



CLEAN CONTRACTING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A collective reform agenda to tackle corruption and weak governance in public procurement

The world's ability to tackle global challenges is being stretched to its limits. Overlapping climate, security, political, social and economic crises have seen a progressive worsening of the international community's capacity to mobilise resources for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The [shortfall is now estimated to be US\\$4 trillion annually](#), reflecting both insufficient public and private investment, and the inability of many countries to access affordable financing. As the gap between needs and available resources widens, it is vital to ensure that public spending delivers maximum value.

Public procurement – the government's purchase of goods, works and services – is key to that effort. Governments worldwide spend [approximately US\\$13 trillion annually](#) in public contracts, representing around [13 per cent of GDP and a third of government expenditure](#) in many countries. Due to its central role in budget execution, public procurement is critical for [impact on all the SDGs and related indicators](#), and citizens' quality of life, as it underpins the implementation of public policies, the development of infrastructure, and the delivery of essential public services such as education and health care.

Yet public procurement is also one of the areas of government operations most at risk of corruption – often going hand in hand with weak governance – due to its complexity, the massive amount of money involved, and the close interaction between public and private actors. This has [devastating consequences for sustainable development](#), as it leads to sub-standard public services, failing infrastructure, environmental degradation and the violation of human rights. It also erodes public trust within and between countries, discouraging private investment and undermining multilateral cooperation. As such, it should be tackled as a matter of priority.

The clean contracting framework

In December 2023, the 10th Conference of States Parties (CoSP) to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) adopted its [first resolution on public procurement](#), providing a broad agenda for country reforms. This calls on governments to provide standardised and machine-readable data on public contracts; strengthen risk management, including through digital tools; enable adequate resourcing and cooperation among oversight institutions; foster public participation and civic monitoring, and support business integrity efforts – a commitment further underscored by another [dedicated resolution](#).

The need for anti-corruption action has also been emphasised in the context of development finance. The [2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), which outlines the international architecture to finance sustainable development, considers measures to curb corruption as central to enabling the effective, efficient and transparent mobilisation and use of resources. In line with this, the [outcome document](#) of the 4th Financing for Development Conference, also known as the Sevilla Commitment, emphasises the need for investment in transparent, data-driven public procurement systems as part of a whole-of-government approach to promote accountability in public financial management.

To live up to these commitments, reform-minded governments, with the support of development partners, should work towards a whole-of-society approach to tackling corruption in public procurement, creating an enabling environment for all stakeholders to play their role in ensuring effective spending outcomes. Accordingly, a clean contracting framework combines the [Open Contracting principles](#) of transparency and accountability with measures to foster a culture of integrity, inclusiveness and sustainability among public contracting authorities and suppliers. Such a framework rests on five pillars, outlined below.

1. Open, interoperable and actionable public procurement data

As a foundation for good governance in public procurement, governments should mandate the disclosure of data across the whole public procurement process in an open, machine-readable and structured format. Data should be published in a user-friendly manner, ideally through centralised portals featuring interactive dashboards and visualisations that allow tracking and monitoring of SDG-related public contracts. To harness the potential of data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI), governments should also invest in solutions for the interoperability or compatibility of public procurement data with information on beneficial ownership, political finance, interests and assets, and other relevant anti-corruption areas, as well as information on environmental and social impact, where applicable.

2. Collaborative accountability ecosystems for effective oversight

To effectively detect and investigate corruption, governments should complement transparency and digitisation reforms with measures to create or strengthen accountability ecosystems. This means providing oversight institutions – including supreme audit institutions and anti-corruption

agencies – and civil society with the legal mandate and resources to monitor public contracts and act on identified irregularities, both individually and in collaboration. Governments should also take measures to embed opportunities for participation of affected communities in oversight processes, and to establish accessible, inclusive and ideally tech-driven grievance redress mechanisms in high-impact public investment projects and contracts, including tools and measures to protect whistleblowers.

3. A strong integrity framework for public procurement officials

While oversight mechanisms are essential for detecting and sanctioning misconduct, they are most effective when operating within a public sector that values integrity. This involves establishing codes of conduct with clear guidance on the management and reporting of conflicts of interest, and on the disclosure of private interests and assets for public procurement officials and top-level decision makers. Governments should foster the implementation of robust internal control systems, including corruption risk management strategies and processes, among public entities such as line ministries in charge of spending large portions of the budget, and build the integrity capacity of the workforce through training programmes and certification.

4. Incentives for business openness and integrity among suppliers

A culture of openness, integrity and fair competition among suppliers is essential to ensure effective public procurement outcomes and foster citizen trust in the private sector. Governments should set a high bar for anti-corruption compliance, disclosure and reporting for firms wishing to bid for public contracts, and provide incentives, such as preferential treatment in contract awards and penalty mitigations, to suppliers with outstanding integrity practices. Such incentives should be backed by robust mechanisms to assess corporate anti-corruption programmes and integrity disclosures – ideally agreed on through inclusive public-private dialogues.

5. Multi-stakeholder collective action to drive change

While necessary, traditional measures on transparency, accountability and integrity might still not be sufficient to improve public procurement outcomes in contexts of weak governance, systemic corruption and lack of public trust. To overcome these obstacles, governments, with the support of development partners, should adopt a multi-stakeholder collective action approach, leveraging the joint efforts of public authorities, suppliers and civic actors. For example, as a collective action public agreement formalising public and business integrity commitments alongside civil society monitoring, the Integrity Pact is a policy tool that enables governments to safeguard high-value public contracts, while at the same time driving reforms.

A joint action plan

While the clean contracting pillars provide a blueprint for ambitious public procurement reforms, they are not meant to be a precise recipe. Rather, they map the key areas that governments and development partners, in collaboration with the private sector and civil society, can leverage to improve public procurement outcomes. Every country has unique conditions in terms of corruption risks and the political economy of reforms, and the prioritisation of specific solutions will ultimately depend on the local context, opportunities and needs.

To support governments and development partners in the effort to confront these ever-growing complexities, Transparency International and its Chapters¹, the Open Contracting Partnership, the Basel Institute on Governance, the United Nations Global Compact Secretariat, the Government Transparency Institute and Monition Europe are committed to leveraging their multi-country networks and expertise in coordinated actions to:

- Provide guidance and technical assistance on implementation of the [Open Contracting Data Standard](#) and the development of solutions for the tagging and tracking of sustainable development-related public contracts and investment projects.
- Develop and pilot innovative data-driven tools and AI-powered algorithms to identify corruption risks in SDG-related public contracts, based on solid and reliable indicators.
- Promote institutional cooperation and intelligence-sharing among supreme audit institutions, anti-corruption agencies, parliaments and other relevant oversight bodies to strengthen accountability in public procurement operations, including in collaboration with civil society and citizens.
- Empower local civil society organisations, civic groups and affected communities through training, tools and resources to meaningfully engage in the design and implementation of public procurement reforms, and in the monitoring of public contracts that are critical for sustainable development.
- Provide public entities in charge of spending large portions of public financial resources or aid flows with tailored technical assistance to strengthen internal controls, build integrity frameworks and enhance risk management in public procurement processes.
- Support and facilitate dialogues and partnerships between governments and suppliers to create reforms and incentives that foster corporate transparency, ethical conduct and inclusiveness in sustainable development-related public procurement markets and sectors.

¹ Transparency International Chapters participating in the initiative (as of July 2025): [Transparency International Argentina](#); [Transparency International Brazil](#); [Transparency International Bulgaria](#); [Transparency International Colombia](#); [Transparency International Germany](#); [Transparency International Hungary](#); [Transparency International Italy](#); [Transparency International Kenya](#); [Transparency International Kosovo](#); [Transparency International Mexico](#); [Transparency International Romania](#); [Transparency International Spain](#); [Transparency International Global Health](#).

- Support suppliers with practical guidance and resources to assess and enhance their corporate integrity disclosures and anti-corruption compliance programmes, including leadership commitment to integrity principles; risk-based operational guidelines, employee training and secure whistleblowing mechanisms.
- Facilitate the implementation and scaling up of multi-stakeholder collective action initiatives, such as [Integrity Pacts](#) and the [High-Level Reporting Mechanism](#), to prevent corruption and foster good governance in high-value, high-risk public investment programmes and contracts.