

REGIONAL ADVOCACY WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH SECTORS IN BENIN, GHANA, AND SIERRA LEONE

Grand-Popo, Benin. 8 November 2023

COMMUNIQUE

ON IMPROVING THE INTEGRITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN WEST AFRICA

Public procurement is a fundamental pillar of strategic governance and service delivery for governments. Making public procurement systems more efficient, cost-effective and transparent is a constant preoccupation of governments and the international development community.

Several institutions are working to strengthen the integrity, transparency and credibility of public procurement in West Africa.

RECOGNISING the commitment of the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC) to ensuring transparency and accountability, with particular emphasis on financial matters.

RECOGNISING recent developments such as the Final Communiqué of the 2022 Biennial General Assembly, which, inter alia:

- (i) affirms that policies of accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs promote good governance and thus contribute to the eradication of corruption.
- (ii) reaffirms the need for parliaments to play an active role in the fight against corruption and to collaborate with national and international financial institutions and civil society organisations that share the same objectives.
- (iii) undertakes to work to identify gaps in the [African] financial architecture.

RECOGNISING the efforts made by the governments of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public procurement.

RECOGNISING the concrete evidence of various public procurement reforms in West African countries in recent years.

CONSIDERING Articles 5 paragraph (a) and 5 paragraph (b) of the ECOWAS Protocol on the fight against corruption which requires each State Member to take measures to establish and consolidate:

- a) national laws, ethical guidelines, regulations and codes of conduct that eliminate conflicts of interest, emphasise merit-based recruitment methods and include comprehensive measures to ensure reasonable living standards, and

- b) transparency and efficiency in the acquisition and disposal of goods, works and services and in the recruitment of staff in the public service.

RECOGNISING the World Bank's efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public procurement.

RECOGNISING initiatives such as the Global Public Procurement Database (GPPD) and resources such as "A Global Partnership in Procurement for Sustainable Development".

CONSIDERING the numerous procurement reforms undertaken in partnership with West African countries, including electronic procurement systems.

WE, the civil society organisations working in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Benin, are making a plea to the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC), the governments of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the World Bank.

OUR advocacy is based on our collective experience of a procurement intervention in the above countries, known as "Uniting constituencies to fight corruption in education and health in West Africa", funded by the Open Society Initiative in West Africa (OSIWA).

HAVING taken note of the challenges, achievements and lessons learned in implementing our joint project and recognising that:

Corruption and inefficient public procurement are widespread in West Africa and cost the citizens of the sub-region considerable sums that could have been spent on providing much-needed public goods and efficient services.

Although there are many risks of corruption in public procurement in West Africa, the rigged participation of aligned business owners and public office holders in public procurement is a major cause of the cost inflation, procurement inefficiency and corruption that characterise public procurement in the sub-region.

WE formulate in a general manner, the following pleas to the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the World Bank:

1. The introduction of functional regimes for beneficial ownership and declaration of conflict of interest would go a long way to reducing corruption and inefficiency in public procurement.
2. The introduction of accessible beneficial ownership regimes as part of the public procurement process will remove the corporate face and reveal their natural owners, allowing conflicts of interest in public procurement to be identified.
3. The declaration of conflicts of interest by officials involved in the evaluation of bids should be made compulsory. These officials should declare any conflicts in writing, and false declarations should be equivalent to perjury in court.

And specifically,

To the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC):

Advocacy to get parliaments across Africa to pass laws on beneficial ownership and to adopt regulations making conflicts of interest declaration, compulsory during the public procurement process could be a powerful element in efforts to reduce corruption in public sector procurement.

To the governments of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):

States should consider the use of e-procurement to reap the benefits inherent in limiting human interaction in the procurement process, including reducing corruption.

To the World Bank:

The World Bank's advocacy of public procurement reforms to governments to include registers of beneficial ownership and mandatory declarations of conflicts of interest as part of public procurement reform.

signed

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