PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT CORRUPTION PRACTICES AND PROJECT SUCCESS: A CASE OF KENYA RURAL ROADS AUTHORITY IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Multiple research studies demonstrated that corruption occurs during public procurement, leading to doubts about the process's ability to select capable implementers for projects. The main objective of this investigation was to analyze relationship between perceptions about procurement corruption practices and project success. The research examined projects undertaken by contractors of KeRRA within Kiambu County. The research aimed to achieve three primary objectives, which involved analyzing the relation between contractor collusion perceptions with project outcomes at KeRRA in Kiambu County, testing the relationship between perceptions of improper noncompetitive procurement activities and project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County, and measuring relationship between perceptions of conflict of interest and project achievement at KeRRA in Kiambu County. This research used both fraud triangle theory and the resource-based theory as its framework. A descriptive cross-sectional research design was used. The research included 23 civil servants from Kiambu County's Roads, Transport, and Public Works Department, 60 members of the County Assembly, and 30 staff from Kiambu Pamoja Trust within the county area as the respondents. The study employed a census sample due to accessibility of all respondents. The research collected its main data through semi-structured questionnaires. The study conducted content analysis on qualitative data and used descriptive statistics for quantitative data. The statistical evaluation consisted of frequency tables, percentage distributions, mean values, and standard deviations. The results showed that 55.7% of respondents believed collusion during the procurement process was high or very high and had a considerable effect on project costs and efficiency. 81.8% of respondents viewed prevalence of unjustified noncompetitive procurement as high or very high implying that it was common and often unjustified. Similarly, the study revealed a high prevalence of conflict of interest in procurement processes at KeRRA, with 50% of respondents rating it as very high and 45.5% as high. The study concluded that procurement corruption practices particularly collusion among contractors, unjustified noncompetitive procurement, and conflict of interest are highly prevalent at KeRRA in Kiambu County. Overall, the study established that these procurement corruption practices have a detrimental effect on project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County as they lead to project delays, inflated costs, substandard quality, and low stakeholder satisfaction. Strengthening transparency, and integrity mechanisms as well as adopting electronic procurement will be critical in enhancing project performance and ensuring that public funds are used efficiently and effectively. The research findings will assist KeRRA and Kiambu County policymakers in spotting procurement policy holes that may trigger adverse perceptions, which require appropriate responses.

INTRODUCTION

Procurement is a vital process which when managed well, it can lead enhanced organizational reputation as well as acquisition of goods and services of high quality in an organization. Reviewed studies revealed that the process is marred by various corruption practices including collusion among contractors, unjustified use of noncompetitive method of procurement and conflict of interest. World Bank (2019) estimates that over one trillion dollars is paid in bribes annually, with procurement identified as one the most prone area for corruption. Such corrupt practices drain resources and also erode public trust and institutional integrity especially in developing economies where regulatory frameworks are likely weaker.

Project achievement depends on three factors: time needed to complete the task, cost investments and deliverable quality, and stakeholder contentment. Poor management leads to project failure, as it escalates prices, extends completion time, produces substandard results, and dissatisfies stakeholders. There exists only partial evaluation of how procurement corruption practices influence success of road projects in public sector. Measurements of perceived procurement corruption practices enabled this study to identify relationship between corrupt practices and effectiveness of KeRRA's road works projects throughout Kiambu County.

In Canada, there was observed enhanced social responsibility in companies that practice ethical procurement practices which enhanced their reputation in the community (Amelia, 2024). To achieve high organizational performance, it is imperative to ensure efficient and effective implementation of procurement functions as well as good governance principles and professionalism (Mchopa, 2020).

However, public procurement is faced by corruption practices which defeat the intended purpose of the process. A global economic survey conducted by PwC (2024) revealed that procurement corruption is too common with fifty-five percent (55%) of respondents reporting that procurement fraud is a widespread concern in their country. It showed that procurement fraud is among the top three most destructive economic crimes just behind cybercrime and corruption. The survey also noted that there are minimal efforts put in place by organizations to use available tools to identify or combat procurement fraud. This undermines the positive impact that the procurement process could have on projects if it was carried out efficiently (Msanga, 2020).

In Nigeria, Ebekozien et al. (2022) identified collusion and lack of professionalism among challenges facing procurement management in infrastructure development projects. Collusion of contractors leads to formation of cartels while lack of professionalism lead to unjustified sole source awards. The findings were corroborated in Tanzania by Masoud (2023) who found out that political meddling in contract award negatively influences procurement outcomes. This is because political interference is likely to lead to negation of procurement requirements resulting in unjustified sole source awards and collusion.

A project meets its success criteria through performance outcomes together with time completion and cost requirements. Quality performance by contractors delivers the biggest influence on project success, according to Kasabreh and Tarawneh (2019). For a project to be completed successfully, a qualified contractor must be found through an efficient procurement process. A proper selection of contractors will produce substantial cost savings along with maintaining high project standards (Yaweli et al., 2005).

Reviewed studies indicated that researchers have not examined how procurement corruption practices influence project success outcomes. The current study aimed to delve into deficiencies through studying the connection between views on procurement corruption practices and project success from a Kenyan standpoint. This research examined the connection between procurement corruption perceptions and success of road construction and maintenance projects within Kiambu County rural areas by studying the Kenya Rural Roads Authority (KeRRA) case.

Corruption in procurement occurs when one or more contractors get an unfair advantage through illegal means (Lyra et al., 2022). To be more precise, public procurement corruption occurs when a corporation or group of people uses their influence to alter the regulations governing fair and open bidding processes to enrich themselves (Arista & Fazekas, 2024).

The ACFE (2019) divided procurement corruption schemes into three main groups: expected contractors conspiring to beat procurement regulations; workers from purchasing entities conspiring with prospective contractors; and unfair use of noncompetitive procurement methods. These fraudulent schemes distort the procurement process since they disrupt the original contract award system, which prioritizes vendors with optimal value and superior product quality (OECD, 2011). Political influence combined with abusive power creates favorable conditions for the parties involved to form interest-based agreements during tender award sessions.

First, collusion among contractors involves a group of contractors who secretly agree to submit complementary high bids so that a preselected contractor can win contacts on a rotational basis, or by dividing contracts by territories, or the bid winner to divide works to the other contractors (International Anti-Corruption Resource Center, 2024). Indicators of this scheme is winning bid being too high in relation to cost estimates, rotation of winning bidders and losing bidders being hired as subcontractors (ACFE, 2019).

Secondly, unjustified noncompetitive procurement method occurs when employees of the procuring entity use noncompetitive procurement method to influence award of contracts to particular vendors at possibly inflated prices for bribes or kickbacks (ACFE, 2019).Organizations usually need proper justification to use this method of procurement which include; when the goods and services are obtainable from a single source, when urgent situations cannot permit delay resulting from a competitive bidding, or when solicitation is deemed insufficient after soliciting a various source (Entwistle & Martin, 2005). Unjustified noncompetitive procurement methods can be indicated by lack of documentation to support noncompetitive awards (International Anticorruption Center, 2024) as well as high number sole-source awards to one supplier, and use of the method when there is available pool of contractors to compete and false statements made to justify the method (ACFE, 2019).

In Zimbabwe, Zinyama and Hamadziripi (2023) established that even though circumstances under which direct procurement is applicable are provided, there are enormous challenges with the method and they involve corruption and conflict of interest. The country lacks regard to effective enforcement of procurement principles as expressed in the procurement legislation. These regulations are meant to minimize corruption in public procurement as established in Tanzania by Mchopa et al (2024) that application of public procurement laws minimizes corruption leading to accountability, and increased fairness undertakings of public procurement. However, some regulations led to challenges as a result of interference and inefficient efforts that hinder effective public procurement activities.

The Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPDA) from 2015 created provisions to comply with Article 227 of the Constitution by establishing methods for efficient public buying alongside efficient public asset disposal procedures for government bodies. The government adopted the Public Finance Management Act, 2012, to help national and county administrators properly manage funds while parliament and county assemblies perform their oversight functions effectively. Procurement corruption continues to disrupt public service stability in the country despite existing prevention measures (Kemboi 2023).

Mutangili (2019) observed that public procurement corruption has long plagued Kenya, influenced by various variables including economic, administrative, political, and social elements. In 2022, eighty per cent (80%) of all instances examined in Kenya regarding public funds theft were related to procurement, encompassing both commercial and public sectors (TI, 2023). Dishonesty in public procurement results in the misappropriation of public monies. Hassan (2019) found that the procurement process in Wajir politics, bribery, and the abuse of power. The study did not demonstrate the collision of these factors on project success.

Analysis of EACC quarterly report released in March 2024 shows that procurement corruption is rampant in various sectors and counties in Kenya. Out of the cases handled by the EACC during the quarter, forty-one percent (41%) were related to procurement corruption. It was followed by bribery by police officers at eighteen percent (18%) and forgery of academic documents and bribery into employment each at eleven percent (12%). Other cases investigated included irregular acquisition of fertilizer, fraudulent payments and bribery in schools comprising of 17% of cases investigated

Bannerman (2008) defined project success as ability of a project to achieve its quality specifications as well as its completion on time and within resources. Project execution is a fundamental component which helps in achieving the main project constraints of scope, cost and time thus resulting to project success (Charvat, 2003).

For a project to be successful there is need for good collaboration among all the stakeholders involved through proper execution of communication of duties and roles by the project manager (Cook, 2017). Suppliers and vendors who are contracted through procurement process to undertake a project are external stakeholders and thus critical in successful completion of a project.

Project success evaluation requires the examination of three core performance indicators, which combine work excellence with project duration and spending budget (Zid et al., 2020) and stakeholder contentment (Baker et al., 1983) with the project outcome. The contractor responsible for delivering the project needs to execute effective project management to ensure project success because proper project and product scope defines project quality targets alongside agreed costs and specified deadlines. Through their research, Lamprou and Vagiona (2022) analyzed the identification methods and success evaluation criteria that determine construction projects' success in Greece. Lamprou and Vagiona (2022) discovered that cost/budget and client or user satisfaction, together with time/schedule and quality and technical capabilities, make up the most significant criteria for evaluating project success.

Analysed studies mostly examines the connection of management and administration strategies and achievement of project goals while neglecting the influence of procurement corruption practices on project results. This study analyzed the link between perceived corruption practices in public procurement and project success, a case of KeRRA in Kiambu County. The indicators of project success included the quality of contractor's completed work, time and cost efficiency, and the satisfaction level of project outcomes by key stakeholders.

The Kenya Roads Authority represents a national public conglomerate established through the Kenya Roads Act of 2007. The establishment occurred in 2009 while the Ministry of Roads and Transport lead its oversight. KeRRA serves the country by executing duties listed in the Kenya Roads Act 2007 to develop and maintain rural road infrastructure. KeRRA performs road building and upgrading functions in addition to rehabilitating rural roads and carrying out their maintenance activities. KeRRA possesses an obligation to deliver road works at an exceptional standard that matches the specifications set by the Cabinet Secretary for Roads and Transport.

The intended crucial importance of KeRRA to the growth of economic and country's prosperity through improvement of rural roads cannot be overlooked (Kitungo and Musembi, 2024). These roads enable mobility and access to various important services like education, healthcare, and market. To enable achievement of its objectives, KeRRA is allowed to engage firms which carry out construction, promotion, analysis and maintenance of rural roads through competitive procurement procedure. The organization has in place an e-procurement portal that allows for easy access of tender notices and application to all potential contractors.

Nevertheless, KeRRA is faced by a myriad of challenges that affect successful completion of projects. These challenges include inefficiencies in procurement processes (Okuku and Oloko, 2024) and inadequate project planning (Kitungo and Musembi, 2024). The challenges at KeRRA make most rural roads impassable due to their poor state resulting from poor maintenance works.

Statement of the problem

The economic advancement of rural populations across the world depends upon rural roads as much as the national growth does. Rural road projects encounter different factors that disrupt successful completion while increasing doubts about contractor selections throughout the procurement process (Alashwal & Alashwal, 2023). The performance of road projects in Kenya falls beyond initial schedule expectations in most construction cases (Seboru, 2015). The contractors face difficulties finishing projects on time, at specified budget and achieving desired quality level (Densford et al., 2018).

Research by Kisavi (2021) in Kiambu County revealed projects of road construction faced multiple challenges that jeopardized their final success. The project suffered from funding shortages as well as incompetent work by poorly equipped contractors and an inadequate planning system for monitoring and evaluation activities. The given analysis failed to investigate how procurement corruption practices affect project success. The public procurement system functions as a fundamental evaluation method to deliver quality products and services through obtaining them at their lowest possible costs. Multiple studies report that corruption occurs as one of the many practices during public procurement procedures.

Rodríguez et al. (2022) showed that collusion is always present in public procurement activities. Despite being rarely used, machine learning techniques have been successful in detecting these fraudulent activities. Research studies indicated that investigations about the consequence of procurement corruption practices on project success remain insufficient. The existing studies focus on price effects from procurement corruption but neglect to study project outcome quality or time duration and stakeholder satisfaction. The current research project analyzed procurement corruption practice perceptions while examining their effects on project success by focusing on the case of KeRRA.

Objectives of thestudy

The study sought to;

i. Determine relationship between perceptions of collusion among contractors and project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County,
ii. Examine relationship between perceptions of unjustified noncompetitive procurement and project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County,

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section deliberates on an overview of the existing literature pertinent to the variables examined in this study. It presents theoretical review, empirical review, and conceptual framework adopted by the research.

Theoretical Framework

Foundational theories in this investigation include the resource-based theory and the fraud triangle theory. We go over the theories and how they apply to the research.

Fraud Triangle Theory

The fraud triangle theory was used to explain unjustified noncompetitive bidding and conflict of interest. After conducting studies on white-collar criminals, Donald R. Cressey established this theory and referred to these criminals as trusted violators. Trusted persons turn into violators before becoming distrusted following a belief they have un-sharable financial issues yet understand they could secretly solve these problems through violating their financial trust status while perceiving themselves as trustworthy individuals.

The three key factors motivating individuals to commit fraud include perceived opportunity along with enticement and rationalization, according to Homer (2020). This forms the fraud triangle with pressure on one vertex representing a non-sharable financial need, opportunity on the second vertex, and rationalization on the final vertex (ACFE, 2019). Consequently, the theory indicates people who commit fraud in organizations are those who have once been trusted while recognizing such situations as pressure, opportunity, and rationalization. Those who engage in financial fraud do so because all these three conditions align.

The fraud triangle theory is applicable to this research due the fact that it helps us understand circumstances that make employees to engage in procurement fraud within an organization. This theory guided the researcher in interpreting the results of the analysis given that employees at KeRRA are expected to have different levels of opportunities to commit fraud as well as different degrees of financial difficulties and perceptions to fraud. Therefore, the theory guided two objectives of the current study, which are; why employees take bribes, kickbacks or any other favor in order to enable unjustified noncompetitive procurement, and why employees decided to engage in conflict of interest.

Resource Based Theory

The study bases its project success evaluation on Resource-Based Theory. Wernerfelt (1984) established that performance differences between firms stem from their dissimilar resource capabilities in the same industry. Managers can use internal resources to obtain competitive benefits by following this management philosophy.

According to Barney (2001), firm resources encompass any asset, including organizational capabilities alongside internal processes and firm features, together with organizational data and skills, as well as other elements that a firm uses to reach its efficiency targets. The theory serves as an important conceptual framework for forecasting the performance behaviors of firms toward each other in competition (Utami & Alamanos, 2023). Organization managers should unite internal assets and capabilities to produce competencies through customer-focused value enhancement.
The research becomes stronger because this theory presents evidence showing that project outcomes depend on effective activities organizations perform with their resources, including procedure development. The execusion of procurement process functions is as a resource that may shape project results based on its execution methods. The current research investigation explored the foundation on which perceptions of procurement fraud relate to project success metrics.

Empirical Review

The observed research on procurement corruption practices is examined in this section. Findings from studies relating to collusion among contractors, noncompetitive procurement bidding, and conflict of interest have been provided. A summary of critique of the studies is given pointing the knowledge gaps identified.

Procurement Corruption

Communal procurement in Italy became the subject of study for Ravenda et al. (2020), who analyzed Mafia control and its influence on procurement achievements. Research analysts evaluated 68,063 public work contracts that Italian municipalities issued through their award process from 2012 to 2017 for analysis. Statistical data showed Mafia crime organizations use collusion methods to disrupt public procurement outcomes. Research suggested multiple policies for addressing the problematic practices during public procurement. The research failed to evaluate how Mafia penetration in public procurement procedures affects the project accomplishment rates of Italian municipalities.

Adebayo et al. (2024) studied how forensic accounting contributes to stopping procurement fraud incidents within the public sector of Osun State, Nigeria. The researchers used survey research combined with questionnaires for data collection. The research used the white-collar crime theory together with the fraud diamond theory as its theoretical foundation. The research created a meaningful link that demonstrates how forensic accounting stands as a tool to prevent procurement fraud in public systems. Employing forensic accountants with proper qualifications stands as a recommended measure for both detection and prevention of public procurement corruption, according to the study. Project success and procurement fraud prevalence were not addressed in the research study.

Amoah and Steyn (2022) examined challenges faced by professionals in the construction sector while complying with their convention of conduct especially in preventing corruption practices in South Africa. Qualitative approach was employed in the study to collect empirical data from fifty-six (56) construction professionals. It established that various unethical issues face professionals in construction sector including inflation of tender prices, kickbacks, and bribes. It was noted that issues like greed, taking of corruption as a normal practice, inadequate knowledge about the code of conduct, and pressure from other players are impediments of compliance to the code of conduct and prevention of corrupt practices. However, the study left a gap since the effect of corruption practices by the contractors on project success as well as corruption practices by employees of procuring entity was not examined.

Panya and Moronge (2023) conducted a study on supporting backing and ethics in public procurement in Kenya. Descriptive research design was used relying on secondary data. It was established that the main rationale behind procurement bribery in Kenya is the porous legal system which is manipulated politically making it ineffective for the purpose of monitoring and grueling offenders constituting of the ruling-elite class. The study left a gap since the specific procurement corruption practices were not examined as well as their relationship with project success. Existing literature examined the presence of procurement corruption as well as its causes and recommends methods of mitigating.

Collusion among contractors

Rodríguez et al. (2022) executed a research project that tested computer-based learning models for detecting fraudulent collaboration between contractors across Brazil, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States. The research confirmed that machine learning achieves successful rates at detecting contractor collusion activities during procurement that intend to undermine fair market competition. Public procurement applications of machine learning to detect collusion practices remain poorly studied, according to the research findings. This study showed that contractor collusion was happening; nevertheless, the investigation could not prove its relationship to project achievements.

Villamil et al. (2024) studied communal procurement contracts given in Sweden from 2010 to 2015 to measure corporate network collusion risk. The researchers analyzed company ownership networks to discover managerial links between corporate relations and bidding actions. Higher rates of non-collusive bidding tend to exist whenever contractors have established ownership relationships, which suggests contractors work together in collusion. Ownership links between firms create greater conditions for joint bidding and bid contract wins. The research failed to evaluate the project accomplishment effect resulting from contractor collusion activities.

Legae and Adeyemi (2017) conducted a survey of common corruption practices in the Botswana building sector that used a literature review design and questionnaire administration for data collection. Bribery-based collusion between building contractors and purchasing entity staff constitutes the most common type of corruption in the assembly sector based on survey results. The research did not evaluate the connection between people's views about procurement corruption practices and project triumph rates.

A study by Kamoni et al. (2024) on Public Procurement Price Variance in Kenya noted that collusive bidding is one of the key drivers of overpricing in public tenders. Exploratory approach was adopted in the study where 336 public entities were sampled. The study focused on causes of overpricing in public procurement where collusion among contractors came out as a major factor. The study leaves a gap since other factors of project success including quality, time and satisfaction of key stakeholders were not considered.

Reviewed studies confirm existence of collusion among contractors during procurement process and its effect on prices. However, a gap is evident since studies on effect of the collusion among contractors on project success are limited. The present study aimed at examining relationship between perceptions of collusion among contractors and project success based on four key indicators namely quality, time, cost, and satisfaction of key stakeholders.

Unjustified Noncompetitive Procurement

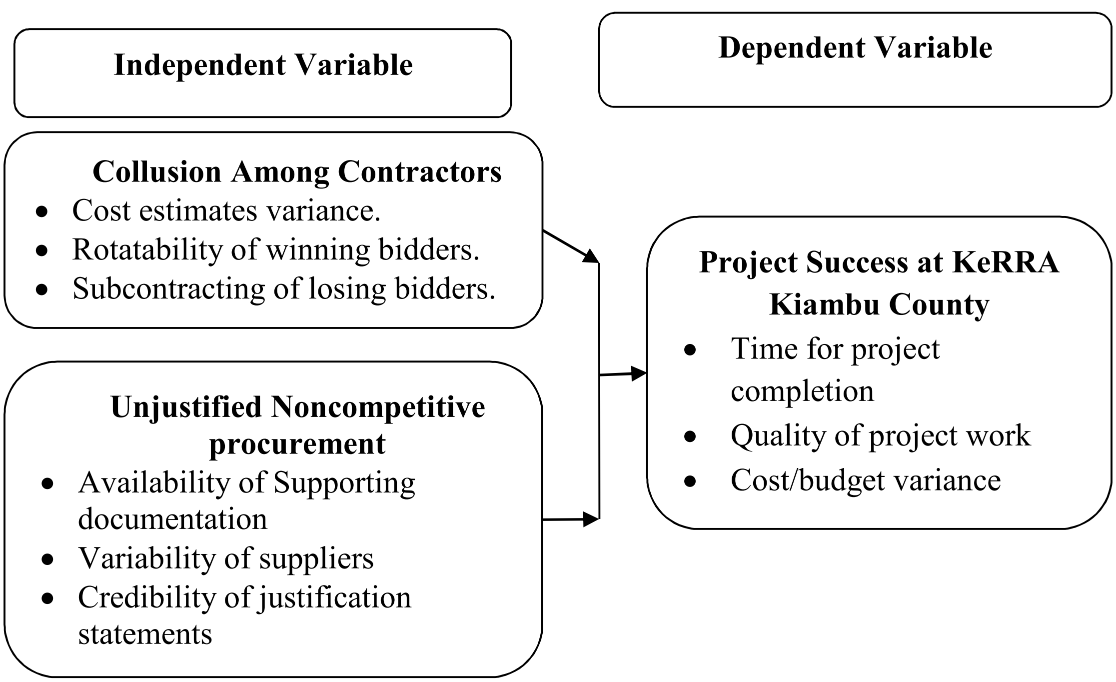
Khan et al. (2022) examined public procurement in Bangladesh, emphasizing the principal problems encountered in the procurement process for farming progress projects. The study engaged an exploratory research design. The survey identified 'lack of skilled procurement professionals' as the most major obstacle. Through the analysis of interrelated challenges, 'political influence' emerged as the preeminent obstacle likely to foster unreasonable, non-competitive bidding.

Effah et al. (2017) conducted a survey on corrupt behaviors within the construction sector in Ghana. The study determined that public officials and contractors display habitual corruption and unethical conduct at multiple phases of the procurement procedure in construction contracts. One of the primary catalysts of procurement corruption discovered was the excessive and imprudent noncompetitive procurement of governmental building projects. The study did not investigate the nexus between the views regarding procurement corruption and project success.

Gatari et al. (2022) evaluated different procurement procedures and their impact on the routine of state businesses in Kenya. The research was grounded in tendering theory and employed a descriptive research approach. The study indicated that in Kenya, the performance of state corporations is markedly affected by the type of procurement strategy employed. Additionally, it was observed that 38.8% of respondents failed to agree to the statement that the process for direct procurement is streamlined to ensure its effectiveness while 35.9% concurred. Thus, the study advised that the administration of state businesses adopt suitable procurement strategies to improve the corporations' sustainable routine.

The reviewed literature indicate that noncompetitive procurement method in the public sector is marred with unwarranted corruption. Most people believe that the current procurement procedures do not adequately address direct procurement needs. Research on the impact of dishonest noncompetitive procurement practices on project success is, however, scarce. The objective of the current research therefore was to examine the KeRRA Kiambu County case study to see whether there is a correlation between the perception of unreasonable noncompetitive procurement and the success of road projects.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research was employed to describe the visible characteristics of both procurement corruption practices and project success outcomes. Shanija (2024) indicates that descriptive research design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect various research data from the same study. Both approaches' strengths will be optimized through this research design approach, which minimizes their respective weaknesses.

This study focused on 23 officials from Kiambu County's Roads, Transport, and Public Works department, 60 elected Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) from Kiambu, and 30 employees of Kiambu Pamoja Trust. The study involved officials from the Roads, Transport, and Public Works department due to their role in the planning, design, and oversight of rural roads in the county. Members of County Assemblies (MCAs) were regarded for their function as intermediaries between the county assembly and the electorate about public service delivery, hence anticipated to comprehend the efficacy of Kenya Rural Roads Authority (KeRRA) projects inside the county. The Kiambu Pamoja Trust is an entity established by civil society and corporate sector organisations to advocate for the residents of Kiambu. The study is deemed relevant, as one of its primary focus areas is addressing inadequate leadership and governance; hence, it was anticipated that the employees of Pamoja Trust possess a comprehensive awareness of corruption practices throughout numerous sectors within the county. This study utilised a census technique due to the small size of the target group, allowing for direct outreach.

Following organization, the collected data was examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, which produced narrative-style results using direct quotes. Descriptive analysis was performed on the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were displayed using pie charts and bar graphs.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

One hundred and thirteen was the total number of questionnaires issued to respondents. Out of these, eighty-eight were duly completed and found suitable for the study. This represented 78% response rate which is appropriate as stated by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) that response rate of more than 50% is suitable.

Demogrphic analysis indicated that majority of respondents (51.1%) were between ages of 31 and 40 years. It also shows that 65% were male and that all respondents had postsecondary education as their top highest education level attained. Consequently, they were able to read and understand the questions on the questionnaires, respond appropriately and give their appropriate perceptions on procurement corruption practices at KERRA Kiambu County. The results also reveal that most respondents (65.9%) had worked in Kiambu County for more than five years while 34.1% had worked in the county between 1 and 5 years. Thus, the respondents demonstrated a good understanding of challenges facing projects undertaken by KeRRA in Kiambu County.

Perceptions of Collusion among contractors of KeRRA in Kiambu County

The study's first objective was to determine relationship between perceptions of collusion among contractors and project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County. In general, the highest number of respondents (55.7%) indicated that prevalence of collusion among contractors during procurement process at KeRRA in Kiambu County was either high or very high**.** Further, the variable was described using cost estimate variance, rotatability of winning bidders, and subcontracting of losing bidders as indicators. Responses to these indicators were rated on a five-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree and it was examined on the basis of mean and standard deviation. The more respondents agreed with the statement the more the scale of the indicator was to 5. A rating under 2.5 signifies disagreement, while a rating above 2.5 signifies agreement concerning the variable. Table 4.3 presents the findings.

Table 1: Collusion among contractors of KeRRA in Kiambu County

Statement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Mean	S.Dev
Collusion among contractors lead to high winning bid prices compared to cost estimates (Expensive projects).	54.5	43.2	2.3	0	0	4.52	0.546
Collusion among contractors at KeRRA Kiambu County can be revealed through winning of tenders by contractors on a rotational basis.	14.8	40.9	25.0	19.3	0	3.51	0.971
Collusion among contractors of KeRRA in Kiambu County involves agreement of losing bidders being hired by bid winners as subcontractors.	61.4	37.5	1.1	0	0	4.60	0.515
Aggregate						**4.21**	**0.677**

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results in table 1. indicate that collusion among contractors lead to high winning bid prices compared to cost estimates which expressly results to expensive road projects undertaken by KeRRA. This is shown by the majority of the respondents who agreed (mean = 4.52). Most of the respondents agreed that collusion among contractors at KeRRA in Kiambu County could be revealed through winning of tenders by contractors on a rotational basis (mean = 3.51). Losing bidders are subcontracted by winning bidders as revealed by majority of the respondents (mean = 4.60).

Robbins & Coulter (2018) noted that a Likert scale mean score above the midpoint indicates overall agreement of the item being measured. Further, Muijis (2011) emphasizes that low standard deviations of less than 1.0 indicate that responses are clustered near the mean implying consistency in responses. Therefore, the overall mean of 4.21 and standard deviation of 0.667 implies that most of the respondents agreed to most of the statements on collusion among contractors of KeRRA in Kiambu County. The mean is high and it suggests that the respondents perceive collusion as really significant issue among KERRA contractors which could be a reflection of actual weaknesses in competitive tendering and contract monitoring

Perceptions of unjustified noncompetitive procurement at KeRRA in Kiambu County

The second objective of the study was to examine relationship between perceptions of unjustified noncompetitive procurement and project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County. The respondents largely opined that the prevalence of unjustified noncompetitive procurement at KeRRA either high or very high (81.8%). The responses on the on prevalence of unjustified noncompetitive procurement at KeRRA in Kiambu County.

Further, the variable was described in terms of availability of supporting documents to support direct procurement, variability of contractors and credibility of statements given to justify noncompetitive procurement. A five-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree was employed to rate responses to this variable and the results were analysed based on mean and standard deviation. The higher the level of concurrence with the statement, the nearer the mean was to 5. A score below 2.5 would reflect disagreement with the statement while a score markedly above 2.5 would reflect uncertainty of the statement posed. Below is table 2 showing the results.

Table 2: Perceptions of unjustified noncompetitive procurement at KeRRA in Kiambu County

Statement	SA %	A %	N %	D %	SD %	Mean	S.Dev
There is lack of adequate documentation to support noncompetitive awards for the projects of KeRRA in Kiambu County.	63.7	23.3	9.2	2.1	1.7	4.01	0.321
There is high number of sole-source awards to some specific suppliers at KeRRA in Kiambu County.	21.1	34.4	13.9	20.5	10.1	3.21	1.043
False statements are sometimes made to justify noncompetitive procurement method at KeRRA in Kiambu County.	55.0	25.0	20.0	0	0	4.67	0.412
Aggregate						**3.96**	**0.592**

Source: Field Data (2025)

According to table 2 most of the respondents observed that there is lack of adequate documentation to support noncompetitive award for the projects of KeRRA in Kiambu County (mean = 4.01). Further, bulk of respondents supported the view that there is high number of sole-source awards to some specific suppliers at KeRRA in Kiambu County (mean = 3.21). The strongest indicator of unjustified noncompetitive procurement at KeRRA county was use of false statements to justify the method (mean = 4.67).

Sekaran & Bougie (2016) argued that when most respondents select the upper points of a Likert scale, the construct being measured is perceived strongly. The overal mean of 3.96 indicating that most of the respondents selected upper points on the Likert scale. The prevalence of perceptions of non-competitive practices is an indicator of weak transparency and accountability mechanisms as revealed in the study by Ameyaw, Mensah and Osei-Tutu (2012) who examined public procurement in developing contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Procurement corruption practices consisting of collusion among contractors, unjustified noncompetitive procurement, and conflict of interest are highly prevalent at KeRRA in Kiambu County. Collusion among contractors was clearly indicated by agreement of respondents that there was inflated bid prices, tender awards to contractors in rotational manner, and subcontracting arrangements among losing and winning bidders. These practices have significantly contributed to higher project costs and reduced transparency in the procurement process, ultimately affecting the efficiency and fruitfulness of road projects.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that unjustified noncompetitive procurement is a common occurrence, often resulting from inadequate documentation and false justifications for direct tender awards. Such practices lead to use of the method even when competitive methods of procurement could be used thus tender is likely to be awarded to less qualified entity. Consequently, this is likely to negatively affect project outcomes.

Overall, the study established that these procurement corruption practices have a detrimental effect on project success at KeRRA in Kiambu County. They lead to project delays, inflated costs, substandard quality, and low stakeholder satisfaction. The results underscore the urgent need for reforms in procurement governance, including strengthening legal framework, adoption of transparent e-procurement systems, promotion of ethical conduct through training and awareness programs, Strict enforcement of penalties for corruption practices, and enhancement of whistle blower protection. These measures are expected to assist in reducing procurement corruption practices thus enhancing road.

The study provides concrete, context-specific evidence that procurement corruption practices particularly collusion among contractors, unjustified noncompetitive procurement, and conflict of interest are highly prevalent within KeRRA operations in Kiambu County. Many studies discuss corruption broadly at national level and do not focus on its effect on project success; this research fills a gap by documenting how these practices manifest in a county-level implementing agency responsible for road development as well as establishing a link between procurement corruption practices and poor project outcomes. Additionally, by proposing targeted reforms such as strengthened legal frameworks, adoption of transparent e-procurement systems, ethics training, strict enforcement of penalties, and enhanced whistle-blower protection, the study offers actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners while providing a baseline for future research on improving procurement integrity and road project performance.

Recommendations

To minimize collusion among contractors, KeRRA may strengthen market competition safeguards by adopting fully transparent electronic tendering systems, publishing detailed bid information, and enforcing strict anti-collusion clauses in procurement contracts. Independent bid evaluation panels and random external audits should be instituted to detect patterns such as rotational awards and subcontracting among competitors. Additionally, collaboration with anti-corruption agencies and competition authorities to investigate suspicious bidding patterns, coupled with blacklisting and legal penalties for offending firms, would deter future collusion and promote fair pricing.

To address the widespread use of unjustified direct procurement, KeRRA should enforce strict compliance with procurement regulations by requiring comprehensive documentation, prior approvals, and independent review before any noncompetitive method is used. Clear thresholds and justification criteria should be standardized, while all sole-source procurements should undergo post-award audits and public disclosure to enhance accountability. Capacity building for procurement staff on lawful procurement methods, alongside automation of approval workflows through e-procurement platforms, would reduce discretionary abuse and ensure that competitive methods are applied wherever feasible.

Finally, given the high prevalence of conflict of interest, KeRRA should implement strict policies and enforcement measures to manage and prevent conflicts of interest among employees and contractors. All staff involved in procurement should be required to declare potential conflicts, with failure to comply attracting disciplinary and legal action. KeRRA should also develop a comprehensive ethics and compliance framework that includes continuous training on professional integrity, fair competition, and procurement best practices. This will not only enhance staff competence but also cultivate a culture of transparency and accountability within the organization.

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