

Barriers to Anti-Corruption and Transparency Units' Communication In Promoting Transparent Procurement Practices in Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

Effective anti-corruption communication is an important component of transparency, accountability and ethical governance. However, communication alone is unlikely to produce sustainable procurement reform where institutional controls, information systems and enforcement mechanisms are weak. This study examines barriers that hinder Anti-Corruption and Transparency Units (ACTUs) from communicating effectively to promote transparent procurement practices in Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in Abuja, Nigeria. It adopts a qualitative scoping-review design guided by the Joanna Briggs Institute framework and reported in accordance with the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews. Searches covered Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, African Journals Online and relevant official repositories, with emphasis on traceable empirical and institutional sources published from 2020 to April 2026. Fourteen core evidence sources met the final inclusion criteria, while legislation, methodological texts, and foundational theoretical works served as contextual sources. The analytical framework integrates Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Principal-Agent Theory and Institutional Theory. Findings show that barriers cluster around three interrelated domains: structural and technological constraints affecting procurement information, digital systems and disclosure; organisational and institutional constraints affecting ACTU capacity, reporting channels, leadership support and oversight; and behavioural and political-economy constraints involving incentives for non-compliance, fear of retaliation, patronage pressures and weak accountability. The review further shows that awareness is necessary but insufficient: communication produces stronger transparency outcomes when linked to accessible procurement information, credible monitoring, e-procurement, organisational support and enforceable accountability. The study concludes that ACTU communication should be embedded in the wider procurement-governance architecture rather than treated as a stand-alone sensitisation activity. It recommends strengthening ACTU reporting capacity, sustaining procurement information publication, expanding end-to-end e-procurement, improving internal reporting protections, leadership-backed behaviour-change communication, and systematically monitoring communication outcomes.

Keywords: anti-corruption communication, Anti-Corruption and Transparency Units, procurement governance, procurement transparency, sustainable procurement practices

Introduction

Public procurement is a central component of public financial management because it determines how governments obtain goods, works and services required for service delivery. Across jurisdictions, procurement represents a substantial share of public expenditure and is therefore closely linked to fiscal efficiency, public trust and the quality of development outcomes (OECD, 2024). Procurement governance is also directly relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasises effective, accountable and transparent institutions (United Nations, 2023). When procurement systems are transparent, competitive, and reviewable, public institutions are better positioned to reduce opportunities for collusion, favouritism, contract inflation, and other forms of misuse.

In Nigeria, the Public Procurement Act 2007 provides the principal federal statutory framework for competitive procurement, accountability, value for money and regulatory oversight. The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) is responsible for policy harmonisation, procurement monitoring, certification within applicable thresholds, procurement audits, and maintaining procurement information systems (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007; BPP, 2023). The Nigeria Open Contracting Portal (NOCOPO) and continuing e-government procurement reforms further demonstrate the increasing role of disclosure and digital systems in procurement transparency.

The anti-corruption architecture within federal institutions also includes Anti-Corruption and Transparency Units (ACTUs), established under the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). ACTUs serve as internal prevention and ethics mechanisms. Their functions include sensitisation, promoting integrity, monitoring compliance, providing reporting channels, and supporting institutional corruption-prevention measures (ICPC, 2023, 2024). These functions make communication central to ACTU effectiveness: procurement rules, ethical standards, reporting procedures, and consequences of misconduct must be communicated in ways that are credible, understandable, and connected to institutional action.

Communication, however, is not synonymous with compliance. Evidence from anti-corruption and governance scholarship indicates that awareness can improve knowledge and stimulate discussion without necessarily changing behaviour where incentives, organisational routines and enforcement practices continue to reward non-compliance (Eke et al., 2025; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Procurement officers may know the applicable rules yet face pressure from superiors, informal networks or organisational cultures that weaken the practical effect of anti-corruption messages. Communication may therefore be necessary for reform but insufficient as a stand-alone intervention.

This study addresses the persistence of procurement-related integrity challenges despite procurement legislation, oversight institutions, ACTUs, and recurring sensitisation activities. The 2024 ICPC Ethics and Integrity Compliance Scorecard, which assessed 330 MDAs, demonstrates uneven institutional compliance and continuing weaknesses in structures that support prevention and accountability (ICPC, 2024). At the same time, recent empirical studies show that transparency, access to procurement information, digital procurement, institutional quality and communication clarity affect procurement outcomes in Nigeria (Aduwo et al., 2020; Khorana et al., 2024; Mbang & Ibiang, 2026; Tyoakosu et al., 2026).

Although corruption and procurement governance in Nigeria have been widely discussed, fewer studies bring together the communication, organisational and procurement-governance dimensions of ACTU effectiveness. Synthesising recent evidence on the structural, organisational, and behavioural conditions that enable or constrain anti-corruption communication in federal MDAs is therefore valuable. Such a synthesis can clarify why sensitisation sometimes fails to translate into transparent procurement practice and can identify institutional conditions under which communication is more likely to influence behaviour.

Against this background, the study conducts a structured qualitative scoping review of contemporary empirical and institutional evidence. It focuses on the barriers affecting ACTU-related anti-corruption communication and the adoption of transparent procurement practices in federal MDAs, with Abuja as the institutional setting of interest. The study contributes by integrating communication, public procurement and institutional-governance perspectives within a single analytical framework and by linking the resulting evidence to practical reform options.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective is to examine the barriers that constrain ACTUs' communication in promoting transparent procurement practices in federal MDAs in Abuja. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. identify structural and technological barriers affecting the communication and disclosure of procurement information;
- ii. examine organisational and institutional barriers affecting ACTU capacity, reporting arrangements and leadership support;
- iii. assess behavioural and political-economy barriers that weaken the translation of anti-corruption awareness into transparent procurement behaviour;
- iv. explain the interaction between communication, incentives, institutional arrangements and adoption of transparency mechanisms; and
- v. derive evidence-based recommendations for strengthening ACTU communication and procurement transparency in federal MDAs.

Conceptual Review

Public Sector Procurement Governance and Transparency

Public-sector procurement governance refers to the legal rules, policies, procedures, institutions, information systems and oversight mechanisms through which public organisations plan, tender, award, manage and report contracts. Good procurement governance requires more than procedural compliance. It also requires clear responsibility, fair competition, traceable decision-making, accurate documentation, timely disclosure, effective review and credible sanctions for misconduct (Igwe et al., 2021; Khorana et al., 2024).

Procurement transparency refers to the availability, accessibility and intelligibility of information across the procurement cycle. Relevant information includes procurement plans, notices, solicitation documents, bid and award information, contract implementation data and oversight findings, subject to legitimate legal limitations. The Public Procurement Act 2007 provides the statutory basis for competitive and accountable procurement at the federal level, while BPP disclosure systems and NOCOPO provide institutional mechanisms for making procurement information more accessible (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007; BPP, 2020).

Digital procurement can reduce unnecessary face-to-face interaction, strengthen audit trails and make procurement records easier to review. Nigerian evidence from construction procurement suggests that e-procurement has anti-corruption capabilities through improved record-keeping, transparent bidding and reduced direct contact, while cross-country evidence indicates that the transparency effects of e-government procurement depend heavily on institutional quality and infrastructure (Aduwo et al., 2020; Khorana et al., 2024). Digitalisation is therefore best understood as an enabling mechanism rather than an automatic guarantee of integrity.

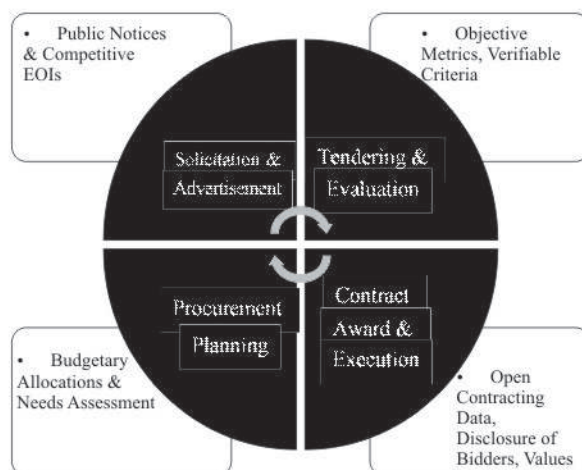


Figure 1: The Public Procurement Transparency Cycle based on statutory provisions of the Public Procurement Act (2007)

Source: Authors' compilation (2026).

Anti-Corruption and Transparency Units (ACTUs)

ACTUs are internal anti-corruption structures in MDAs that operate under ICPC guidance. Their preventive role places them at the intersection of ethics management, internal reporting, integrity education, monitoring and institutional reform. In practice, their effectiveness depends on whether they are properly constituted, supported by management, resourced, integrated into institutional processes and able to receive and escalate information through credible channels (ICPC, 2023, 2024).

Communication is therefore not a peripheral ACTU activity. It translates rules and institutional expectations into understandable guidance, communicates risk and sanctions, encourages reporting, and feeds information back into organisational improvement. Where the unit lacks access to management, reporting platforms or operational support, communication may become symbolic: messages are disseminated without a corresponding capacity to act on the information generated.

Anti-Corruption Communication and Transparent Procurement

Anti-corruption communication can be understood as the planned use of information, persuasion, participation and feedback to promote knowledge of integrity standards, influence risk perceptions, strengthen ethical norms and support compliance with anti-corruption rules. It includes formal circulars and guidelines, ethics sensitisation, training, internal reporting messages, leadership communication, media engagement and digital information systems. Eke et al. (2025) show that communication can raise awareness and stimulate public discussion around corruption, while procurement studies demonstrate that access to information and openness in decision-making are associated with more transparent procurement processes (Tyoakosu et al., 2026).

The central limitation is that awareness does not automatically remove the incentives that sustain corrupt behaviour. Communication may inform an officer that a practice is prohibited. However, its behavioural effect will be weak if misconduct is rewarded, reporting is unsafe, sanctions are inconsistent or senior officials undermine the same rules being communicated. Effective anti-corruption communication must therefore be linked to systems of disclosure, monitoring, feedback and enforcement (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

For this study, transparent procurement practice is treated as an institutional outcome reflected in timely disclosure, competitive processes, traceable decisions, reduced discretionary opacity, accessible reporting, compliance with procurement rules and credible oversight. ACTU communication is examined as one influence on that outcome, not its sole cause.

Typology of Barriers to Anti-Corruption Communication

The reviewed literature supports a three-domain typology. Structural and technological barriers concern the systems through which information is created, stored, published and accessed. They include fragmented information systems, uneven digital infrastructure, weak interoperability, incomplete publication of procurement information and bureaucratic procedures that delay communication. These constraints can reduce the timeliness, reach and verifiability of anti-corruption messages.

Organisational and institutional barriers arise within individual MDAs and within the relationships between ACTUs, management and oversight institutions. They include weak management support, inadequate operational resources, limited reporting channels, poor feedback arrangements, insufficient integration of ACTUs into relevant compliance processes and a gap between formal anti-corruption structures and actual organisational routines. Institutional decoupling is particularly relevant where structures exist formally but do not influence operational decision-making (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Behavioural and political-economy barriers concern individual incentives, social norms and power relations. They include fear of retaliation, peer pressure, patronage networks, normalisation of non-compliance, selective enforcement, rent-seeking opportunities and resistance by actors who benefit from opacity. Such conditions create an awareness-compliance gap: officials may understand procurement rules but still perceive non-compliance as rational or unavoidable.

Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains how new ideas, practices and technologies spread through social systems (Rogers, 2003; Dearing & Cox, 2018). In the present study, transparent procurement practices, e-procurement tools and new reporting arrangements can be treated as innovations whose adoption depends on perceived usefulness, compatibility with existing routines, complexity, demonstrability and communication through credible channels. The theory helps explain why procurement officers may adopt or resist transparency tools even when the legal requirement is clear.

Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-Agent Theory focuses on delegation, information asymmetry, discretion and monitoring (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In public procurement, the principal-agent relationship is multi-layered: citizens delegate authority through political and administrative institutions; public authorities delegate procurement responsibilities to officials; and specialised oversight bodies monitor how that authority is exercised. Corruption risks increase where agents have significant discretion, information is hard to verify, and accountability is weak. Klitgaard's (1988) heuristic, $C = M + D - A$, captures the intuition that monopoly and discretion increase corruption risks while accountability constrains them. From this perspective, communication matters when it reduces information asymmetry, clarifies obligations, strengthens monitoring and makes consequences credible.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory explains how organisations respond to regulatory pressures, norms and expectations and why formal structures may become decoupled from day-to-day practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Federal MDAs may formally establish ACTUs, adopt ethics policies and display anti-corruption messages while informal routines continue to privilege hierarchy, patronage or opaque decision-making. The theory therefore helps explain why formal communication structures do not guarantee institutionalised transparency.

Integrated Analytical Framework

The three theories are complementary. Principal-Agent Theory explains incentives and information asymmetry; Institutional Theory explains the gap between formal structures and actual organisational

behaviour; and Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains adoption or resistance to new transparency practices and technologies. Together they suggest that anti-corruption communication will have greater impact where messages are credible, transparency tools are usable, organisational routines support compliance, information asymmetries are reduced, and monitoring and sanctions are sufficiently credible to alter incentives.

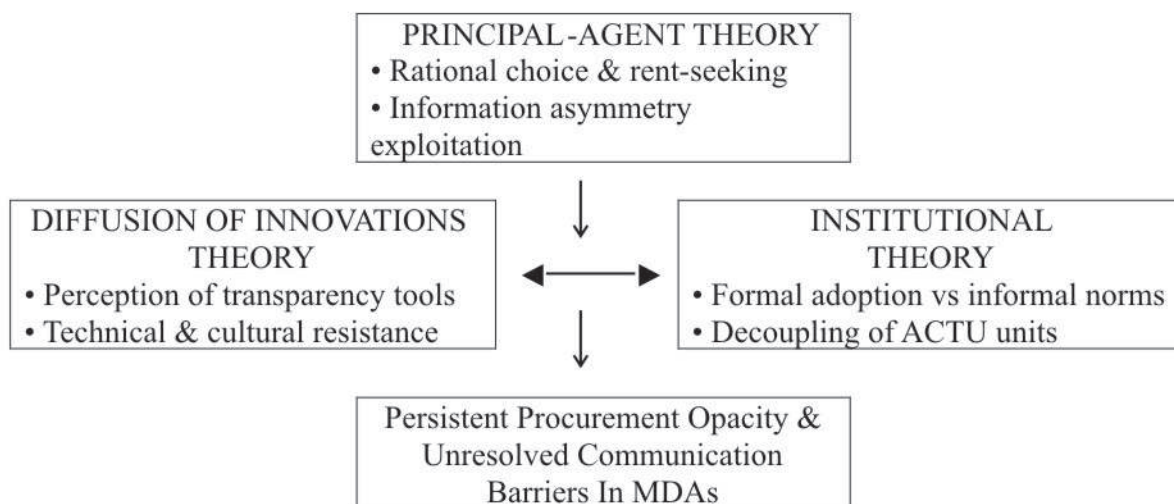


Figure 2: Integrated Theoretical Framework for Assessing Barriers to Effective Anti-Corruption Communication in Promoting Transparent Procurement Practices in MDAs

Source: Authors' compilation (2026).

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative scoping-review design. A scoping review was appropriate because the research question spans communication, anti-corruption practice, organisational capacity, and public procurement, and because the relevant evidence includes both peer-reviewed empirical studies and authoritative institutional documents. The review followed the Joanna Briggs Institute guidance for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020) and used PRISMA-ScR principles for transparent reporting of search and selection decisions (Tricco et al., 2018).

The review mapped recent evidence relevant to Nigerian federal MDAs rather than estimating a pooled causal effect. The principal review period was January 1, 2020 to April 30, 2026. We retained earlier sources only when they provided statutory, methodological, or foundational theoretical context and did not count them as part of the contemporary core evidence set.

Searches were conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and African Journals Online, supplemented by targeted searches of relevant Nigerian institutional repositories and official websites, especially those of the ICPC and BPP. Search concepts combined terms relating to anti-corruption communication, ACTUs, public procurement, transparency, accountability, e-procurement, federal MDAs and Nigeria. Representative Boolean combinations included: (“anti-corruption communication” OR “corruption communication” OR ACTU OR “Anti-Corruption and Transparency Unit”) AND (“public procurement” OR procurement) AND (transparency OR accountability OR compliance) AND (Nigeria OR “federal ministries” OR MDAs); and (“e-procurement” OR “procurement information” OR “open contracting”) AND (corruption OR transparency) AND Nigeria. Search strings were adapted to the syntax of each database.

Eligible sources had to provide empirical or official institutional evidence directly relevant to at least one of the study's barrier domains: communication processes, ACTU functionality, organisational integrity systems, procurement transparency, e-procurement, reporting mechanisms, accountability, or

behavioural compliance. We prioritised Nigerian federal evidence; we retained comparative or cross-country studies when their findings were directly applicable to procurement transparency and institutional capacity. We excluded opinion pieces, unverified web publications, and sources without sufficient methodological or institutional provenance.

Screening proceeded through identification, duplicate removal, title and abstract review, full-text assessment and final inclusion. The initial search yielded 142 records. After removing duplicates and conducting preliminary title/abstract screening, 78 records remained for closer consideration. We assessed 24 full-text sources against the eligibility criteria and included 14 contemporary empirical or institutional sources in the core evidence synthesis. Statutes, foundational theories and methodological sources were charted separately as contextual material and were not included in the final core count.

Data were charted using a structured matrix covering author or institutional source, year, research design or document type, institutional focus, principal barrier domain and findings relevant to procurement transparency. Thematic synthesis then grouped recurring findings into three harmonised domains: structural and technological barriers; organisational and institutional barriers; and behavioural and political-economy barriers. We applied this three-domain framework consistently across the findings, discussion, and recommendations. Because the review is qualitative and includes heterogeneous source types, we did not attempt a meta-analysis.

Table 1
Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time frame	January 2020-April 2026 for the contemporary evidence set	Pre-2020 empirical sources, except legislation, methods or foundational theory used as context
Geographic relevance	Nigeria-focused studies and directly relevant comparative evidence	International evidence with no clear relevance to Nigerian public-sector procurement
Subject matter	Anti-corruption communication, ACTUs, procurement transparency, accountability, reporting, e-procurement or behavioural compliance	General corruption literature without a communication, ACTU or procurement-governance connection
Source quality	Peer-reviewed empirical studies and authoritative ICPC/BPP institutional documents	Opinion pieces, newspaper editorials, unverified online materials and sources lacking traceable provenance
Analytical usefulness	Sources providing findings that could be coded into at least one barrier domain	Sources with insufficient detail to support thematic coding

Note. Authors' compilation (2026).

PRISMA-ScR Selection Summary

Figure 3
Study Selection Flow

Records identified	After duplicate/title- abstract screening	Full texts assessed	Core evidence sources included
N = 142	N = 78	N = 24	N = 14

Note. Authors' compilation following PRISMA-ScR reporting principles.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 2
Empirical Synthesis Matrix of Core Reviewed Studies and Reports

Author/source	Design/document type	Institutional focus	Barrier domain	Key finding relevant to this review
Aduwo et al. (2020).	Cross-sectional survey (759 respondents)	Construction procurement, Nigeria	Structural/technological	E-procurement can strengthen records, audit trails, transparent bidding and competition while reducing direct contact.
Agu et al. (2024).	Quantitative governance study	Nigerian governmental institutions	Organisational/institutional	Institutional strength and anti-corruption measures are associated with transparency and accountability outcomes.
Igwe et al. (2021).	Documentary analysis	Nigerian public procurement	Organisational/institutional	Transparency and accountability are central to procurement integrity and value for money.
Olarewaju et al. (2021).	Qualitative/abductive case analysis	Nigeria public financial transparency	Structural/technological	ICT and social media can expand transparency and citizen scrutiny of public financial information.
Okolie et al. (2022).	Political-economy analysis	Nigeria WASH procurement	Behavioural/political economy	Political-economic interests can weaken formal procurement rules and shape bidding outcomes.
Eke et al. (2025).	Qualitative interviews (20 participants)	Media, government and civil society, Nigeria	Behavioural/communication	Communication can raise awareness and stimulate public discussion, but awareness alone does not guarantee institutional change.
Hoffmann (2024)	Research paper/public-opinion analysis	Corruption and procurement environment, Nigeria	Behavioural/institutional	Collective-action and institutional weaknesses shape public responses to corruption and procurement fraud.
ICPC (2024)	Official Ethics and Integrity Compliance Scorecard	330 federal MDAs	Organisational/institutional	The assessment shows uneven compliance and gaps in institutional structures supporting ACTUs, reporting, and prevention.
ICPC (2025)	Official Ethics and Integrity Compliance Scorecard	Federal MDAs	Organisational/institutional	Provides updated evidence on ethics, integrity, prevention capacity and institutional compliance.
BPP (2020)	Official emergency-procurement guideline	Federal MDAs	Structural/technological	Required COVID-19 procurement plans to be uploaded to NOCOPO and prohibited artificial splitting to evade thresholds.
Tyoakosu et al. (2026).	Census survey (44 procurement staff)	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Abuja	Communication/transparency	Access to procurement information, clear communication, and openness in decision-making are positively associated with procurement processes.
Mbang & Ibiang (2026)	Survey/descriptive design	Audit, accounts and procurement staff in federal MDAs, FCT	Behavioural/organisational	Corruption significantly undermines procurement; e-procurement and open contracting are recommended transparency mechanisms.
Khorana et al. (2024).	Cross-country quantitative analysis	Public procurement systems	Structural/technological	E-government procurement supports transparency, particularly where institutional quality and infrastructure are adequate.
Ogundipe (2025)	Sequential explanatory mixed-methods	BPP/public procurement, Nigeria	Behavioural/organisational	Campaign effects are constrained by institutional and political conditions, illustrating limits of communication without institutional efficacy.

Note. The 14 sources in this table constitute the contemporary core evidence set. Statutes, methodological sources and foundational theories are cited separately and are not counted in N = 14.

Findings

The synthesis identifies three mutually reinforcing categories of barriers. First, structural and technological barriers affect the production, movement and disclosure of procurement information. Second, organisational and institutional barriers affect ACTU authority, reporting, management support and oversight capacity. Third, behavioural and political-economy barriers affect officials' willingness to internalise anti-corruption messages and act consistently with procurement rules. The categories are analytically distinct but interact in practice.

The strongest direct institutional evidence comes from ICPC scorecard material and BPP procurement guidance. The 2024 EICS assessed 330 federal MDAs and reported wide variation in levels of institutional compliance (ICPC, 2024). This matters for communication because ACTU effectiveness depends on management culture, administrative systems, reporting mechanisms and institutional support. Where those structures are weak, anti-corruption messages are less likely to produce feedback, reporting and corrective action.

The review also indicates that procurement transparency is increasingly dependent on information systems. BPP guidance during COVID-19 required emergency procurement plans to be uploaded to NOCPO and warned against splitting procurements to evade applicable methods or thresholds (BPP, 2020). This demonstrates the regulatory value of digital disclosure. However, the broader evidence shows that the impact of e-procurement depends on infrastructure, user capacity and institutional quality (Aduwo et al., 2020; Khorana et al., 2024). Communication about transparency tools will therefore be ineffective where users cannot access or confidently use those tools.

A further finding is that organisational capacity mediates communication effectiveness. ACTUs may disseminate ethics messages, but those messages have limited organisational consequence if reporting channels are weak, management does not respond, or the unit is treated as peripheral to operational decision-making. Institutional Theory helps explain this possibility as decoupling: formal anti-corruption arrangements may satisfy external requirements while internal routines remain largely unchanged.

Finally, the evidence demonstrates an awareness-compliance gap. Studies of corruption communication and procurement show that awareness can coexist with persistent non-compliance (Eke et al., 2025; Mbang & Ibiang, 2026; Ogundipe, 2025). Political-economic interests, patronage relationships, discretionary power and fear of adverse consequences can outweigh the persuasive effect of ethics communication. Communication is therefore most effective when it changes both information conditions and the incentive environment in which procurement personnel operate.

Structural and Technological Barriers

Structural barriers include bureaucratic bottlenecks, fragmented information flows, uneven digitisation, limited interoperability and inconsistent publication of procurement information. These barriers affect both the speed and the credibility of anti-corruption communication. A circular or sensitisation message has limited value if procurement records are difficult to access, contract information is incomplete or reporting systems are disconnected from the procurement process.

Digital procurement offers important corrective possibilities. Aduwo et al. (2020) identify record-keeping, audit trails, transparent bidding, and reduced direct human contact as key anti-corruption capabilities of e-procurement. Khorana et al. (2024), however, show that institutional quality and infrastructure condition the transparency benefits of e-government procurement. This implies that digital communication should be paired with investment in systems, connectivity, standardised data, user support, and consistent disclosure obligations.

The BPP's use of NOCOPO illustrates how communication and transparency can be embedded in a system rather than confined to awareness messages. Procurement information becomes more useful when published in a structured, timely, and searchable form that oversight bodies, civil society, suppliers, and citizens can review. ACTU communication should therefore direct officials not only to ethical expectations but also to the specific information systems and disclosure duties through which those expectations are operationalised.

Organisational and Institutional Barriers

Organisational barriers relate to ACTUs' position within MDAs, the degree of management support they receive, the availability of reporting systems, and the extent to which communication is linked to institutional action. The EICS provides a useful institutional benchmark because it assesses dimensions of management culture, financial and administrative systems and internal integrity structures. Uneven performance across MDAs indicates that the formal existence of an ACTU does not by itself guarantee effective prevention (ICPC, 2024, 2025).

Leadership commitment is especially important. Officials are more likely to treat anti-corruption messages as credible when senior management demonstrates compliance, supports reporting and acts consistently on breaches. Conversely, messages lose legitimacy where procurement decisions are perceived to be shielded from scrutiny or where rules are applied selectively. Organisational communication must therefore be supported by visible leadership behaviour and a reliable feedback loop between reporting, investigation and corrective action.

The review also points to the importance of role clarity and institutional coordination. ACTUs, procurement units, internal audit, legal services, BPP and ICPC perform different functions. Communication failures may arise when officials are unsure which body receives a report, what happens after a report is made, or how procurement irregularities are escalated. Clear protocols and documented referral pathways can reduce this uncertainty.

Behavioural and Political-Economy Barriers

Behavioural barriers explain why knowledge does not necessarily produce compliance. Procurement personnel may understand the law while responding to informal incentives generated by hierarchy, patronage, peer expectations or perceived opportunities for rent extraction. Political-economy analysis of procurement in Nigeria demonstrates how powerful interests can shape the practical operation of formal rules (Okolie et al., 2022). Such conditions make passive awareness campaigns particularly weak because they do not alter the incentives associated with misconduct.

Fear of retaliation is another important barrier to reporting. Even where internal channels exist, officials may remain silent if they do not trust confidentiality arrangements or believe reporting will expose them to career disadvantage. The review therefore supports safer reporting systems, confidentiality safeguards, documented anti-retaliation procedures and consistent consequences for reprisal. These measures should be framed as institutional safeguards rather than as communication slogans.

Collective norms also matter. Where corruption is perceived as widespread or sanctions as selective, individual officials may conclude that compliance carries personal costs without institutional benefits. Anti-corruption communication should therefore incorporate peer-based discussion, scenario exercises, leadership modelling, case-based learning and recognition of compliant practice. The objective is to move communication from one-way transmission toward social and organisational reinforcement of integrity norms.

Discussion of Findings

The findings confirm that barriers to ACTU communication cannot be understood as communication problems alone. They are embedded in the architecture of public procurement. Theories of diffusion, agency and institutions help explain different parts of the same process. Diffusion theory highlights whether transparency practices and technologies are perceived as usable and compatible with existing routines. Principal-Agent Theory highlights discretion and information asymmetry. Institutional Theory highlights the possibility that formal anti-corruption structures are disconnected from operational practice.

From a diffusion perspective, communication is most likely to influence behaviour when the promoted practice is observable, usable, and supported by organisational readiness. An officer may receive repeated messages about e-procurement, for example, yet resist adoption if the platform is unreliable, training is inadequate or manual processes remain institutionally dominant. This is consistent with evidence that e-government procurement produces stronger transparency gains under conditions of adequate infrastructure and institutional quality (Khorana et al., 2024).

From a principal-agent perspective, anti-corruption communication contributes to transparency by reducing information asymmetry and making monitoring more credible. Procurement officers exercise delegated authority over public resources. Where processes are opaque, principals and oversight institutions cannot easily verify whether procurement decisions serve public purposes. Digital disclosure, audit trails, clear reporting channels and accessible procurement information reduce that asymmetry and therefore reinforce the behavioural effect of communication.

Institutional Theory best explains the gap between formal ACTU presence and practical influence. A unit may exist, conduct sensitisation and produce reports while being marginal to the routines in which procurement risks arise. This form of decoupling helps explain why more communication does not necessarily produce better outcomes. What matters is whether communication is linked to actual institutional processes: procurement planning, disclosure, internal controls, reporting, management response and external oversight.

The review therefore supports a shift from campaign-centred communication to system-centred communication. Posters, circulars and workshops remain useful, but they should form part of an integrated integrity system. Messages should tell officials what the rule is, why it matters, how to comply, where to publish information, how to report a concern, what protection is available, and what response to expect. Communication becomes credible when the institution behaves consistently with the message.

The evidence also suggests treating transparency as both an information condition and an accountability condition. Publishing procurement data is valuable because it enables scrutiny, but publication without accurate records, response mechanisms, or oversight can become ritualistic. Conversely, enforcement without accessible information may be arbitrary or difficult to verify. Sustainable procurement transparency therefore requires the combination of open information, institutional capability, behavioural incentives and credible accountability.

Conclusion

This study examined barriers to ACTU communication in promoting transparent procurement practices in federal MDAs in Abuja through a qualitative scoping review of contemporary empirical and institutional evidence. The review found that communication effectiveness is constrained by three interdependent domains: structural and technological weaknesses affecting procurement information and digital systems; organisational and institutional weaknesses affecting ACTU capacity, management support, reporting and oversight; and behavioural and political-economy pressures affecting incentives, norms and willingness to comply.

The findings demonstrate that awareness is necessary but insufficient. Anti-corruption messages are more likely to influence procurement behaviour when supported by accessible, reliable information systems, practical compliance tools, trusted reporting channels, management commitment, and credible monitoring. Conversely, communication becomes symbolic when formal anti-corruption structures are disconnected from procurement routines, when information is difficult to access, or when non-compliance remains rational from the perspective of organisational actors.

The study therefore concludes that ACTU communication should be treated as part of an integrated procurement-governance system rather than as an isolated sensitisation function. Strengthening communication requires simultaneous attention to technology, institutional design, leadership, reporting, behavioural incentives and accountability. Such an integrated approach offers a more plausible path toward sustainable transparency and improved public trust in federal procurement.

Recommendations

- i. **Strengthen ACTU institutional capacity and reporting arrangements.** ICPC and MDA leadership should ensure that ACTUs are properly constituted, supported with basic operational resources and connected to clear internal reporting and feedback mechanisms. Performance monitoring should assess not only the number of sensitisation activities but also whether reports are received, acted upon and resolved.
- ii. **Integrate communication with procurement disclosure systems.** ACTU messages should routinely direct procurement personnel to applicable disclosure obligations, NOCOPO/e-procurement requirements, documentation standards and reporting procedures. BPP and MDAs should sustain timely publication of procurement information in accessible and reusable formats.
- iii. **Accelerate end-to-end e-procurement with user support.** Digital procurement should cover the procurement cycle as comprehensively as practicable, while implementation should include training, connectivity, technical support and audit-trail preservation. Digitalisation should reduce discretionary opacity rather than merely reproduce manual processes online.
- iv. **Establish safer internal reporting and anti-retaliation procedures.** MDAs should maintain confidential reporting channels, documented escalation procedures and clear protections against workplace retaliation. Where national whistleblower-protection reforms are adopted, ACTU procedures should be aligned promptly with the applicable legal framework.
- v. **Adopt social and behaviour-change communication approaches.** ACTUs should complement circulars and posters with scenario-based ethics training, peer discussion, case learning, leadership modelling and practical problem-solving around procurement risks. Communication should be interactive and should address the organisational pressures that drive non-compliance.
- vi. **Strengthen leadership accountability and feedback.** Accounting officers and senior management should visibly support procurement transparency, respond to substantiated integrity concerns and communicate corrective actions where disclosure is legally permissible. Leadership behaviour is essential to the credibility of anti-corruption messages.
- vii. **Institutionalise monitoring and evaluation of communication outcomes.** ACTUs and ICPC should develop indicators that distinguish outputs from outcomes. Beyond counting workshops or materials distributed, evaluation should examine knowledge retention, use of reporting channels, timeliness of procurement disclosure, compliance trends and recurrence of identified control weaknesses.

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