

Policy Brief: Public Procurement and Infrastructure - The Corruption Problem in Sierra Leone

A Policy Brief for Decision-Makers in Government, Oversight Bodies, and Development Partners

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Public procurement remains one of the highest-risk corruption areas in Sierra Leone. It promotes political interference and leakages through weak monitoring, discretion, and opaque manual processes.
- Theoretical insights show that e-procurement can reduce corruption by addressing principal-agent problems through audit trails and transparency. However, collective action and political economy dynamics revealed that technology alone cannot shift behaviour in the face of systemic corruption.
- Ukraine's Prozorro demonstrates that mandatory digital workflows, civil society oversight, and political will can significantly reduce discretion, expand competition, and institutionalise transparency even in crisis.
- Tanzania's NeST shows that the government can build systems that can deliver and promote transparency and fiscal savings. NeST attracted strong institutional leadership, compliance enforcement, and nationwide capacity building.
- Both cases highlight that e-procurement succeeds when there is a strong political will to drive these digital tools, which establishes credible sanctions, promotes consistent utilisation, and provides incentives that make corruption very costly.
- In Sierra Leone, the technology is available; the gap is the governance process of the e-GP. Implementation of the e-GP is challenged by mandatory adoption across MDAs, a stronger NPPA to impose fines for non-compliance, and restructuring coalitions that protect the system from political capture.

INTRODUCTION

Public procurement is vulnerable to corruption because it involves large budgets, manages complex contracting processes, and entrusts decision-making power to officials, allowing for administrative discretion (OECD, 2016; Bajpai & Myers, 2020).

The OECD's 2016 report clearly noted that procurement of needed goods and services accounted for 12-20% of GDP and up to 30% of government budgetary expenditure in many countries. Price inflation, incomplete projects, and substandard work that undermine citizens' access to basic services become the immediate consequences of a corrupt procurement process (OECD, 2016; Bajpai & Myers, 2020). Sierra Leone fits this high-risk profile. However, there is an added vulnerability linked to its post-conflict and resource-constrained context. A major added vulnerability linked to Sierra Leone's post-conflict and resource-constrained context is the persistence of weak state capacity and entrenched informal governance networks that survived the civil war and continue to shape public administration.

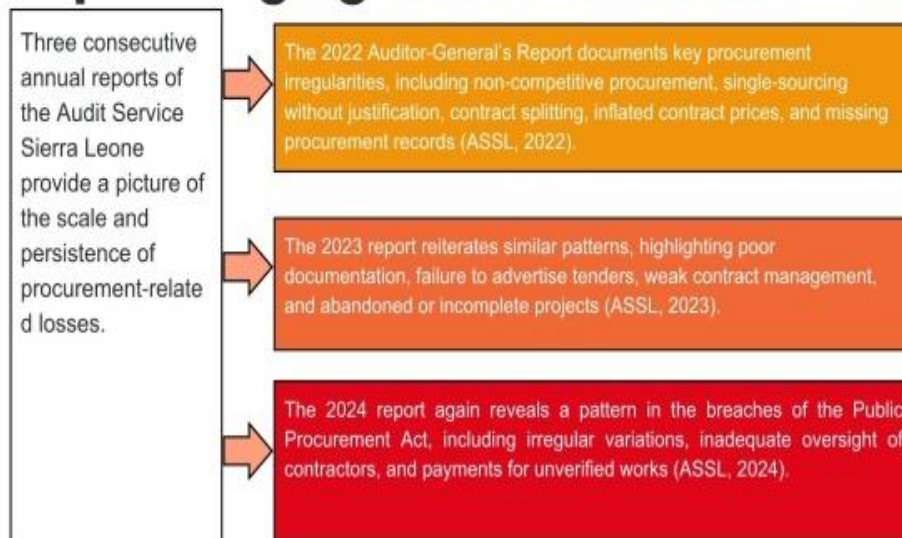
The IMF's Governance and Corruption Diagnostic on Sierra Leone highlighted the lack of institutional competence to function effectively (Robinson *et al.*, 2026). This implies that governance-related reforms were never fully implemented, leaving behind fragile oversight systems, limited enforcement capability, and high discretion in public spending.

Fanthorpe and Maconachie (2010) study on Sierra Leone post-war governance shows that patronage practices during the war and moral economies of entitlement have been embedded in the recovery process, normalising expectations of favour exchange and resource capture which continue to shape public sector behaviour, including procurement practises today.

Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index places Sierra Leone in the lower half of global performers and ranks 109/182 with its public sector corruption score of 34/100.¹

This rating comes with persistent concerns about poor public financial management and procurement (*Corruption Perceptions Index 2025*, 2025). Similarly, the IMF 2026 governance diagnostic highlighted the existence of a weak rule of law, limited and conditional enforcement, and vulnerabilities in public spending systems (Robinson *et al.*, 2026). These external assessments resonate with empirical claims that procurement has been a central channel through which public financial resources are diverted.

Sierra Leone Auditor General’s Report findings on Procurment



Source: own elaboration

Figure 1: Three-year Audit Report procurement findings (Diamond-Suma, 2026, Figure 4)

Three consecutive annual reports of the Audit Service of Sierra Leone provide a picture of procurement-related losses.

MDAs' (including local councils') lack of compliance with procurement processes indicates higher cultural impunity than technical weaknesses. Audit Service Sierra Leone (2023)² highlighted procurement-related weaknesses, non-competitive awards, poor documentation, and contract management failures that occur across MDAs suggest that it's a structural governance problem. The National Public Procurement Authority (NPPA)³ Compliance checks highlighted persistent reliance on unapproved bidding documents, breaches of procurement guidelines, and opaque contract awards, particularly in government infrastructure projects (Conteh, 2025).

¹ Transparency International CPI 2025 scores <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2025/index/sle>

² Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL) is the country's Supreme Audit Institution (SAI), mandated to independently audit the use of public resources and report directly to Parliament.

³ NPPA is the established legal body under the law to oversee all public procurement activities in Sierra Leone.

National policy documents also recognise these risks.

The 2019-2023 National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) acknowledge public procurement as a high-risk area for fighting corruption in Sierra Leone, highlighting issues of non-compliance, weak monitoring of contract implementation, and limited capacity of MDAs in managing large budgets (Anti-Corruption Commission Sierra Leone, 2019)⁴. Also, NACS 2024–2028 shares similar concerns; hence, the strategy calls for robust accountability and transparency mechanisms to address manipulation and favouritism (Anti-Corruption Commission Sierra Leone, 2024). The consequences are severe. The government pays more than it should when procurement fails, leaving social services constrained from fully attending to. These limitations result in weak economic performance and undermine public service delivery. The repeated procurement losses and scandals continue to erode citizens' confidence in the process and deter credible investors. In the Sierra Leone context, tackling procurement corruption is considered good governance and the achievement of Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plans (MOPEL, 2024)⁵

E-Procurement Intervention In Sierra Leone

Defining the reform package

In Sierra Leone, e-procurement is being pursued as part of its broader effort to promote open, rules-based public procurement. The core of this package is the NPPA's electronic government procurement platform (e-GP), supported by the Public Procurement Act 2016, the 2020 Regulations, the Anti-Corruption Act, and related financial management laws (NPPA, 2016; NPPA, 2020; ACC, 2008).

The eGP aims to make public procurement more transparent; it ensures that each step, ranging from planning and tendering to evaluation, award, and contract implementation, leaves a digital footprint. The e-procurement platform is less open to discretion; it ensures that oversight bodies, civil society, Parliament, the Audit Service, the ACC, the media, and, by extension, citizens can easily review the process (truthmedia.sl, 2026).

e-Procurement in practice: the e-GP platform

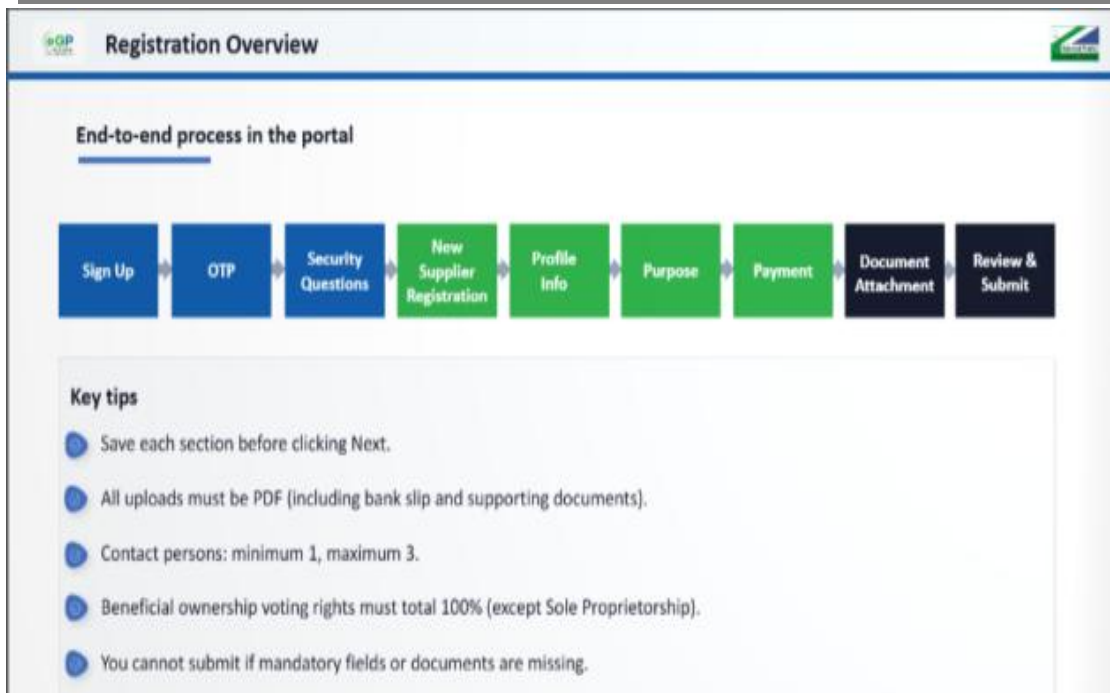
The e-GP system digitises the core stages of public procurement, creating automatic audit trails and time-stamped records (e-GP, 2025). The stages are;

- Procuring entities (MDAs) publish plans, tender notices, and bidding documents online
- Suppliers register and submit their bids electronically
- Evaluation outcomes and contract awards are recorded in the system
- A public interface is also created on the portal with access to tender and award information.

Figure 2: e-GP registration framework

⁴ The ACC is Sierra Leone's independent body established by law to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish corruption and corrupt practices, while promoting integrity in public life.

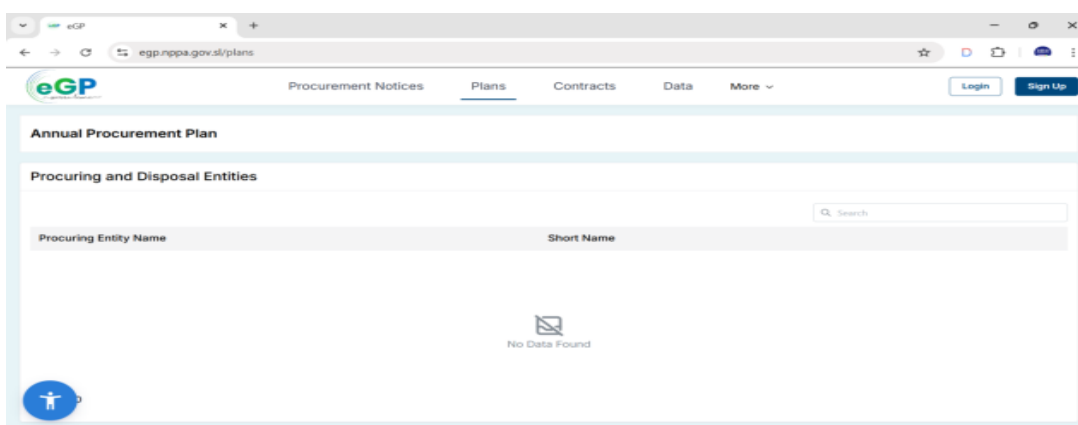
⁵ MTNDP: Is the Government of Sierra Leone's Transformative Acceleration Agenda for Food Security, Human Capital Development & Job Creation



The e-GP system makes it harder to conceal non-competitive awards or alter documentation processes, while giving oversight bodies a clearer data trail to detect irregularities. However, the timely adoption by MDAs remains a challenge to its effectiveness in producing quality data, enhancing digital literacy, and addressing connectivity challenges, meaning the system’s potential depends heavily on consistent use and strong enforcement.

However, the platform seems incomplete with non-functional areas, there is no information on the procurement notice section (which is impossible to be), an empty plans page, zero contract information and a blank OCID data section and tender counts are still at zero⁶. This brief further analysed the main NPPA website to confirm the usability of this e-procurement platform; unfortunately, no data were found. However, NPPA provided a simple step-by-step guide to register on the platform.

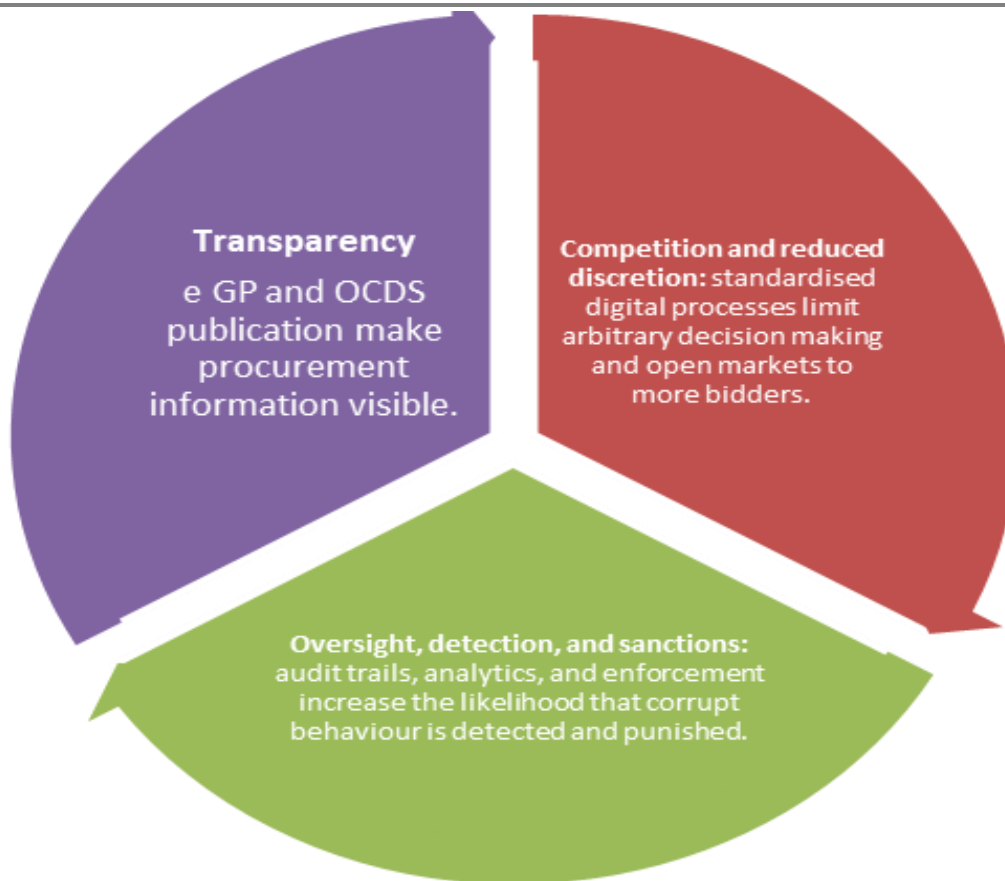
Figure 3: Limited flow of procurement information on the system.



Theory of change

The underlying theory of change is straightforward:

⁶ e-GP platform viewed on 23rd April, 2026 <https://egp.nppa.gov.sl/data/ocds>



The theory of change underpinning Sierra Leone's e-procurement reform rests on the interaction of three reinforcing mechanisms: transparency, competition, reduced discretion, oversight, detection, and sanctions (as illustrated in the diagram). The intervention assumes that digitising procurement processes and publishing data through the e-GP and OCDS platforms will increase visibility and traceability. It will enable external actors such as Parliament, the Audit Service, the ACC, civil society, and the media to scrutinise transactions in real time. This transparency reduces information asymmetry and limits opportunities for concealment.

Standardised digital workflows then curb discretionary decision-making, ensuring that tendering and evaluation follow uniform criteria and that markets are open to a wider pool of bidders. This competitive pressure discourages collusion and rent-seeking. Finally, the system's automated audit trails and analytics enhance detection and enforcement, allowing oversight institutions to identify anomalies and sanction misconduct more efficiently.

Together, these mechanisms create a virtuous cycle: transparency triggers accountability, accountability enforces compliance, and compliance builds public trust. The expected outcomes will lower corruption risks, improve value for money, and strengthen institutional credibility, as proposed by the recent transparency partnership between NPPA and BAN (Jalloh, 2026) which document early gains in procurement integrity and monitoring capacity following the e-GP rollout.

However, the effectiveness of the e-procurement system depends on legal alignment and political-institutional willingness because these conditions determine whether the tools function as genuine accountability mechanisms or merely as procedural add-ons.

Legal alignment with global standards (such as UNCITRAL, OECD, and MAPS benchmarks) ensures that the digital system is embedded in a coherent regulatory framework, one that mandates disclosure, standardises procedures, and defines enforceable consequences for non-compliance. Without this legal backbone, e-procurement platforms can be bypassed, underused, or selectively applied.

More critically, the system's impact hinges on the willingness of political and institutional actors to use these tools to challenge entrenched interests.

In Sierra Leone, procurement has been historically shaped by patronage networks, discretionary authority, and informal influence. Digital tools do not automatically disrupt existing power relations.

Their effectiveness depends on whether leaders, oversight bodies, and procurement officials choose to activate the system's transparency, auditability, and enforcement features rather than treat e-GP as a box-ticking exercise. This is why political will and institutional incentives are central; they determine whether the technology is used to expose irregularities, enforce sanctions, and open markets, or a procedural façade that leaves underlying practices unchanged.

Evidence On the Efficacy of E-Procurement

Evidence from around the world has indicated the role of e-procurement in public spending as an enabler of transparency, competition, and oversight. Bajpai and Myers (2020) and OECD (2016) reports highlighted that when the government digitize its procurement processes, it avoids single-bid tenders, improves supply participation and creates an enabling environment for earlier detection of irregularities. However, achieving these is highly dependent on strong political will, adherence to consistent use of the systems by MDAs and institutional capacity.

Ukraine's Prozorro

IN UKRAINE, following the 2014 uprising against extensive corruption under former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, some civic activists and data experts agreed to overhaul the government procurement (Yukins & Kelman, 2022). Their overhauling produced an open-source e-procurement system named "ProZorro". This began as a private effort, which was later adopted by the Ukrainian government (Transparency International Ukraine, 2017; Starodubtsev & Buhai, 2018). The system was developed on impartial decision-making and transparency principles. Ukraine's Prozorro platform is globally regarded in the transparency space as one of the most successful e-procurement systems. Since its launch, this system has increased domestic suppliers' participation from 14,000 companies in 2014 to 140,000 in 2024 and generated more than US\$8.7 billion in public savings. This is a clear reflection of its core design principle of "transparency" (Transparency International Ukraine, 2017).

In 2024, competitive procurement volumes increased by UAH 841 billion compared to 2023, which was UAH 616.8 billion (Prozorro, 2024). In 2023, almost 80% of all procurement spending was processed through the Prozorro platform (Prozorro, 2024). The Prozorro system is designed as a mandatory tool for e-tendering, online bid submission, automated audit trails, and full publication of procurement data. This process has reduced discretion and made oversight by other accountability stakeholders easier. Prozorro has been confirmed by international reviews, including those presented at the EU4PFM conference as a case study within the EU, to be capable of real-time monitoring (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023). Media outlets such as Kyiv Independent have also highlighted its role in maintaining transparency during wartime.

Ukraine's progress reflects strong political backing, active civil society monitoring through DoZorro, and significant donor support in its co-creation process and implementation.

TANZANIA'S Nest

IN 2024, TANZANIA launched the National e-Procurement System of Tanzania (NeST) as the replacement for the initial TANePS platform⁷. Tanzania's digital procurement strides provide a strong example of how African-

⁷ **TANePS** was the earlier pilot system launched around 2018, while NeST (National e-Procurement System of Tanzania) is the upgraded, fully integrated platform rolled out from 2022–2024.

built e-procurement systems can address procurement corruption. Unlike donor-driven systems, the Tanzanian PPRA designed and developed NeST to reflect its national strategy, which aims to strengthen transparency and accountability in public procurement.

Evidence reviewed in this policy brief shows that NeST has already delivered measurable gains (PPRA, 2024). PPRA's internal assessments⁸ indicates that digitalisation has significantly improved data effectiveness and reduced document tampering, while the shift to digitalisation (paperless tendering has contributed to substantial fiscal savings in the 2023/24 financial year.

Media reports confirm that NeST processed more than 130,000 tenders in its first year, collectively saved the government billions of Tanzanian shillings and narrowed avenues for bribery associated with physical submissions (Said, 2026). These improvements have also expanded access for suppliers outside major cities to compete for contracts.

International Institutions (World Bank Group, 2023; Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023) also reinforce these findings. World Bank Group (2023)⁹ notes that these reforms have strengthened audit requirements and embedded mandatory digital workflows. ODI analysis also highlights Tanzania as a case of local ownership, where domestic technical capacity has driven credible improvements in procurement transparency (Brown & Neumann, 2026).

These assessments validate PPRA's claim that NeST has enhanced oversight by supporting faster identification of risk tenders and improving compliance monitoring across procuring entities. Amidst these progresses across ministries and local authorities, challenges remain with digital literacy and connectivity.

Critical Reflections and Implications for Sierra Leone

Ukraine's and Tanzania's e-procurement strides were success stories in reducing corruption and were backed by strong political will and consistent utilisation by the government and its decentralised institutions. Ukraine proves that mandatory digital workflows and active oversight effectively limit discretion, whilst Tanzania shows that locally built systems can restore integrity.

This will be assured when government institutions lead the reform with enforced compliance. A lesson for Sierra Leone's NPPA is that technology alone will not shift incentives. Implementing an effective e-procurement program is highly reliant on strong political will, effective use across MDAs, and credible oversight to ensure transparency becomes the new normal in the process.

Application of Theoretical Frameworks

Principal-Agent (PA) Theory offers a fundamental perspective for understanding how the effective utilisation of e-procurement systems in Sierra Leone can reduce corruption.

This theory suggests that both citizens and political leaders (principals) delegate authority to procurement officials, and contractors (agents) are part of the process. These agents typically hold key information about procurement processes, pricing, and operational details, an information asymmetry that lies at the core of the principal-agent relationships (Fama, 1980; Miller, 2005). These dynamics are well documented in corruption literature, where asymmetric information positions agents to exploit gaps in oversight (Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Groenendijk, 1997).

This information asymmetry, when combined with weak oversight and limited authorisations, creates openings for the agent to divert public resources for personal gain (Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Groenendijk, 1997) By

⁸ [https://www.ppra.go.tz/uploads/documents/en-1775809668--%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%20-%20FY%202023-24%20\(Merged_2.pdf\)%20WAZIRI%20Last%20version.pdf](https://www.ppra.go.tz/uploads/documents/en-1775809668--%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%20-%20FY%202023-24%20(Merged_2.pdf)%20WAZIRI%20Last%20version.pdf)

⁹ **March 2024**, The World Bank approved \$50 million to help Tanzania strengthen its revenue management, modernize public procurement processes, and improve resource allocation and audit effectiveness.

digitising the procurement processes (e-GP platforms), it will automatically reduce information asymmetries, standardise documentation, and generate audit trails for oversight purposes by the Principal- NPPA, ASSL, ACC, PAC, and citizens.

Using the e-GP platforms ensures the availability of structured data and analytics, which increases the likelihood that some anomalies will be detected. It will raise the expected cost of corrupt behaviour. From this perspective, e-GP will represent a rational institutional reaction to classic agency failures.

Given the systemic nature of corruption in Sierra Leone, the application of Principal-Agent Theory alone would limit its potential. Collective Action Theory claims that when corruption is perceived as “how things are done”, it becomes a social norm. This reduced the ‘this is how the system works’ attitude among individuals to act honestly, even under a clear framework, because they always expect others to remain corrupt (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015)

Transparency reforms in these circumstances may uncover corruption, but will fail to shift behaviour if actors are not convinced that others will comply (Stephenson, 2015). It is at this point that Political Economy views become critical. Public Procurement corruption in Sierra Leone is shaped by political economy dynamics; it reflects deeper power relations, patronage networks, and elite incentives rather than a technical or administrative incapacity (Fanthorpe and Maconachie, 2010). In this context, procurement decisions, especially in infrastructure, energy, and service-delivery sectors, carry significant political implications because they are tied to electoral coalitions, regional loyalties, and elite rent-sharing arrangements (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015; Basdevant et al., 2024). These patronage networks often resist reforms that threaten established channels of political finance or elite control over public contracts. Comparative political-economy research shows that when procurement systems are used to reward supporters or consolidate political coalitions, they become instruments of patronage distribution rather than public value, undermining both efficiency and integrity (Jackson, 2005; Fanthorpe and Maconachie, 2010). This resistance manifests through deliberate under-implementation of rules, manipulation of tender processes, and political interference in high-value contract awards.

In such contexts, reforms only succeed when procurement is insulated from these political incentives, because evidence from the 2026 IMF Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Report demonstrates that elite control over public contracts is a key mechanism through which power is maintained, not simply a symptom of weak administrative capacity (Robinson, 2026). This means that digital reforms such as e-procurement, audit strengthening, and transparency tools must be accompanied by political-economy strategies that address elite incentives, strengthen oversight institutions (NPPA, ASSL, ACC), and reduce discretionary political influence over procurement decisions.

E-procurement in Sierra Leone offers strong potential to reduce principal-agent problems by increasing monitoring, transparency, and detection. However, its effectiveness ultimately depends on credible enforcement mechanisms that shift incentives and constrain political interference. To achieve meaningful impact, the system must be backed by visible and consistent enforcement, including blacklisting of non-compliant suppliers, mandatory publication of sanctions, and automatic referral of serious breaches to the ACC for prosecution.

Strengthening sanctions such as debarment, contract termination, financial penalties, and loss of future bidding rights creates real deterrence and signals that high-level offenders will face consequences. At the same time, reform requires coalitions of oversight actors - NPPA, ASSL, ACC, Parliament, civil society, and compliant suppliers who actively defend the integrity of the e-GP system and resist attempts by politically connected networks to manipulate or bypass digital processes. When enforcement is credible and coordinated, e-procurement can shift collective expectations, reduce discretionary power, and align political incentives with transparent, rules-based procurement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The public procurement system in Sierra Leone faces high risk of corruption. This has resulted in repeated financial losses, poor-quality and incomplete infrastructure, and affected public trust.

Three consecutive Auditor-General's reports show that procurement abuses are systemic. NPPA's e-GP platform offers an opportunity to make procurement more transparent, competitive, and accountable. International experience from Ukraine and Tanzania shows that e-procurement reforms can only work when they are embedded in and protected from political capture, trustworthy institutions, and supported by active oversight. Capacity-building is essential to ensure that the NPPA e-procurement reforms become part of a broader governance transformation of Sierra Leone rather than a narrow technical upgrade. MDAs need sustained training on digital procurement workflows, data quality standards, and enforcement procedures to ensure the e-GP system is used consistently and with integrity. Civil society organisations also require support to interpret procurement data, monitor contract performance, and engage constructively with oversight institutions, strengthening external accountability.

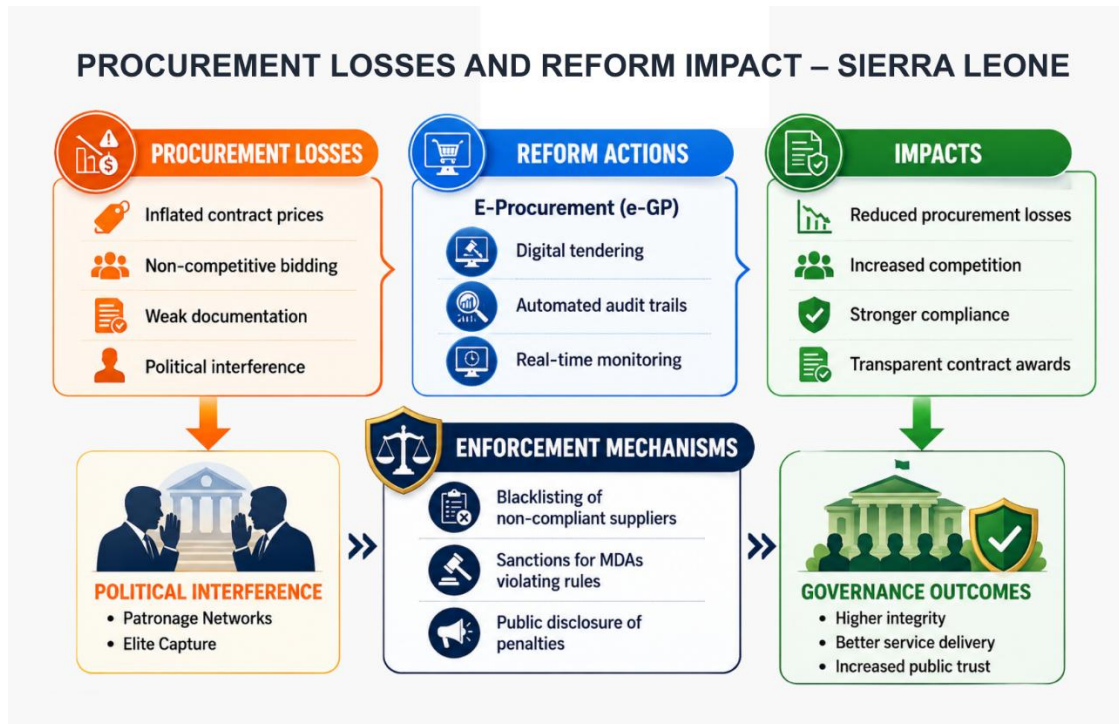


Figure 4: Procurement Losses and Reform impacts – Sierra Leone (Diamond-Suma, 2026, Figure 4)

To maximise the impact of e-procurement in curbing corruption in Sierra Leone, this brief recommends that the government of Sierra Leone should:

1. **Mandate** all MDAs to fully integrate e-GP for all procurement processes and outline compliance as a legal requirement
2. **Align** the e-GP systems with OCDS to ensure data completeness, accessibility, and analysis and routinely monitor red-flag indicators.
3. **Strengthen** oversight of the e-GP data through the establishment of standard data-sharing protocols between NPPA, ASSL, ACC, and PAC, and by building capacity to use procurement data in audits.
4. **Enforce** proactive disclosure on blacklisting and beneficial ownership. This will ensure that debarred firms and hidden beneficial owners cannot simply re-enter the market under new identities.
5. **Establish** a coordinated national capacity-building programme led by NPPA and ASSL that trains MDAs and civil society on digital compliance, monitoring, and enforcement, including practical modules on blacklisting procedures and sanctions implementation.
6. **Invest** in capacity building and change management on the e-GP for all actors in the public procurement processes. And, enforce a communication strategy that would build public trust in procurement, transparency and accountability.

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- **Figure 3: Source** <https://egp.nppa.gov.sl> - Limited flow of procurement information on the system.
- **Figure 4: Source** Diamond-Suma, A. 2026, Procurement Losses and Reform Impact – Flow Infographic, unpublished diagram

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