics to flag high-risk contracts can improve oversight efficiency. Additionally, ensuring that findings of irregularities lead to consequences is vital: procurement rules should specify sanctions (fines, blacklisting of suppliers, disciplinary action for officials) and these should be consistently applied. For example, if a company is caught colluding or paying bribes, it should be promptly debarred from future tenders across government – a policy that OECD and World Bank guidelines recommend and which countries like Bangladesh and Kenya have started to enforce.
2) Enhance Transparency through Open Contracting Data: To truly institutionalize transparency, countries should adopt open contracting principles. This means publishing procurement data in comprehensive, standardized, and machine-readable formats covering the entire procurement cycle (from planning, tender, award, to implementation). Embracing the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) allows civil society, journalists, and oversight agencies to easily access and analyze procurement information [89]. Governments should go beyond minimum disclosure – for instance, not just announce who won a bid, but also release information on all bids received, evaluation scores, and copies of contracts (excluding legitimately confidential details). Proactive disclosure builds trust and invites public monitoring. In Nigeria, for instance, fully implementing the NOCOPO portal and making all MDAs upload required data would be a step in this direction, as would publishing datasets of procurements in usable formats (CSV/JSON) that watchdog groups can scrutinize. Citizen-friendly transparency is also important: creating public dashboards or maps (showing, say, all ongoing projects, their contractors, and status) helps citizens easily see where money is going and report discrepancies.
3) Mandatory E-Procurement with End-to-End Functionality: Governments should mandate the use of integrated e-procurement systems for all public entities and all stages of procurement. As seen in Kenya's 2025 directive and Bangladesh's rollout, making e-GP usage compulsory (with few exceptions) ensures widespread adoption and prevents lagging departments from sticking to opaque practices [29, 30]. The e-procurement system should cover from procurement planning to contract management, including e-tendering, e-evaluation, e-award, and even e-payments if possible. End-to-end coverage minimizes points where corruption can creep back in (for example, if bidding is electronic but contract management isn't, someone could later alter contract terms secretly – an integrated system can deter that by logging changes). Centralizing procurement portals can also yield efficiency – a single national portal (or interoperable network of portals) concentrates information and standard procedures. However, with mandatory e-procurement, it's crucial to *provide support*: extensive training for all users (officials and suppliers), helpdesks for technical issues, and phased implementation if needed to ensure no disruption in procurement. A clear legal basis for e-procurement (recognizing digital signatures, etc.) should be in place to avoid legal challenges to e-steps.
4) Promote Political Will and Leadership for Transparency: High-level political backing can make or break reform implementation. It is recommended to foster a coalition of leaders who champion procurement transparency – this can include not only the executive branch (president/prime minister, finance ministers) but also legislators and local government leaders. One strategy is peer learning and public commitment: for instance, organizing forums where political leaders from coun-

tries that succeeded (like a Rwandan official demonstrating e-GP benefits) speak to others can build motivation. International initiatives (like OGP) can be leveraged to hold governments to their promises. In practice, this might mean a president issuing an executive order to enforce transparency measures and then regularly following up on progress (much like Kenya did). Linking procurement reform to the broader anti-corruption narrative and showing citizens that leaders are taking action can also generate public support, which in turn pressures politicians to stay the course. Essentially, countries should entrench the idea that transparency is non-negotiable and politically rewarding (e.g., by highlighting savings achieved or scandals averted due to reforms).

5) Institutionalize Procurement Integrity in Agencies: Each ministry or agency needs internal reforms to align with the transparency agenda. It is recommended to create or strengthen Procurement Units and Integrity Units within ministries, tasked with ensuring compliance and recommending improvements. The example of Nigeria's Ministry of Works having a Reform & Anti-Corruption unit is a model to replicate [41]. These units should report to top ministry leadership and coordinate with central bodies like the procurement authority and anti-corruption commission. Regular internal reviews of procurement processes can catch issues early. Additionally, incorporating transparency and ethics goals into the performance evaluation of procurement officials and project managers can incentivize them to uphold high standards. Governments may also consider requiring key officials to sign integrity pacts or conflict-of-interest disclosures for major projects, reinforcing personal accountability.
6) Build Procurement Professionalism and Capacity Continuously: Ongoing capacity building is vital. This includes formal certification programs for procurement officers (perhaps in partnership with institutions like the Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply) and continuous on-the-job training especially on new tools or regulations. Training should also extend to suppliers (especially SMEs) to help them participate and compete fairly – this levels the playing field and increases competition. Furthermore, establishing communities of practice or networks among procurement professionals can help spread innovative solutions to transparency challenges (for example, techniques to enhance bid evaluation fairness or use of data analytics to detect collusion). Donors and international organizations can support by funding training centers or embedding advisors in high-spend ministries to mentor staff in upholding transparency. By professionalizing the function, the aim is to create a cadre with a culture of zero tolerance for corruption and pride in delivering value.
7) Increase Stakeholder Participation and Social Accountability: Engaging stakeholders outside government adds an extra layer of accountability. Civil society organizations, media, and the general public should be encouraged and enabled to monitor procurement. Governments can institutionalize this by, for instance, including civil society observers in tender opening sessions (many countries allow this formally), or setting up citizen monitoring committees for large infrastructure projects. Another tool is citizen feedback mechanisms – e.g., after a contract is completed, the community can be surveyed or invited to comment on whether the work was done properly. Open feedback platforms can be integrated with procurement systems (some places have tried star-ratings for vendors or project outcomes). Whistleblower channels also need strengthening; protecting whistleblowers who report procurement corruption is crucial so that insiders or affected bidders feel safe to come forward [61]. Whistleblower protection laws, anonymous hotlines, and rewards for information leading to recovery of funds could be instituted or improved. Social accountability efforts like Bangladesh's citizen portal and community monitoring can be replicated, as they have proven effective in flagging issues that officials might miss [40].
8) Tighten Legal Frameworks and Close Loopholes: Legal reforms should be revisited periodically to close loopholes that undermine transparency. For instance, thresholds for competitive bidding might need adjustment (too high a threshold allows many small contracts to be direct-awarded; too low could overwhelm the system – finding the right balance is key). Exceptions to competitive procedures should be narrowly defined and require disclosure and justification. The law should also adapt to new risks – for example, incorporating provisions against bid-rigging cartels (and empowering agencies to work with competition authorities on this), or mandating transparency in subcontracting arrangements (since corruption can hide in subcontracts even if the main contract was transparent). Countries like India should consider finally passing an overarching procurement law to unify and solidify transparency requirements [72], which would supplement the administrative reforms already made. Moreover, legal provisions for easier public access to information (such as integrating procurement data into freedom-of-information regimes by default) can be added. Essentially, the legal/institutional framework should evolve as the "rules of the game" to keep raising the bar for transparency and integrity.
9) Monitor and Evaluate Reform Impact: It is recommended that countries institute mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of procurement reforms and make adjustments as needed. This could involve setting up key performance indicators like percentage of tenders under open competition, average number of bidders, processing time,

number of complaints filed and resolved, etc., and tracking them annually. Independent evaluations (possibly by academic institutions or think tanks) can provide impartial assessments of how transparency has improved and what bottlenecks remain. International benchmarks or indices (like the World Bank's Benchmarking Public Procurement or similar) can also be used to gauge progress relative to peers. Having solid evidence of what works will help justify reforms politically and focus efforts on the most impactful measures.

Abbreviations

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
BPP	Bureau of Public Procurement
(e-GP)	Electronic Government Procurement
UN	United Nations
CPAR	Country Procurement Assessment Report
MDAs	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies
ICRC	Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
PPA	Public Procurement Act
NOCOPO	National Open Contracting Portal
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PPRA	Public Procurement Regulatory Authority
AGPO	Government Procurement Opportunities
IFMIS	Integrated Financial Management System
CVC	Central Vigilance Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
GeM	Government e-Marketplace
CPPP	Central Public Procurement Portal
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
RTI	Right to Information
CPTU	Central Procurement Technical Unit
OCDS	Open Contracting Data Standard

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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