

Research Article

DUE PROCESS IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AKWA IBOM STATE. ISSUE AND PROSPECTS

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Article History:

Received: 25 Jan 2026 | **Accepted:** 28 Feb 2026 | **Published:** 12 March 2026

DOI: <https://zenodo.org/records/18990326>

*** Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.*

Abstract

Public procurement is one of the governance and socio-economic development levers a country uses for its development whether developed or developing. Like other federating entities, Akwa Ibom State has undergone tough procurement peculiarities even after the enactment of the Public Procurement Act in 2007 and other agencies or regulatory frameworks. Some of the challenges were non-implementation or bad application of procurement laws, corruption, poor planning and budgeting, limited competition, and undue lessening of importance to the capacity of procurement officers. There were inefficiencies that led to delayed execution of projects, escalation of prices for goods, works or services, and sub-standard delivery of services in realizing the development targets of the state. This research studied the hurdles of due process in public procurement within Akwa Ibom State and its effect on the aforesaid State's socio-economic development. For the selected research design, it entailed documentary and historiographical, whereby content analysis was adopted to analyze secondary data of official records, policy documents, and previous studies. It was discovered that inefficiencies in procurement procedures among other things had resulted into poor infrastructure, inadequate health care, poor education, and social challenges that have remained evidence of social development despite the revenue being generated by the state from oil. The study recommended retraining of procurement officers, strict monitoring of adherence to procurement law, transparency in the bidding process, and active participation of

the citizenry in procurement matters for optimized public procurement to benefit Akwa Ibom State and thus become accountable and sustained in socio-economic development.

Keywords: Public procurement, due process, Akwa Ibom State, procurement challenges, socio-economic development, corruption, compliance, transparency, capacity building.

Introduction

Procurement is a critical government function at local, state, or federal levels. Considering procurement dealing with matters concerning budget execution, service provision, and socio-economic-development issues (Dakwang and Muripshaka, 2017; Eze, 2009), the economic enhancement of any society is tied directly to how well procurement laws are drafted and thereafter implemented to meet the challenges before the society. Procurement, as per the Public Procurement Act of 2007, means acquiring goods, services, or works-any consideration of complex decision-making on what to buy, how to buy it, or from whom to purchase it. Procurement sets in once the agency has settled its requirements and identified a need for something based on set procurement requirements. The entire procurement process involves risk assessments; seeking and evaluating alternatives; awarding contracts for the provision of goods or services; the actual delivery of goods and services; payments; and post-contract management of contracts, including alternate disposal of the property as friendly functioning of its age (Musa, Success, and Nworgu 2014; Hui et al., 2011). It is expected that government procurement is one of the highest expenditures by governments; hence in the analysis of global procurement, governments expecting that the procurement would aggregate nearly 11 trillion face roughly 13% of global GDP (Ali, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

Some principles of good procurement include accountability, transparency, competition, and integrity, all of which are deemed necessary to ensure the best use of public resources (Thai, 2001; OECD, 2007). In doing so, good procurement would streamline the delivery of public goods and services, with good governance existing when procurement is governed by laws and supported by institutions. Therefore, it would seem in the public interest that procurement law and oversight bodies would be created to see that due process is in force and that transparency, competitiveness, and value-for-money are ensured in public procurements (Hui et al., 2011). In line with this, Nigeria embarked on a deep institutional, legal, and regulatory reform process in 2007 with an express focus on promoting transparency and competition and curbing corruption within the public procurement system. However, while the Public Procurement Act of 2007 laid the groundwork for the establishment of the National Council on Public Procurement (NCP) and the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) with the sole purpose of orchestrating a clean procurement process that would permit socio-economic development, the implementation of these reforms has not pleased many. Therefore, in Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, inclement challenges have returned to plague the procurement processes. On the one hand, reforms were supposed to instill transparency and competitiveness; on the other hand, maladministration often trampled on these values, with

poor procurement practices causing delays, wastage, and, in some instances, outright corruption.

While there are rules and regulations for procurement, the bane of all consideration in the past has been complete non-enforcement or selective enforcement of procurement laws and regulations. Improper procurement activities, although getting longer legislation, still constitute a serious loophole through which embezzlement of public funds is carried out (OECD, 2007). Poorly done procurement planning, wrong cost estimates, lack of genuine competition, political interference, and lack of transparency all continue to affect the procurement procedure adversely in Akwa Ibom State (Lebete and Maramura, 2023; Greasley and Thomas, 2020). The failure to undertake full cost-benefit analyses, combined with the rules being laid out in such a way as to protect the interests of those predetermined winners, negates sound economic principles and leads to inefficiencies, the wasting of resources, and corruption (Grossman and Krueger 1995). This study, therefore, attempts to critically examine constraints in enforcing due process in public procurement and their socio-economic development consequence in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Design

This study adopted documentary and historical research designs for collecting and analyzing data. Under the documentary research design, the researcher intended a systematic collection of existing documents, records, and archival materials insofar as they were relevant to the study. It also helped the researcher to collect data from a number of sources such as formal reports, policy documents, and other publications. It is said by Gupta (2002) that documentary research implies getting the data from secondary literature and so gives valuable insight into the study topic without direct control over the factors that might alter population characteristics under investigation. Under a historical research design, analysis occurs of the events, trends, or processes of the past in order to give the researcher more insight about the subject under consideration through more sources of information to include primary and secondary. The basis for historical research is reconstructing and interpreting past facts, from which insights into motifs may become directions to the present study. The first phase of the study went through the collection of data through reviewing relevant documents, official records, and archival material, followed by content analysis. Content analysis was the major data processing technique. This allowed for the systematic consideration and interpretation of the content of documents and records, identifying the key themes, patterns, and trends concerning the objectives of the research. Through content analysis, the study was able to identify, interpret, and draw conclusions from meaningful information in the data, based on various categories of historical documentary sources.

Conceptual Literature Review

The Concept of Due Process in Public procurement

Due process in public procurement is an important governance aspect, thus demanding that transparency, fairness, and accountability be observed in the allocation and utilization of public funds. It is the very framework of laws and procedures through which the procurement

process is regulated so that government projects can be implemented expeditiously within the laid down principles. If we draw upon Black's Law Dictionary to define the term process, it is said to be that series of actions or procedures pursued to attain a particular result. In public procurement, due process is that means whereby transparency is encouraged, proper allocation of resources is ensured, and due monitoring of the performance of procurement itself is carried out, thereby guaranteeing the responsible use of government funds, thereby allowing an environment conducive for transparency and compliance in public projects (Osezua and Julius, 2013).

Due process has been underscored in various scholarly publications. Obasanjo (2003) opines that due process is a process that certifies projects for public funds, ensuring that they satisfy implementation standards, including an international competitive bidding process. It stands as a set of governance reforms aimed at service delivery to ensure that public procurement is carried out transparently, efficiently, and without any suspicion of corruption. On the other hand, another view, according to BMPIU (2005), holds that due process is the process of administering strict adherence to the rules of procurement, competitiveness, fairness, and right costing. A basic principle on which procurement stems from is fairness and due process. The purpose of these principles is to protect the populace and contractors from unfair practices. Transparency means the procedures should be open and accessible to all qualified parties, regardless of whom they wish to favor. Transparency requires that the procurement decision be publicly visible so an appropriate independent body may audit and inspect the procedures. Fairness dictates that the entire procurement process operate in an impartial way that is free of any discrimination based on the merits of each offer, providing all parties an equal opportunity for success. Another important principle is the concept of value for money (VfM), whereby public funds should be spent acquiring, with competitive pricing, the best possible services or goods (Anonymous, 2024).

The term procurement regulations may apply to the processes and legal and administrative requirements that are to be followed while implementing an approved procurement procedure in any establishment or agency. Hence, the procurement regulations are to ensure participation of capable and reputable contractors and to buy competitively or at competitive prices, thereby engendering confidence in the tendering system. This confidence implies that contracts get awarded fairly and equally without any corruption. According to BMPIU (2005), procurement regulations should ensure that procurement is undertaken with integrity and that contracts are awarded on merit and in strict compliance with laid-down procedures. They may also cover the classifying and standardizing of tender documents, the formulation of procurement policies, and overseeing the enforcement of ethics in the procurement cycle (Ameh and Ogundare, 2013).

The main purposes of the due process in public procurement are to ensure transparency, economic efficiency, public confidence, fairness, and corruption-free service. These objectives create an environment in which procurement is open and resources are used efficiently. In addition, policies and procedures typically provide for due process in procurement, which means suppliers must not be treated unfairly on the basis of being

discriminated against; such procedure also addresses any corruption, fraud, or unfair influence in procurement so as to further foster confidence in the integrity of public spending (public procurements laws of Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda). The due process in public procurement is a very important resource management mechanism. This, in an attractive sense, is also an area of governance that stands for transparency, equality, and accountability. A due process ensures the proper implementation of public projects by the government, and the proper use of public funds for such projects. On the other hand, due process eliminates corruption from public project implementing agencies, thereby strengthening public trust and enabling societal socio-economic development.

Public Procurement Procedure in Nigeria. An Overview

The Public Procurement Act, 2007, generalizes procurement in Nigeria by embedding the provisions of the UNCITRAL Model Law and the World Bank Procurement Guidelines (World Bank Guidelines, 2011). The Act stipulates five major procurement methods which can be utilized by a government agency in the procurement of goods, services, and works. According to the Act, these methods include open competitive bidding, two-stage tendering, restricted tendering, request for quotations, and sole-source procurement.

i. **Open Competitive Bidding:** This is a common law-PPA mechanism. International and national competitive bidding may obtain, where all interested persons who have been given an equal opportunity to bid and bid prices receive information. The tender is awarded to the lowest evaluated responsive bid (Section 24 (3) Public Procurement Act, 2007). If it is international bidding, the advertisement for the open competitive bid must run for six weeks. The bids must be deposited into the tamper-proof bid box before the deadline. Immediately after bids have been deposited, the bid box shall be opened publicly so that the bids shall be transparent and in full view of all parties, including interested Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for ensuring fairness (Section 30).

ii. **Two-Stage Tendering:** The method applies only under certain circumstances such as when detailed specifications cannot be drawn up, rapid technological changes are prevailing, or where matters of national security are involved (Section 39 (2)). In such cases, proposals are solicited, but no prices are submitted, on the basis of which negotiations may be undertaken with the bidders specifying the technical and contractual aspects of their bids (Section 39 (5)). During the second stage, suppliers are to submit any final tenders with prices that shall be evaluated according to criteria laid down, with the awarding being granted to the lowest-evaluated tender (Section 39 (7)).

iii. **Restricted Tendering:** This is a procedure of limited competition with the approval of the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), where few suppliers exist for the goods, works, or services, or where the procurement value is so low as to make evaluation of a large number of tenders overbend (Section 40). After nominations have been made (Section 40 (4)), it switches to the advertising of opportunities and to all other prescriptions under open competitive bidding.

iv. Request for Quotations: In procurements below the monetary threshold, the procuring entity may solicit quotations from at least three unsuspecting suppliers. No negotiations shall be allowed, and the contract shall be awarded to the lowest-price responsive quotation (Section 41).

v. Sole-source procurement: According to the PPA, sole-source procurement is recognized if circumstances arise wherein a particular good or service can be supplied by but one person, or the need for its procurement is urgent due to unforeseen situations or considerations of national security (Section 42). In the line of emergency, it is justifiable to engage in sole-source procurement whenever a kind of public work stands the risk of delay or deterioration in the absence of the much-needed item. A report will likewise be required to be filed with the BPP under such circumstances, especially when amounts involved exceed certain thresholds (Section 43). Each method of procurement under the PPA seeks to instill transparency, fairness, and value-for-the-money treatment in the procurement; accountability, rule-compliance, and protection of public procurement are given preeminence therein.

The Concept of Socio-economic Development

Considered a multidimensional term, socio-economic development or, simply, development may be viewed as an umbrella for everything encompassing improvements in the economic, social, and cultural well-being of a society. It is a process whereby a community, region, or country attempts to raise the standards of living while morphing poverty into a rare phenomenon, eliminating inequality in all its forms, and promoting the good of mankind. Socio-economic development includes a gamut-from economic growth, social justice, environmental conservation, culture, and human rights (Magbodeh, 2020). It arises when activities result in better standards of living: better income, skills training, employment, life expectancy, GDP growth, and literacy. Socio-economic changes occur following technological developments, new enactment of the law, changes to the physical environment, and discoveries of resources.

Again, broad socio-economic development may be seen as changes or improvements in living conditions with respect to their manifestation at either the level of the individual, the organization, or the society. Most of the time, statistical indicatives are preferred in the analysis. Such indicators include GDP indicators, life expectancy, literacy, and employment (Harrison and Ebong, 2026). At the same time, socio-economic development can also be viewed through intangible vectors, such as dignity of the individual, freedom of association, personal security, and participation in civil society (Metu, 2017). The socio-economic development involves quantitative and qualitative change and structural transformations brought about by social practice-interactions in social and economic terms. Development in these two areas affects virtually all aspects of life—from those related to material conditions (fulfillment of consumption needs), economic structure, entrepreneurship, access to public goods and services such as education and health, to social relations (integration, trust, security, and conflict), and environmental factors and finally to satisfaction with life as a whole (Stemplowski, 1987; Chojnicki, 2010; UNDP, 2012; Bellu, 2011).

Economic and social development is a process by which the economy and quality of life of a country or region or community are upgrading as specified goals and targets are achieved. Poverty alleviation, which usually constitutes a part of socio-economic development where the large majority are guaranteed of food, potable water, proper health facilities, education, and housing (Magbodeh, 2020), is one of such major objectives. Socio-economic development means poverty reduction, the empowerment of people, good governance, and provision of infrastructure within which the delivery of goods and services can be possible. Such infrastructure comprises roads and transport networks, energy supply, and communication systems, etc (Harriso, Martins and Ebong, 2026).

Infrastructural development hosts a sound environment where economic activities conduct their trades as well as the markets through social-economic developments should stress equity and social inclusion such that benefits are shared among the different segments of society; it should also include issues of disparity based on gender, race, ethnicity, and income levels. On sustainable development, which is therefore another important aspect in socio-economic development-the long-term lifespan of society and environment-and the forth responsible use of natural resources to lessening the degradation of the environment plus laying down of mitigation measures for climate change. Socio-economic development provides a framework for policies and programs aimed at sustainable economic access for the beneficiaries leading to constant positive changes in the community.

Socio-economic developments cast out their beneficial implications: one for the rule of law, the establishment of justice systems, and the other for environmental improvement, like in land degradation. Socio-economic development has to put in place those things so as to strengthen policy-making and delivery systems for resources toward securing food, education, health care (including HIV/AIDS prevention), child welfare, gender equity, and the protection of vulnerable groups into which women, youth, and children, the elderly, and people with disabilities are categorized (Waziri, 2018).

Considered in the broad sense shall be the general aim and indicators of socio-economic development, which shall include:

- i. Promotion of self-reliance and capacity building through skill acquisition training and access to loans for sustainable development.
- ii. Strengthening of policies and delivery mechanisms for service delivery.
- iii. Considering the affordability of basic infrastructure: electricity, transport networks (roads, railways, airports), telecommunications, potable water, sanitation, and housing.
- iv. Socio-economic development should encourage the widest possible participation in this development process as stakeholders should be able to benefit from opportunities arising from socio-economic growth at all levels (Waziri, 2018).

Public Procurement and Socio-economic Development: The Nexus

The procurement of goods and services being public, therefore operates sideways in transforming government programs, policies, strategies, and frameworks into actual

undertakings that could bring about socio-economic changes. It is a very important arm of government which directly charts the course for the development of a nation - thus placing developmental goal within reach and maximizing public welfare (Akpakpan, Ebong and Ndaeyo, 2025). Public procurement is worth mentioning that ranges anywhere from millions to billions depending on the government department involved and on issues of budgetary allocations and functions. The magnitude of government procurement and its effect on socio-economic development receives immense support from across the globe, emphasizing the need to have procurement stimulate economic growth and enhance public welfare if all funds are accounted for and managed properly (Christopher, 2007).

According to Evenett and Hoekman (2005), procurement is necessary for development. A state cannot fulfill the demands of its people without a good public procurement system in place. The OECD (2011) argues that the best public procurement practices are key to achieving public expenditure efficiently. Governments devote anywhere from 5 to 20 percent of their GDP toward procurement, while good procurement policies assure the full utilization of government's resources. Hence, procurement systems greatly impact poverty reduction programs, mostly in developing countries (World Bank, 2014). The World Bank (2014) also established a relationship between efficient procurement and better development outcomes. Studies do tend to back the contention that procurement performance greatly affects the realization of development projects. Projects with unresolved procurement issues past their implementation are over thrice the times more likely to report unsatisfactory results than those with good procurement processes (World Bank, 2014).

Socio-economic development has to be there when national plans, policies, and strategies get translated into public budgets appearing in real procurement, as it is one of the government's primary objectives. Procurement is the channel through which government institutions, agencies, contractors, suppliers, or consultants are engaged to perform works, supply goods, or provide services in accordance with budgetary appropriations, thus raising the banner of national development (Evenett and Hoekman, 2005). Governments design incentive and deterrent mechanisms within their public procurement systems so that procurement activities support socio-economic policies and guarantee that the system works well. Incentive-oriented mechanisms may include subsidies, bid evaluation preferences, quotas, certification requirements, minimum content requirements, and differential financing options (Frank, Okposin and Ebong, 2025).

Conversely, deterring mechanisms, which include fines, contract adjudications, and temporary banning for governmental contracting, are intended either to secure accountability or to coerce parties into complying with their duties and obligations (World Bank, 2014).

Public procurement leans heavily toward the actualization of different social and economic goals of government. Governments have its policies, plans, and frameworks that are laid down for the execution of socio-economic development. These policies may include areas of emphasis such as education or health, with frameworks usually embracing development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs). How development targets are achieved will largely depend on public procurement systems in the short run, medium run, or long run (World Bank, 2014). Thus, procurement becomes the chief development instrument toward realizing the broader developmental objectives of any nation.

Review of Empirical Literature

Boniface, Nnadi, and Val (2024) researched the procurement issues relating to the construction industry and remain active areas of inquiry in Nigeria. Through their survey and description, data were obtained from 125 procurement officers and professionals in the federal Ministry of Works. The results of the study indicated that some salient problems faced by Nigeria's public procurement system include poor risk management, lack of transparency, corruption, and poor purchasing decisions. It also confirmed statistically significantly that the procurement process, industry dynamics, and project quality jointly influenced the dependent variables. The study recommended that the government develop measures that strengthen procurement processes and enforce punitive measures to discourage fraud. The study concluded that any improvement in procurement procedures would reflect positively on the industry, economy, and general quality of the entire project.

The implementation of the Due Process policy in contract administration in Akwa Ibom State was studied by Scholastica, Timothy, and Michael (2022). The study therefore set to investigate the presence of compliance with the Due Process policy and its impact on project delivery, while also seeking to identify factors that affected its implementation. Structured questionnaires and interviews were conducted for stakeholders in the construction industries. Despite a high awareness from the participants, the study found low compliance with the Due Process policy (22.2%). However, 73.8% of the respondents believed that the policy assisted successful project delivery. Therefore, the study recommended workshops on sensitization to enlighten them on the workings of the policy and to make the process less cumbersome, thereby increasing compliance and achieving the larger goals of economic reforms.

Following the structure of the study conducted by Aliu et al. (2022), the study focused on a construction and public works procurement system in Nigeria through structural equation modeling. Five major constructs were identified to describe the manner in which the various procurement methods affect project delivery. Therefore, a survey research design was adopted, using 411 respondents drawn from a total population of 1,504. It was determined that all variables posited in the conceptual model laid a positive contribution toward effective project delivery. Governments and organizations should consider applying the model developed in this study to infrastructure and procurement systems to ensure better project outcomes.

Okotie and Tafamel (2021) studied the nexus of transparency and public procurement practices within Nigeria's Civil Service. The study attempts to ascertain how transparency affects public procurement practices. Survey research design has been adopted. Out of a staff population of 2,933, a size of 352 was selected from the procurement departments of several

federal ministries located in Abuja. There was a positive and significant relationship between level of transparency and public procurement practices. In promoting transparency and efficiency, neutrality and fairness should be injected into Nigeria's Public Procurement System.

Enofe, Okuonghae, and Onobun (2019) explain the effect of the Public Procurement Act on government accountability in Nigeria. The methodology deployed was survey research. Structured questionnaires were administered to respondents from procurement officers themselves; professional quantity surveyors, contractors, engineers, architects, lawyers, and accountants, to members of the public. It was found that while the public procurement system in Nigeria is professional, said process must be transparent for competition to exist and the government to be held accountable. The study, therefore, considers transparency, competition, efficiency, and professionalism as factors that help in establishing government accountability. This, in turn, will lead to recommendations for the Federal Government and other relevant stakeholders to promulgate a totally comprehensive National Procurement Policy based on accountability, transparency, competitiveness, and professionalism, along with provisions for strong monitoring and evaluation.

According to the study carried out by Aloysius and Nnamani (2019), a connection is drawn between public procurement reforms and economic growth in Nigeria. In particular, the effects of public procurement reforms on Nigeria's economic development were investigated through a documentary review and content analysis approach to data collection. Following from the underlying principles of the Marxist theory of the Post-Colonial State, it was found that the structure and character of the Nigerian state have worked against the actual implementation of procurement reforms. Evidence was, however, revealed during the research to show that since the enactment of the Public Procurement Act of 2007 and the establishment of the National Council on Public Procurement and the Bureau of Public Procurement, the reforms have failed to achieve their objectives as a catalyst for economic development in Nigeria. Among other recommendations, the study calls for the removal of the immunity clause in Nigeria's constitution that allows the political class to amass capital through corrupt practices.

Muthomi (2019) did a comparative study in the context of procuring in the public domain to be used as instruments for economic and social development in Kenya, to draw lessons from the US and South Africa. The study noted that Kenya's public procurement framework faces a number of key challenges: conflicting coexistence of economic and social objectives; abuse of discretion; and corruption, favoritism, and malfeasance on the procurement decision-making side. It has been found by the study that development in sustainability and the tax base are highly adversely affected by corruption and malfeasance occasioned by poor financial management systems. It was noted by the study that the US and South Africa have developed more integrated and effective regulatory responses to these challenges and drew lessons that Kenya could also draw from the two countries so that it could improve on its procurement system and financial management, including taxation.

Governing Principles on Public Procurement in Akwa Ibom State

The Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Public Procurement Law No. 5, 2020, finds its roots in Part VI, Section 16 (1-30), which is the general law that covers public procurement in Akwa Ibom State. The ideology was to ensure transparency, fairness, and efficiency in procurement in order to preserve value for money and minimize corruption and inefficiency. All procurements shall be carried out by open competitive bidding, giving room for competition, economic efficiency, and equal opportunity to all eligible bidders (Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Public Procurement Law, 2020). Procurement must ensure competition and equal opportunity so that all rights-eligible persons shall have an opportunity to participate in such procurement activity (Etim, 2018).

Procurement needs to be standardized and simplified and manipulated according to the changing technological landscape and the demands of public administration for procurement systems to respond flexibly to the needs of contemporary governance (Akpan, 2019). Execution of contracts should be carried out duly in a manner which is effective, efficient, transparent, and without undue delay so that the deliverables or outcomes of those contracts retain their "value for money" within the stricture of legal limits (Effiom, 2020). Accountability is the mother of any laws. Public servants in charge of procurement shall observe proper codes of ethics and are held accountable for their actions and may be investigated and punished for whatever wrong actions they engage in (Ebong, 2020). Procurement is subject to public scrutiny in order that every contract is awarded and implemented in accordance with the procurement laws and is performing well according to the terms of those contract specifications (Joe, 2021).

Again, the act provides that procurement plans must be backed by prior budgetary appropriations. No procurement is to be entered into without ensuring that the necessary moneys for that purchase are at hand, thereby ensuring proper accountability for finances and resources (Frank, 2020). The Bureau shall also establish thresholds in moneys for procurements, and no moneys shall be paid contrary to such thresholds to any procurement activities (Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Public Procurement Law, 2020). There are also bidder exclusion criteria that require that the bidders meet certain qualifications concerning professional capacity, financial capacity, and legal status (Etim, 2018). The law stipulates that the contract prices must be fixed and can only be altered after obtaining prior consent from the Bureau except in some exceptional circumstances to uphold fairness in procurement (Akpan, 2019). All communications and documents related to procurement activity must be in the English language and recorded in writing, with a copy deposited at the procurement registry within seven days of them being made (Hui et al., 2014). Also, procurement records must be kept for at least ten years and should be open for public inspection for the sake of transparency and accountability (OECD, 2007).

The Bureau acts as a guardian of the law pertaining to expenditures, procurement activities being down in conformity with the law, and the integrity of the procurement. Hence, nobody who is in any way bound to make a procurement decision can participate in the procurement process itself (Joe, 2021). Moreover, arbitration will stand as the procurement contracts' primary dispute resolution mechanism (Aliu, 2020). Third, all procurement

contracts shall be valued in Nigerian naira with foreign currency payments being converted at the exchange rate in force at the time of such payment, as specified by the Central Bank of Nigeria (World Bank, 2021).

Challenges of Due process in Public Procurement and its implications on Socio-economic Development in Akwa Ibom State. An Assessment

The challenges facing the public procurement in Akwa Ibom State immensely stunt its socio-economic development. Procurement, as it were, is the means with which the state pays infrastructural works, public services, and development programmes considered vital. Against all odds, inefficiency and corruption in procurement processes nevertheless yield poor delivery of social services, bad infrastructures, and less provision of social amenities. Hence, even with huge oil revenues, Akwa Ibom has not only maintained some of the worst socio-economic indicators-the likes of maternal and child mortality, access to education, and sanitation-below national averages. Such situation exposes unreconciled disparity between the actual development outputs vis-à-vis the resources brought to bear on public projects, all at the instance of procurement failure, which has somehow frustrated the utilization of state funds (Effiom, 2019; Frank, 2020).

Purchasing by Akwa Ibom State Government is directly linked to the delivery of vital infrastructure-work on roads, hospitals, schools, and water supply systems. Inefficiencies, delay, and corruption characterize procurement, thus giving way to price discrepancies or projects being halted midway or poor-quality delivery being accepted (Akpan, 2021). For example, several public hospitals and schools in Akwa Ibom suffer poor infrastructure emanating from inefficiencies in procurement, thereby hindering service delivery and the quality of life of the people. These inefficiencies combined with a veil of opacity have further eaten public funds that are supposed to be used for the state's development (Joe, 2022). The lack of development indicators has made Akwa Ibom State witness poor economic growth despite a substantially huge iota of oil revenues. In several locations, there is a very disturbing level of maternal and child mortality, with insufficient access to basic health care, education, and sanitary conditions (Effiom, 2019). On these delivery deficits rest procurement procedures. With critical sectors undermined, the OECD (2007) observes that inefficient procurement leads to the wrong allocation of funds so that it is made more difficult for the health and education sectors to bring about a change in the socio-economic development of the state. To wit, in many instances, funds meant for expansion of existing or construction of new secondary health centers or for the purchase of medical equipment are grossly misappropriated, and as such, the people are unable to get even basic and worthwhile health services.

Until procurement reforms are implemented fully, the state cannot begin to realize its developmental ambitions. To make procurement activities transparent, competitive, and value for money, the Public Procurement Law was introduced in 2007; however, poor implementation and non-compliance have remained protagonists throughout the time and counteracted these intended purposes (Frank, 2020). Some argue that the delay, cost overruns, and failure to meet expected outcomes occur because of lack of planning, budgeting, and

strategic alignments of procurement projects with development goals (Greasley & Thomas, 2020). Such ill use of public funds reduces the state's capacity to face outright and pressing developmental needs such as poverty, unemployment, and poor infrastructure (Lebete & Maramura, 2021). When competition is undermined, it also adds to the problems of failure to procure dirt cheap (Joe, 2022). In almost all instances, contracts are awarded to favorites of the day, and so-called competition is mostly a sham. Preventing competition prevents innovation and efficient resource allocation; in essence, this almost ensures that better solutions do not get developed for less money. Grossman and Krueger (1995) state in their work: "When procurement is disregarded, money allocated on favor and nepotism ends up misallocating resources, delaying project completions and sub-optimal outcomes and hence the underdevelopment of key services in the state."

Another so essential issue that the State finds itself in the challenge of capacity shortage among procurement officers. Most procurement officers lack the technical proficiency and professional training to carry out more complicated procurement processes, within the framework of applicable regulations. Akpan (2021) indicates how the absence of continuous professional development for procurement officials keeps them from keeping up with best practices in the proper management of public funds. This ultimately reduces service delivery and proves counteractive to procurement management. Another big hindrance to transparency and accountability is inadequate citizen engagement in procurement matters. The fact is that many of these citizens in Akwa Ibom State are neither very aware of their rights nor willing to engage in holding government accountable for public procurement matters (Adewole, 2014). This very absence of citizen engagement creates gaps between the government and the citizens, which in turn places impediments before the citizens willing to check procurement officials for mismanagement and inefficiency. Ekwekwu (2016) emphasizes that without due monitoring and pressure from the public, the procurement reforms in the state shall never attain the set targets.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks constitute the constructs that formulate a conceptual lens through which certain assumptions and principles, pertaining to theories, can be used to describe and analyze a research problem (Obasi 1999). Developed by Spence and Zeckhauser (1971), the Principal-Agent Theory has hence been adopted in this study with the relevant purpose of understanding how self-interested persons behave in the economic environment. Such a framework defines causes and implications related to efficiency loss arising from the divergence between cooperative and self-interested behavior, usually called agency problems. As the same framework seeks to understand which control mechanisms-budgetary systems, employment contracts, procurement systems' monitoring-would best contribute to curbing inefficiencies caused by agency problems. Prima facie, the Principal-Agent Theory is commonly applied in managerial procurement to determine optimal incentive structures among a variety of stakeholders and efficient procurement control mechanisms to monitor behaviors and actions (Demski 1980; Biaman 1982; Namazi 1985).

In the middle of the Principal-Agent Theory is the concept of agency relationships that arise when one party, the Principal, hires another party, the Agent, to perform some task on its behalf. The contract usually defines the framework in which these two parties operate. From the perspective of procurement, the Principal-Agent Theory applies mainly to buyer-supplier relations, while it also applies in the attorney-client relationship, the employer-worker relationship, and so forth (Eisenhardt 1989). Hence, the framework gives way to the analysis of the organization-vendor interaction in the procurement process in relation to behavior, outcomes, and control mechanisms. The most valuable input from Principal-Agent Theory into the public procurement field yields to the big-picture view and, consequently, relevance and applicability to the procurement process. The theory, in general, sees procurement processes as remedies against agency problems, especially when self-interest is at stake on the part of agents within organizations. Such a procurement process will then act as a catalyst to begin to consolidate the inconsistencies that have appeared due to such motivational conflicts. Hence, motivational conflicts would create inconsistencies that would then nurture those procurement interventions aimed at injecting rational decision making internally become an optimal status to be procured for. To have a different view on procurement policies and procedures will assist in conceptualizing why those systems might be needed and how they could impact the procurement landscape.

Holmstrom and Shavell (1979) lay down the six main assumptions of the Principal-Agent Theory. Prima facie, the ability to observe an agent's actions may be given; however, complete acquisition of such information is expensive, especially when a unified Principal is involved. The Principal moves first by offering a contract and so acts rationally with a consistent set of preferences. For the Nigerian public procurement setting to be linked to this theory, the Agency would be those acting out the stages of procurement in accordance with the law, while the public is expected to be the Principal whose interests they are representing. Principals, theoretically speaking, should be able to impose terms of procurement processes, yet paradoxically, the procurement processes impose terms on them. In actual practice, the public who should serve as the Principal have far too often been cast into the sideline. This allowed the agents (government officials) to wrest control of the decision-making process away at the expense of transparency and fairness that should have characterized the system.

The Principal-Agent Theory presents an uncommon scenario in Nigeria. For instance, the Government, as the Agent, has failed in its Constitutional duty to provide essential needs of the populace in terms of infrastructure, healthcare, poverty reduction initiatives, generating employment, security, and quality education. On the other hand, as the Principal, the citizenry has equally short-shrifted their obligations by failing to pay taxes and engaging in economic crimes detrimental to governance. Constitutionally, this dysfunction poses a huge constraint as funds that ought to have been channeled towards public procurement and development are being instead scavenged to check insurgency and to secure the Nation. Paradoxically, those in governance, who are counted among the citizenry as well, worsen the state of affairs. Most often corrupt and fraudulent in their dealings with public funds, it is these very same people who find themselves shouting from the rooftops about bad governance. Such acts continue to

mar the possibility of using public procurement as a tool for socio-economic development and perpetuate the inefficiencies that the Principal-Agent Theory was meant to resolve.

In this light, if one were to link this theory with the present situation of Akwa Ibom State, a similar dynamic would seem to operate there. The interest of the people is either not protected, development projects are halted, or developments projects become mismanaged. Although the citizens should ideally be principals, in reality, they are often powerless in holding the government accountable because of inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of transparency in procurement processes. An embodiment of an agency problem as explained earlier in the Principal-Agent Theory is one in which the agent-government uses its position to sustain its interest, generally against that of the principal-public. Before these are unravelled, one gets to know the inefficiency in the procurement system created under this theory, hence the incapability in Socio-Economic land to provide benefits to the citizens of Akwa Ibom State as being considered under this theory as unproductive relationships between the public and government as allies derailing what should have been productive links toward development upgrade.

Study Findings

The aforementioned study identified prevailing issues affecting due process in public procurement in Akwa Ibom State. These include indifferent implementation of existing procurement laws and regulations; non-application of anti-corruption laws; ill-conceived planning and budgeting; perfunctory competition; capacity deficiencies amongst procurement officers; and exclusion of public participation. Rather than these laws and regulations being enforced to create efficient procurement processes, which prohibit opportunity for corruption, gross mismanagement, and patronage, these laws have rather been applied ineffectively, creating the procurement process that is replete with corruption, gross mismanagement, and patronage. The end result of those anomalies notwithstanding the apparent availability of huge sums of money in the State was delayed inception and completion of projects, high escalation of prices of contract works, and poor workmanship.

Discussion of Findings

With these findings, procuring is placed in the position of economic sustenance for Akwa Ibom State. Any inefficiencies in procurement tend to be impediments toward the delivery of infrastructure, social amenities, among others. For example, inadequacies are registered in many public health centers and schools due to procurement failures, thus impeding their capability to deliver services and affecting residents' quality of life. Social indicators are of little concern to oil revenue, standing high in maternal and child mortality rates, while there is less adequate provision of social services (i.e., health and social-welfare services). All this comes down to problems related to procurement: resources targeted for projects hardly realize their anticipated outcomes.

Corruption is when many procurement contracts are given to fixed winners without reference to the qualifications of the contractors or the quality of their proposals. Without competition, the state stands to lose the best value for money, but more importantly, it

prevents the nascent business community in the area from innovating and growing. In another way, procurement officers themselves are often denied the technical competence to handle complex procurement processes and thus make decisions that further exacerbate the misuse of public resources. Then with the half-hearted implementation and outright non-compliance, they make matters worse and thereby frustrate the full realization of what the Public Procurement Act of 2007 was set out for. The study brought to light, moreover, how a lack of adequate citizen engagement in public procurement processes and consequent demand for accountability is an inefficiency. A majority of the citizens of Akwa Ibom are unaware of their rights or even the need to hold government officials accountable for procurement activities or, for that matter, the actual implementation of such procurement. Thus, the absence of viable public participation in procurement processes creates a situation where such processes become capable of operating without scrutiny, and that breeds corruption and mismanagement.

Conclusion

Development-related weak points detected into the procurement systems in Akwa Ibom State have direct bearing on its so-called socio-economic development. Inefficiency, corruption, and ridicule are common themes that have dominated malpractices within procurement processes, hence negating all hopes for real exit from public service delivery and infrastructure projects from the state in relation to its monetary endowment, most of which comes from oil revenues. In the big picture, inefficiency in the procurement system is demonstrated when no project is executed to completion of the intended budget; thus, this has been a roadblock for Akwa Ibom in fast-tracking her developmental agenda. The evidence shows that misapplication of public resources have been occasioned by non-implementation of procurement reforms, continued opacity in procurement processes, poor planning, lack of capacity in procurement officers, etc. Procurement system inadequacies have continued to hamper timely delivery, transparency in costing, and service and goods quality in critical areas such as health, education, and infrastructure while socio-economic problems have been created through corruption and nepotism in gigantic backdrops for maternal and child mortality, education access, and sanitation, etc., some of which have already been formed. The study further identified non-genuineness of competition, low citizen participation, and poor training of procurement officers as major constraints in the improvement of the procurement process. Further, the inefficiency of the procurement system to respond to the development priorities of the State has further birthed stagnation in socio-economic development, thus creating a wider gap in the infrastructure and service delivery of the State.

Recommendations

From the above challenges, the following are recommended:

- i. **Fairer Implementation and Compliance:** Training and capacity building for procurement officers must be prioritized by the Government of Akwa Ibom State, with the aim of ensuring adherence to procurement laws and regulations. Compliance checks should be undertaken

periodically on the conduct of the procurement exercises, and guidance issued thereon on measures against corruption.

ii. **Enhance Transparency and Reduce Corruption:** Transparent bidding processes need to be ensured, while measures to prevent corruption need to be strengthened. Contracts should be awarded on merit, and the whole course of action of procurement should be opened to competition.

iii. **Capacity Building for Procurement Officers:** Continuous professional development of procurement officers should be provided. Provision should, therefore, be made for opportunities to develop skills and knowledge to handle the intricacies brought about by procurement, and most importantly, to utilize public funds for worthy causes

iv. **Raising Citizen Participation and Level of Accountability:** Citizens have to be made aware of their rights in public procurement, and means should be created whereby citizens of the NRCS may participate in procurement processes. The higher customer demand and insistence on the procurement system will almost certainly raise the probability of transparency and effectiveness. Since we have enhanced transparency and lines of procurement, the public pressure will create auxiliary demand for resolution and enforcement.

v. **Strengthening Planning and Budgeting:** Procurement projects have to be subjected to careful planning and budgeting. Proper feasibility studies and cost estimates need to be undertaken beforehand as a prelude to procurement activities. It shall further bring in reduction in cost overruns and delays and shall guarantee realization of projects on time and within budget.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the **International Journal of Multidisciplinary Department**, ISSN 3108-2718 (Online). In Volume 2 (2026), Issue 2 (March - April)

The journal is published and managed by **IJRGP**.

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