

LETTER OF THE DAY

Technology is no longer optional

Across the globe, technology is transforming every aspect of business, and procurement is no exception. From manual paperwork and face-to-face negotiations to digital platforms and real-time monitoring, the evolution has proven to reduce corruption, increase efficiency, and improve accountability. Uganda, with its growing economy and increasing public expenditure, cannot afford to be left behind.

Traditional procurement systems rely heavily on human intervention, paper documents, and manual approvals. While these methods have worked for decades, they are slow, error-prone, and susceptible to manipulation.

Tender documents can be altered, evaluation committees compromised, and approvals delayed for personal gain. In such an environment, transparency is fragile, and public trust suffers.

The shift to e-procurement has proven to be a game-changer. Online platforms allow tenders to be posted publicly, bids submitted electronically, and evaluations conducted transparently.

Every action is recorded digitally, creating a permanent audit trail that reduces the opportunities for face-to-face interference or favouritism. For example, a supplier submitting a bid no longer has to navigate personal networks or pay facilitation fees to secure a contract. Digital platforms automatically enforce deadlines, standardise evaluation criteria, and provide decision-makers with tools to compare bids objectively. This not only increases fairness but also restores confidence among honest suppliers and the public.

Automation is another major advantage. Approvals can now be tracked in real time, invoices processed without manual



bottlenecks, and supplier payments monitored efficiently. Organisations save time, reduce administrative costs, and minimise the risk of delays that previously stalled projects. In an era where time is money, faster procurement cycles translate into faster delivery of goods and services. Moreover, digital systems allow for improved coordination between departments. Procurement, finance, and operations can access the same information simultaneously, reducing duplication of effort and preventing miscommunication that can lead to errors or misuse of resources.

Beyond efficiency, digital procurement provides organisations with powerful insights. Advanced data analytics enables the tracking of spending patterns, identification of procurement risks, and accurate forecasting of demand. By analysing historical data, organisations can negotiate better contracts, optimise supplier selection, and reduce unnecessary expenditure. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now being applied to flag suspicious transactions, detect anomalies, and predict potential fraud before it happens. Predictive analytics allows procurement managers to

make informed, proactive decisions rather than reacting to crises after losses have occurred.

Transitioning to digital procurement does require investment in software, training, and infrastructure. However, the returns far outweigh the costs. Beyond measurable savings in time and money, digital procurement rebuilds trust. Taxpayers, donors, and stakeholders gain assurance that resources are being used transparently, fairly, and efficiently. When procurement becomes predictable, auditable, and data-driven, the culture of secrecy and shortcuts that has historically undermined organisations begins to shift. Integrity becomes embedded in the system itself rather than relying solely on individual ethics.

In the 21st Century, technology is no longer optional — it is a strategic necessity. For procurement, it serves as both a tool and a guardian of integrity. It minimises human error, prevents manipulation, and enforces transparency at every stage of the supply chain.

For Uganda, embracing digital procurement is not merely a modernisation exercise; it is a national imperative. By investing in e-procurement, automation, and data analytics, the country can reduce waste, prevent corruption, and ensure that public and private resources deliver maximum value. Ultimately, technology may provide the healthiest cure for procurement's long-standing challenges: restoring trust, efficiency, and accountability in a system critical to national development.

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