



THE ROLE OF PROCUREMENT LAW IN SOCIAL ENGINEERING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MERU COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed how procurement law affects developmental outcomes within Meru County in Kenya under the prevailing atmosphere of the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA, 2015). The main target was to evaluate the transformative role that the prevailing procurement legal regime has played in promoting transparency, accountability, preference policies, in influencing the performance of the public service, quality of the project, and the satisfaction of the community. The study was based on the governance and institutional theory alongside a descriptive cross-sectional study based on structured questionnaires made to a sample population of 106 of the procurement stakeholders that were represented by a sample of county departments, contractors, auditors and civil society. Data analysis was carried out through the descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression models. The analysis indicated that all four constructs of the procurement law had a statistically significant positive relationship with development outcomes, with the strongest level of relationship being e not legal compliance ($r = 0.648$), followed by transparency ($r = 0.603$). These relationships were further validated using regression analysis with the overall model explaining 56.6 percent of the interconnections in the development output. The levels of legal compliance once again came out as the prominent predictor ($\beta = 0.319$) which stresses the centrality of enforcement as a facilitator of procurement effectiveness. Descriptive statistics indicated that respondents identified some successes in their procurement planning, bid accessibility along with competitive tendering, but also noted the shortcomings in enforcement, training, support of innovation, and also citizen oversight. Under Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) program, the inclusivity mechanisms were considered constitutional but under-implemented administratively. On the same note, even though there was transparency on the planning process, the openness and access by the citizens on post award and audit reports were weak. The study concluded that effectiveness of the procurement law alone is not enough, unless its institutionalization as well as autonomous enforcement and participatory styles are sound. The study recommends reinforcement of law enforcement outfits such as the PPRA, introduction of open contracting data standards (OCDS), mobilization of AGPO support services, transformation of payment and monitoring processes, and creation of civic procurement forums. Among the limitations, there is the use of perceptual data in one-county level. Future studies ought to consider comparative research between counties, more objective development measures and a qualitative input of marginalized stakeholders. In totality, this study reaffirms that procurement law is a strategic gearing towards inclusive development and accountable governance under the devolved system in Kenya to provide empirical support as well as a policy direction towards reinforcing the developmental aspect of procurement.

Key Words: Procurement Law, Developmental Outcomes, Meru County, Transparency, Legal Compliance

Background of the Study

Public procurement law has progressively evolved from a rigid administrative procedure into a dynamic legal and institutional mechanism that drives socioeconomic transformation, transparency, and accountability (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Modern procurement statutes serve as instruments for economic reform and social justice, embedding redistributive, sustainability, and anti-corruption objectives into public contracting frameworks (UNCITRAL, 2021; ILO, 2023). However, their effectiveness varies widely depending on the strength of legal enforcement, political stability, and institutional capacity (ADB, 2023; UNPAN, 2023). Globally, nations such as China and South Korea demonstrate how digitized procurement laws and strict compliance mechanisms significantly enhance transparency and reduce corruption (MOFCOM, 2023; OECD, 2023), while many developing economies continue to struggle with weak enforcement and fragmented legal systems.

In emerging economies, procurement legislation has been used as a policy tool to advance inclusivity and equitable economic participation. Countries like Brazil and South Africa have embedded affirmative action policies within procurement laws, yielding higher compliance and broader participation among marginalized groups compared to non-legislated systems such as Malaysia's Bumiputera program (ILO, 2023; ADB, 2023). Despite the global trend toward SDG-aligned procurement, particularly SDG 12.7 on sustainable consumption and SDG 16.6 on transparent institutions, implementation across Africa remains inconsistent, hindered by enforcement weaknesses and political interference (UNPAN, 2023).

In the African context, procurement reform has been positioned under the African Union's Agenda 2063 as a catalyst for industrialization, SME participation, and sustainable development. Nonetheless, practical outcomes reveal a persistent gap between legislation and execution. Only a few countries—Rwanda, Kenya, and South Africa—score above global averages in procurement integrity, while inefficiencies continue to cost the continent billions annually (AfDB, 2023; UNECA, 2023). Kenya, in particular, represents a significant case study due to its robust legal framework under the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (2015), which operationalizes Article 227 of the Constitution and decentralizes procurement governance to county levels (GoK, 2015; PPRA, 2023). However, despite this progressive legislation, only a small fraction of counties meet full transparency standards, revealing an implementation paradox that undermines the intended developmental gains (OECD, 2022; Were, 2023).

Grounded in Principal-Agent and Institutional theories, the study interprets these gaps as manifestations of information asymmetry, institutional inertia, and limited enforcement capacity (Eisenhardt, 1989; North, 1990; Olken, 2007). These theoretical perspectives explain why elite capture, corruption, and limited accountability persist even within legally robust systems. Within this framework, transparency and legal compliance emerge as the most critical determinants of procurement performance—transparency ensures openness and ethical conduct, while legal compliance guarantees adherence to statutory standards and sanctions. This study, therefore, focuses on examining how transparency and legal compliance within Kenya's devolved procurement law influence social and economic development outcomes in Meru County. By employing a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative analysis of procurement records and qualitative insights from key stakeholders, the research aims to uncover how well statutory transparency measures and enforcement mechanisms translate into practical governance improvements.

Problem Statement

The Kenyan Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act of 2015 established a highly developed legal framework that was meant to drive socioeconomic transformation through open, inclusive, and competitive processes. However, in Meru County, significant discrepancies existed between legislative intent and outcomes at the implementation level. During FY2022/23, though procurement accounted for 23% (KSh 6.3 billion) of county expenditure, 12% compliance with preferential procurement guidelines was observed, only 7% of contract value went to women-owned enterprises (short of a 30% constitutional target), and 42% of projects experienced delays directly attributable to procurement inefficiencies like bid rigging and document falsification (PPRA, 2023; KNBS, 2023; EACC, 2023). These implementation shortcomings effectively nullified procurement's promise as a social engineering instrument and an economic development tool.

Three essential knowledge gaps called for this research. First, although Sections 39-43 of PPADA required transparency and inclusiveness, no quantitative empirical research measured how these provisions actually affected SME development or gender parity at Kenya's devolved government level, leaving a policy blind spot. Second, the cause-and-effect relationship between procurement process effectiveness (measured through tender length and cost predictability) and tangible outcome of development (job creation, growth of local GDP) had not been examined in low-capacity settings like Meru County, where only 29% of procurement staff was competent (CoG, 2023). Third, although 30% of county procurement budgets were lost to corruption nationwide (EACC, 2023), earlier studies did not investigate what combination of enforcement mechanisms (administrative sanctions, e-procurement, civic monitoring) best optimized procurement's developmental contribution in decentralized frameworks.

This study spanned immediately such gaps by analyzing Meru County underachievement on three fronts: (1) the measurable impact of transparency interventions on SME participation and growth, (2) structural obstacles to inclusiveness policies attaining social redistribution objectives, and (3) evidence-based combinations of enforcement tools which realized maximum developmental dividends. The study briefed higher learning on the effectiveness of decentralized government while producing actionable knowledge into Kenya's existing reforms in procurement under Medium-Term Plan IV (2023–2027), notably marginalized group members' participation monitoring structures and counties' capacities.

General Objective

To examine the role of procurement law in promoting social engineering and economic development in Meru County

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the influence of transparency and accountability provisions in procurement law on economic development in Meru County.
- ii. To investigate the role of legal compliance and enforcement mechanisms in shaping social engineering and economic development in Meru County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Principal-Agent Theory explains the accountability challenges that arise when those entrusted with implementing procurement decisions (agents) act in self-interest rather than for the public good (principals). Originating from corporate governance (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), the theory was

extended to public administration to analyze how information asymmetry and weak oversight create space for corruption and inefficiency (Eisenhardt, 1989). In Meru County, audit reports confirm that officials exploit informational advantages to pre-select contractors and inflate costs, validating the theory's assumptions (County Procurement Audit Report, 2022). Information asymmetry—where agents possess more knowledge than principals—allows manipulation of procurement processes, while moral hazard arises when inadequate monitoring encourages negligent or corrupt behavior (Holmström, 1979). Although measures like transparency reforms, performance contracts, and audits reduce these risks, they also increase administrative costs (OECD, 2021). Critics argue that the theory oversimplifies human behavior by assuming universal self-interest, ignoring moral and social motivations (Perry & Wise, 1990). In contexts such as Meru County, community monitoring and civic engagement have proven more effective in reducing corruption than punitive controls alone (ICPAK, 2022). Thus, the study applies Principal-Agent Theory to assess whether transparency mechanisms—like bid disclosure and oversight committees—minimize agency problems in county procurement systems. The theory provides a useful lens for linking transparency and accountability reforms to procurement performance, despite its limitations in capturing complex political and social dynamics.

Institutional Theory, grounded in the work of Douglass North (1990), emphasizes that both formal laws and informal norms shape behavior within organizations. It explains why legal compliance gaps persist even where strong procurement laws exist. In Meru County, procurement outcomes are often undermined by informal patronage networks and political interference, revealing a misalignment between formal rules and informal practices (Cheeseman et al., 2016). Institutional Theory helps the study examine how these dual systems interact to either support or subvert procurement reforms. It also explores institutional isomorphism—the tendency of organizations to imitate others for legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)—which may lead to symbolic compliance where counties adopt legal frameworks without genuine accountability. The theory further stresses enforcement capacity as a determinant of institutional effectiveness: weak oversight agencies and limited resources reduce the power of procurement regulations to ensure compliance (Ostrom, 2005). Historical institutionalism, another key concept, explains how pre-devolution procurement traditions and bureaucratic cultures continue to shape present practices through path dependence (Pierson, 2000).

Applying Institutional Theory allows this study to analyze how formal procurement laws interact with local norms, enforcement capacity, and institutional legacies in Meru County. It provides insight into why compliance gaps persist despite strong legal frameworks and why transparency reforms succeed or fail depending on institutional alignment. By integrating both formal and informal dimensions, the theory helps uncover the root causes of governance failure and offers a foundation for developing reforms that strengthen transparency, accountability, and overall procurement performance within Kenya's devolved systems.

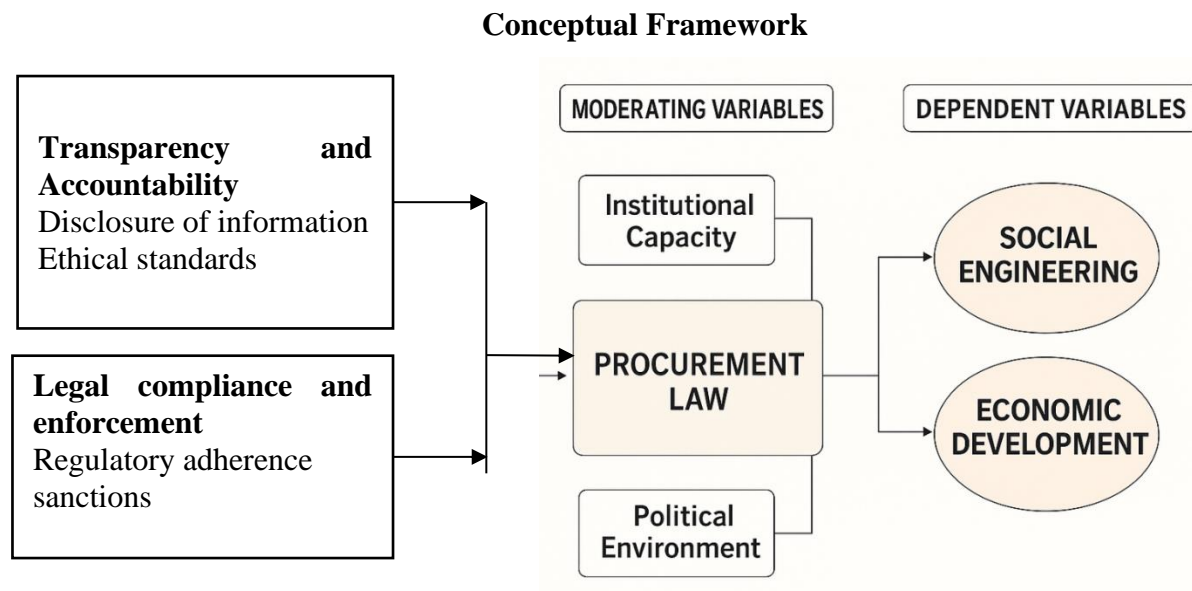


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

Source : (Author, 2025)

Empirical Review

The Role of Transparency and Accountability in Social Engineering and Economic Development

Recent research (2020-2024) argues that transparency and accountability become the fundamental foundation for achieving both social equity objectives and economic development through public procurement systems. The global evidence verifies that transparent procurement processes, when put into practice effectively, are capable of combating corruption at the same time as inducing inclusive economic activity. Rwanda's end-to-end e-procurement platform, introduced in full since 2020, is a model case, with a 30% reduction in irregular procurements and a 22 percentage point increase in the share of contracts awarded to small and medium enterprises (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, Ukraine's ProZorro e-procurement has saved 14% of procurement budgets on an annual basis since its nationwide roll out in 2021, while also fueling citizen trust in government procurement practice (OECD, 2023). These international experiences provide empirical evidence for the middle ground of Principal-Agent Theory that reduction of information asymmetry by technology-based interventions effectively curtails moral hazard but generates more competitive and fairer market conditions.

The Kenyan case offers a more nuanced picture of procurement transparency and developmental impact. Despite all the new provisions in the 2015 Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act, enforcement throughout devolved governments remains spotty. By 2023, only 35% of county governments had fully transitioned to fully digitized procurement systems, Meru County improving by a mere 40% (PPRA, 2024). This half-way execution has serious consequences; the 2023 Meru County audit discovered that manual procedures and weak audit trails are still promoting discretionary award of contracts and undermining fair competition (Meru County Audit Report, 2023). The fact that such gaps still persist attests to the challenges experienced in the implementation of national policy frameworks into consistent local practice, particularly in impoverished decentralized systems.

Affirmative action procurement policy is a critical test case for examination of the relationship between transparency and social engineering objectives. Kenya's 30% reservation of procurement in marginalized groups via the AGPO program has had remarkable success at the national level, with women and youth-owned enterprises securing government contracts worth 28% by 2023 (National Treasury, 2024). Implementation within Meru County, however, reveals systemic failures undermining the program's transformative potential. While 22% of the contracts were awarded to target groups, follow-up studies indicated that only 15% of these companies experienced sustainable growth from their original government contracts due in large part to chronic payment delays of 180 days and poor capacity-building support (KNBS, 2023). These findings augment rising criticism of preferential procurement policies in developing contexts, which issue warnings against over-reliance on quota systems absent complementary institutional frameworks (Wanyama, 2022).

Accountability systems in Meru County possess systemic weaknesses reinforcing economic inefficiencies as well as social injustice. The county procurements audit conducted in 2023 revealed that only 12% of the contracts complied fully with all necessary disclosure requirements, and 61% of them exhibited evidence of prequalification bias against politically aligned firms (EACC, 2024). These developments reflect the deep-rooted resilience of informal networks to subvert formal institutional arrangements, since Institutional Theory's account of the discrepancy between codified rules and what transpires predicted (North, 1990). The contrast with the Makueni County experience is instructive; following the establishment of an independent procurement oversight committee in 2021, Makueni recorded a 40% reduction in cases of corruption, demonstrating the potential of localized accountability mechanisms to combat institutionalized corruption (World Bank, 2023).

New purchasing governance innovations offer potential directions for change. Rwanda's 2023 introduction of blockchain technology to facilitate high-value tenders lowered payment delays by 60% and enhanced auditability (AfDB, 2024), and Ghana's "citizen audit" initiative successfully engaged community groups in monitoring contracts (2022). For Meru County, such occasions mean the promise of hybrid accountability models that combine three critical elements: mandated end-to-end e-procurement for transparency, guided vendor capacity programs for meaningful equity, and empowered oversight committees with actual prosecutorial powers for enforcing accountability.

Legal Compliance and Enforcement in Social Engineering and Economic Development

The effectiveness of procurement governance systems to meet social engineering and economic development goals depends largely on the robustness of legal compliance frameworks and enforcement potential. Indonesia's new anti-corruption courts in 2020 are a showcase of the way institutional innovation can drive accountability significantly, having increased corruption convictions by 35% and reduced case processing times by 40% (UNODC, 2023). Such a model is consistent with Institutional Theory's emphasis on the importance of specialized enforcement institutions for ensuring compliance with rules (North, 1990), demonstrating how particular judicial mechanisms can steer clear of the dangers of generic legal codes. The Indonesian experience is particularly instructive for other developing countries because it has achieved these results in the presence of a complex patronage system, suggesting that well-constructed institutions can indeed modify long-standing habits of governance if given appropriate authority and financing.

The Kenyan experience offers a sobering counterpoint, illustrating the consequences of frail systems of enforcement. The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) 2023 report revealed a 67% loss of procurement corruption cases, with only 12% of cases investigated ending in successful prosecution (EACC, 2024). This is an enforcement lacuna that speaks to multiple systemic failures: under-resourced investigation agencies, extremely long court proceedings averaging 3.2 years per case, and pervasive political interference with prosecution decisions (Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, 2023). Meru County's audit report of irregularities in procurement shares the same country trends, with only 8% of raised irregularities attracting sanctions, and 72% of the cases either dropped or suspended indefinitely (Meru County Audit Report, 2024). Such trends validate the truth of Principal-Agent Theory's predictions of accountability failures whenever mechanisms of monitoring are weak and chances of punishment are low (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), creating permissive cultures for malfeasance in procurement.

Comparative evaluation reveals that efficient enforcement systems share three unique characteristics which are characteristic of high-performing jurisdictions. Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau does this at a 92% conviction rate using its unique blend of operation autonomy, specialized procurement forensic units, and mandatory asset declarations for public officials (World Bank, 2023). Georgia's 2021 procurement anti-corruption reforms reduced corruption by 60% via real-time contract monitoring with automatic suspicious activity triggers for investigation (Transparency International, 2023). Botswana's Anti-Corruption Commission boasts 85% case closure rates due to strict 180-day timeframes for corruption trials (AfDB, 2023). These cases collectively demonstrate that effective compliance systems require more than effective legislation - they depend on professional institutions, efficient resources, and political to implement.

Innovations in progress (2022-2024) indicate promising ways of improving compliance systems in resource-poor environments. Rwanda's blockchain-based procurement system automatically detects anomalies for investigation, reducing detection times by 65% (Ministry of ICT, 2023). Ghana's citizen oversight committees, empowered to refer evidence packages to prosecutors, have increased case filing by 45% (GACC, 2023). Malaysia's AI-based risk assessment system now correctly detects corruption probabilities 82% of the time and can conduct targeted audits (UNODC, 2024). For Kenya and Meru County, the models suggest that bridging current enforcement shortfalls involve investment in technology solutions and participatory oversight systems on the understanding that such systems must be tailored to local institutional realities.

Prospective reforms need to put four evidence-based interventions at top priority: the creation of specialist procurement courts to lower case backlogs, integrated digital monitoring systems coupled with automated warning notices, enhanced whistleblower protections based on the Indonesian template, and the imposition of tight timelines for corruption inquiries. The experience of front-running jurisdictions shows that sustained investment is needed to construct effective compliance systems, but the payoffs in terms of economic efficiency and social equity make it worthwhile. For Meru County, this means the need for county-level enforcement systems taking into account local institutional capacity together with lessons drawn from global best practice in procurement governance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was grounded in a pragmatic critical realist philosophy that merged positivist and interpretivist traditions to provide a comprehensive understanding of procurement legislation in Meru County. Rooted in Bhaskar's (2020) theory of critical realism, the research viewed

procurement laws as both formal legal frameworks and socially constructed practices within Kenya's devolved system of governance. It integrated quantitative and qualitative perspectives—using regression analysis to measure relationships between legal reforms and development outcomes, and interpretive inquiry to explore stakeholder experiences and implementation challenges. Guided by Ubuntu philosophy (Metz, 2021) and feminist institutionalism (Kang & Tripp, 2023), the philosophical orientation addressed structural inequalities within procurement systems. This framework was operationalized through a mixed-methods design that combined standardized questionnaires, qualitative interviews, and institutional ethnography, emphasizing reflexivity and participatory validation to ensure epistemological balance between Western and African paradigms.

The research adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design following Creswell and Plano Clark (2023), which unfolded in three systematic phases. The first phase involved a quantitative survey of 300 respondents drawn from key procurement stakeholders using standardized World Bank (2022) procurement assessment tools. This phase provided statistical insights into transparency, inclusivity, and efficiency indicators. The second phase entailed qualitative inquiry through 50 in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants and systematic document reviews of audit reports and legal files, which contextualized the numerical findings. The third and final phase involved integration of both data sets through joint display techniques that enabled triangulation and the development of meta-inferences. This design was selected because it effectively combines hypothesis testing with theory building, providing a holistic evaluation of complex policy environments in decentralized governance settings (Bamberger, 2022).

The target population comprised approximately 1,000 procurement stakeholders in Meru County, including procurement officers, AGPO-registered suppliers, oversight agencies such as the EACC and PPRA, procurement legal officers, and community beneficiaries. Stratified random sampling was employed for suppliers to ensure proportional representation of women, youth, and PWD-owned enterprises, while purposive sampling was used for expert stakeholders such as officers and legal practitioners. The final sample size included 300 quantitative respondents and 50 qualitative participants, providing both statistical generalizability and contextual depth. Sampling precision was established through Cochran's formula, which ensured a 95 percent confidence level and a ± 5 percent margin of error, while purposive selection guaranteed the inclusion of participants with professional expertise and institutional relevance (Maxwell, 2021).

Data collection was executed using three validated instruments. The first was a 25-item Procurement Transparency Index Questionnaire derived from World Bank indicators, which assessed openness, access to information, accountability, and equity, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 during pilot testing. The second tool was a 12-item semi-structured interview guide, organized around policy implementation, challenges, and recommendations, with a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.92. The third was a document review protocol that systematically analyzed tender reports, audit documents, and court cases between 2015 and 2023. Inter-coder reliability for document analysis was 85 percent, confirming methodological rigor. All tools were pretested on 30 participants, resulting in refinement of poorly correlated items and improved instrument flow.

Data gathering followed a rigorous and ethically sound process in compliance with NACOSTI and the Kenya Data Protection Act (2019). Quantitative data were collected using the ODK Collect platform to facilitate real-time validation and minimize human error. Qualitative interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim to preserve narrative integrity. Document reviews were systematically coded and tracked in Excel for

transparency and accountability. All field researchers received training on ethics, data quality assurance, and cultural sensitivity. Pilot testing with 10 percent of the total sample confirmed instrument reliability, procedural efficiency, and contextual appropriateness.

The pilot study replicated full research conditions to verify methodological soundness, reliability, and cultural adaptability. Translation and back-translation of instruments into Swahili and local languages ensured linguistic clarity. The pilot revealed areas requiring adjustment, including rewording five unclear survey items, reducing interview duration from 60 to 45 minutes, and expanding corruption indicators for analytical robustness. Pilot data analysis confirmed Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency, while thematic coding validated qualitative coherence. The pilot's outcomes informed refinements to data tools and field procedures, ultimately strengthening the study's overall validity.

Data analysis employed a comprehensive mixed-methods strategy encompassing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative analysis began with data cleaning and descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel, followed by inferential testing in SPSS. Correlation analysis and regression modeling were performed. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding in Excel, using color-coding, pivot tables, and iterative refinement to identify emerging themes and relationships. Analytical rigor was supported through inter-coder reliability testing (Cohen's Kappa ≥ 0.80), audit trails, and triangulation across surveys, interviews, and documents. Integration of both data types through cross-display matrices facilitated the generation of comprehensive meta-inferences that connected measurable outcomes with contextual meanings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The survey was carried out on 120 stakeholders who were involved in public procurement in Meru County. Of these, 106 were duly filled and sent back with a response percentage of 88.3. Babbie (2020) argues that a response rate of more than 70 percent is excellent and good enough to ensure generalizability in social science research. The study had a relatively high response rate of 88.3% where 106 participants out of the 120 questionnaires issued by the respondents (procurement stakeholders) were duly completed and returned. High rate of respondents' participation was considered because of high engagement and relevance of the research topic to target population. Based on the same author, Babbie (2020), the response rate of 70% and above was not only satisfactory but boosted external validity by reducing non-response biasness.

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed for each construct using Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Transparency and Accountability

Table 1: Transparency and Accountability

Item	Mean	Std. Dev
Procurement plans are publicly available before tenders	3.84	0.76
Tender advertisements are accessible on official platforms	4.02	0.69
Evaluation criteria are consistently applied	3.71	0.81
Award decisions are transparently communicated	3.66	0.87
Complaint resolution mechanisms exist and are utilized	3.52	0.89
Oversight institutions operate independently and effectively	3.34	0.93
Citizens have access to procurement reports	3.22	0.91
Transparency enhances economic development	4.08	0.64

The description of construct transparency and accountability showed moderate to high degree of agreement of such construct measured against the respondents towards the application in the procurement processes in Meru County. The average score of the eight questions indicated that an average of 3.67 is not a good measure and therefore there is variance in transparency mechanism across the different domain. The strongest-ranking statement was the one concerning the idea that transparency leads to better economic performance ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.64$), indicating that over half of the respondents acknowledged that openness in procurement is not primarily against procedure but is instrumental towards economic and value-for-money analytics as well as citizen satisfaction. Similarly, the mean of providing tender advertisements in official web sites was high ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.69$), implying that the first steps towards the procurement lifestyle were to some extent open and legally acceptable as laid out in the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA, 2015).

Nonetheless, a number of indicators pointed to structural and procedural flaws in the complete expression of transparency. Topicality of people accessing the reports on procurement data registered the lowest mean ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.91$), which implies that information transparency is not effectively at the bottom end of the users chain. Coupled to the latter was that the perceived sovereignty and efficiency of oversight units like the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority and the Office of Auditor-General was also rated afresh modestly ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.93$) indicating concern with independence, resourcing, and capacity to enforce. These deductions coincide with the findings of Transparency International Kenya, (2023) where despite enacting one of the detailed procurement legislation in East Africa, implementation challenges are still persistent in Kenya, especially subnational where capacity levels, watchdog, and civil grassroots engagement are airdropped.

These facts thus confirm the notion that transparency in procurement is disproportionally enforced, stronger during adverts as well as in planning stage than during monitoring, disclosure, and post-award accountability. The partial nature of transparency undermines both the legality and legitimacy of the procurement process and limits its developmental impact. It is imperative that Meru County institutionalizes open contracting frameworks, expands citizen access to procurement information, and strengthens the operational independence of oversight bodies. Doing so would not only align practice with statutory intent but also promote trust, deter corruption, and enhance procurement's contribution to equitable and sustainable development.

Legal Compliance and Enforcement Mechanisms

Table 2: Legal Compliance and Enforcement Mechanisms

Item	Mean	Std. Dev
Laws are understood by stakeholders	3.84	0.78
Officers adhere strictly to procurement laws	3.67	0.75
Non-compliance attracts penalties	3.21	0.82
Effective reporting and appeal mechanisms exist	3.30	0.86
Audit reports are acted upon	3.18	0.88
Compliance ensures fairness	3.94	0.71
Enforcement boosts public confidence	4.06	0.65
Law promotes social equity	4.10	0.62

This observation of legal compliance and enforcement construct is indicated by a high perception of relevance and contribution of the regulatory framework to the procurement integrity in Meru County. In this construct, the composite mean score amounted to 3.66 of eight items which is the highest of all the dimensions that were assessed. This was an indication that there were legal provisions within which the process of procurement was undertaken and that these were not just recognized but that they were perceived to help in favoring fair and effective procurement practices. The most prominent mean aggregate was found in what the respondents said that the procurement law enhances social equity ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.62$), which was followed by the assumption that the effectiveness of the law, in terms of implementation, increases the faith of the people in the procedures of the government ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.65$). Such answers echoed a common belief that the rule of law is the key to legitimacy of procurement, fairness and fairness of distribution, and the distribution of citizen trust.

The fact that high agreement levels were recorded in items such as legal compliance being able to guarantee equitable public contract award ($M = 3.94$) supported this idea more as it noted mass appreciation towards the normative functions of the legal framework in potential elimination of any elements of favorites and inclusiveness across the intended spectrum. Nonetheless, enforcement practices were found to be rated lower especially in areas of how non-compliance gets penalised ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.82$) and how adhering to audit reports get implemented ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.88$). These data suggest the incongruence between these legal requirements and enforcing tools, and, accordingly, the legal requirement of presence does not necessarily result in an effective implementation. The same is echoed in the report of Transparency International (2023) and the experts concluded that in most of the devolved units in Kenya, the enforcement agencies are either poorly funded and coordinated or politically motivated.

Also, the existence of useful reporting and appeal channels was rated rather low with a moderate consensus ($M = 3.30$), suggesting possible ruling improvement in the grievance redress systems and whistleblowing protection. Although procurement officers were regarded as generally law-abiding ($M = 3.67$), a relatively low confidence towards the tools of enforcement, pointed to uncertainty in the frame work of institutional accountability. These reflections indicate that, despite a good base of the laws behind procurement at Meru County, the implementation of the schemes is not steady.

The capacity to enforce the law through access to resources, independence, and performance evaluation of regulatory bodies is urgently needed to maximize the effect of legal compliance on the results of development. There is also great opportunity of integrating real-time audit systems, publicizing the enforcement action, and increased prosecutorial independence, which increase the deterrence and credibility of the institutions. These reforms would not only intensify the rule-based governance but also augment the view that the procurement is a transforming equalizing developmental instrument.

Scoring that inter-correlates

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to investigate the linkages between the dimensions of the procurement law and the development outcomes within the Meru County. Dependent variable was Development Outcomes which was measured as an index of perceived changes in public service delivery, quality of the project and the community satisfaction.

Table 3 Scoring that inter-correlates

Variable	Transparency Legal Compliance Development Outcomes		
Transparency & Accountability	1.000		
Legal Compliance & Enforcement	0.446**	1.000	
Development Outcomes	0.603**	0.648**	1.000

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This was then followed by the coefficient of association between legal compliance and development outcomes ($r = 0.648$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that the level of compliance with the procurement regulations is a key in the establishment of effective development processes. There was also a positive and strong relationship between transparency and accountability ($r = 0.603$) which is in support of the argument that transparency in procurement processes facilitates development through efficiency, trust, and confidence of stakeholders.

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression model was run to assess the predictive power of procurement law dimensions on development outcomes.

Table 4: Coefficients Table

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
Constant	1.202	0.242	—	4.967
Transparency & Accountability	0.278	0.078	0.256	3.564
Legal Compliance & Enforcement	0.305	0.075	0.319	4.067

Analysis of standardized beta coefficient determined legal compliance and enforcement mechanisms as the most predictive indicators ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), which highlights the prioritization of regulation enforcement in delivering tangible development outcomes. This was complemented by transparency and accountability ($\beta = 0.256$, $p = 0.001$),

These empirical results support the theoretical model informing the study to the effect that procurement reforms have significant contributions to the outcomes of governance in decentralized environments. The findings are in line with other studies (World Bank, 2022; OECD, 2021) that have consistently demonstrated the worth of an integrated system of procurement whereby rule enforcement, procedural transparency, and social inclusion converge to enhance development impact. Second, the model's large explanatory power provides policymakers with an instrumental basis for investment with the implication that certain investments in institutional capacity for enforcement, process improvement, and inclusive procurement practices are most likely to yield measurable developmental dividends.

Conclusions

This study concluded that although Kenyan legal frameworks on public procurement specifically the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (2015) are theoretically well-designed and comprehensive enough, their practice in devolved governments such as Meru County is inconsistent and selectively enforced. The evidence indicated that legal compliance and enforcement mechanisms were the most potent force in bringing about development outcomes.

That was a call for strengthening institutional capacity, funding, and autonomy of enforcement and oversight bodies to have them ensure procurement law compliance and increase developmental effectiveness.

The transparency and accountability factor was moderately met, primarily in the early phases of procurement such as planning and notification of tenders. However, transparency plummeted significantly in post-award phases, particularly in redressal of complaints, audit follow-up, and access to information on procurement by the public. The erosion of procedural transparency in later stages erodes the legitimacy of procurement procedures, decreases citizens' trust, and waters down the value-for-money norms embedded in procurement legislations.

Recommendations

First, the enforcement capability of the regulatory institutions, particularly that of PPRA, has to be strengthened considerably. This would entail enhancing resource allocation and ensuring operational autonomy not subject to political influence. It is essential to have the capability to sanction, investigate infringements, and initiate prosecution for closing the gap between law intent and actual compliance. Enhancing legal enforcement would enhance procurement integrity and unequivocally deter malpractices.

Second, transparency in procurement needs to be promoted using Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS) and more digital platform usage. Digitization of procurement documents and real-time publication of procurement plans, as well as tender evaluation, awarded contracts, and audits, should be the priority for Meru County. Digital disclosure mechanisms would not only enhance information access but also ensure public trust, reduce rent-seeking, and increase stakeholder monitoring.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited to Meru County and focused on perceptions of stakeholders as a proxy for the outcome of development. The perceptions were helpful but further research would be beneficial if carried out across broader geographic spaces and included comparative studies across multiple counties. Such studies would give a broader picture of the difference in the application of procurement law among different devolved units and how the difference affects the outcome of development.

In addition, the incorporation of longitudinal study designs would allow researchers to examine the impact of procurement law on development results in the long term. Tracking changes in developments in procurement techniques, institutions, and project performance over several years would reinforce causal conclusions and unveil trends or cycles in enforcement of the law, efficiency gains, or stakeholder involvement. The time dimension can also quantitatively assess the long-run impacts of policy interventions, like legal reforms, digitalization, or capacity-building initiatives.

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