



Outcomes Document

27–28 August 2025 | Hilton Hotel, Kuching, Sarawak

Event Summary

The “Regional Workshop on Integrity in Public Procurement: The Key to Economic Growth” was held from 27–28 August 2025 in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The workshop was co-organized by the Office of the Sarawak Ombudsman (Government of Sarawak), in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and supported by the United States Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

The workshop brought together 109 participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Participants and speakers included senior officials from Ombudsman offices, ministries of finance, public procurement agencies, competition commissions, defence, oversight bodies, integrity commissions, anti-corruption agencies, as well as representatives from civil society organizations and universities. International organizations such as UNODC, the Asian Development Bank, and Transparency International contributed expertise and facilitated peer exchange.

The workshop was formally opened by Yang Berhormat Dato’ Murshid DiRaja Datuk Dr. Juanda Jaya, Deputy Minister in the Sarawak Premier’s Department (Integrity and Ombudsman), with remarks by Annika Wythes, Team Lead of UNODC’s Anti-Corruption Hub for South-East Asia.

Sessions featured leading experts including:

- YBhg. Dato Sri Dr. Wan Lizozman bin Wan Omar, Sarawak State Financial Secretary;
- Professor Christopher Yukins, George Washington University (United States);

- Dr. Laode M. Syarif, Former Commissioner, Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (Indonesia);
- Rona Yngson, Asian Development Bank;
- ASec. Eleazar Ricote, Philippines Public-Private Partnership Center;
- Pushpan Murugiah, CEO, C4 Center Malaysia;
- Raymon Ram, President, Transparency International Malaysia;
- Almas Sjafrina, Indonesia Corruption Watch;
- Christian De Los Santos, Philippine Competition Commission;
- Dr. Mark Lovatt, CEO, Trident Integrity, Malaysia.

Facilitators from UNODC—Graeme Gunn, Annika Wythes, Kirbee Tibayan, and Vickram Rangunath—guided participants through a series of expert panels, interactive discussions, and small group sessions on key areas of public procurement reform and integrity-building.

Event Objectives

The workshop aimed to:

- Strengthen regional capacity on integrity in public procurement;
 - Share practical strategies and good practices for promoting transparency and accountability;
 - Address legal, institutional, and operational challenges in procurement systems;
 - Promote peer learning on reforms and oversight tools;
 - Identify technical assistance and capacity-building needs among participating countries.
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Key Challenges Identified

Discussions during the expert presentations and interactive sessions validated and added detail to the core challenges in public procurement integrity facing the region.

1. Legal Frameworks and Policy Gaps

- Inconsistent or lacking procurement legislation across jurisdictions;

- Lack of centralized procurement laws or standardized appeal and review mechanisms;
- Where appeal systems exist, political interference can undermine their effectiveness;
- Weak or absent supporting policies such as beneficial ownership transparency and data-sharing regulations.

2. Institutional Capacity and Capability Gaps

- This area was strongly emphasized by participants as a critical barrier to reform;
- Uneven technical knowledge and capacity across government departments with a need for practical training;
- Limited training and professional development specific to public procurement roles exacerbated by high staff turnover;
- Insufficient risk management and contract oversight skills;
- Fragmented procurement systems that lack interoperability.

3. Lack of Transparency and Oversight

- Inadequate supervision and internal controls;
- Need for greater measures to protect public procurement from political interference and to build public confidence in the fairness of the process;
- Limited public access to procurement data and decision-making processes which limits public oversight;
- Weak enforcement of conflict-of-interest rules and debarment mechanisms.
- Cultural and contextual factors that affect implementation of transparency measures require tailored approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions;
- Political economy dynamics, including balancing procurement efficiency with various social and economic policy objectives.

4. Use of Technology and Data

- Slow transition to fully digital procurement platforms;
- Inconsistent data quality and lack of structured analytics;

- For artificial intelligence (AI) tools to be effective, the process must start with a foundation of accurate, complete and standardized data;
- Absence of data integration with tax, corporate, and beneficial ownership registries;
- Limited use of real-time tools such as AI-driven red flags or supplier performance scoring.

5. Crisis and Emergency Procurement Vulnerabilities

- Emergency situations expose and amplify existing procurement weaknesses, as demonstrated by COVID-19 experiences across the region;
- Crisis procurement often bypasses normal oversight mechanisms, creating opportunities for corruption and poor value-for-money outcomes;
- Lack of pre-established frameworks for emergency procurement leads to ad-hoc decision-making and accountability gaps.

6. Address Specialized Procurement Challenges

- Develop specific guidelines for defence and security procurement integrity, including management of offset agreements and classified information while maintaining core transparency principles;
- Establish measurement frameworks that go beyond compliance metrics to assess actual development outcomes and public trust in procurement systems;
- Create protocols for managing the intersection of national security considerations with procurement transparency requirements.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Based on the challenges identified, participants and experts formulated the following recommendations for consideration, which align with the core Open Contracting principles of disclosure, participation, and accountability.

1. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Review and align procurement laws with international standards (e.g., UNCAC, WTO GPA);

- Establish clear and independent remedies systems for bid challenges and appeals that are shielded from political influence;
- Develop and implement robust and transparent risk assessment processes for supplier selection, including debarment mechanisms and sanctions for non-compliance with contractual terms to promote supplier accountability;
- Develop policies supporting data transparency and mandatory beneficial ownership disclosure;
- Use independent expert monitors as part of integrity pacts to oversee high-risk and high-value public procurement.
- Develop specialized frameworks for emergency and crisis procurement that maintain integrity safeguards while enabling rapid response;
- Recognize and address cultural and institutional contexts when designing procurement reforms to ensure local ownership and sustainability.

2. Build Institutional and Human Capacity

- Develop specialized and continuous training for procurement officers, with an emphasis on practical skills and professional certification programmes to professionalize the workforce;
- Create inter-agency taskforces for procurement oversight and monitoring;
- Encourage secondments or exchanges between countries for peer learning.

3. Enhance Transparency and Civil Society Engagement

- Publish procurement decisions, appeal outcomes, and debarment records online;
- Consider engaging third-party monitors (e.g. CSOs) in procurement processes through tools like integrity pacts;
- Consider supporting and partnering with civil society to independently monitor and analyze procurement data, following the model of Indonesia Corruption Watch;
- Strengthen whistleblower protections and access to information legislation.

4. Leverage Technology and Data Analytics

- Establish an integrated e-governance framework for public expenditure, digitizing the entire lifecycle from e-planning and e-budgeting through to end-to-end e-procurement and integrated payment solutions;

- Consider accessible cost-effective low-tech data analytic tools, inspired by examples from the Philippines Public-Private Partnership Center, to support risk detection and monitoring;
- Develop and apply AI and data analytics tools to flag irregularities and improve planning, while ensuring human expertise remains central to decision-making and guarding against technology creating new forms of exclusion or manipulation.
- Standardize data collection and publication formats (e.g. open contracting data standards);
- Facilitate cross-border data-sharing to combat supplier fraud and collusion.

5. Facilitate Regional Collaboration and Technical Assistance

- Consider establishing a regional peer network for procurement integrity practitioners, for example an ASEAN Public Procurement Integrity Network, to share experiences and examples of successful reforms.
- Develop toolkits and guidance notes on topics such as supplier due diligence, defence procurement integrity, and social audits;
- Leverage the UNODC Hub and the INL-funded regional programmes for targeted support.

Conclusion

The workshop reinforced that public procurement is a strategic entry point for promoting integrity, reducing corruption, and driving inclusive economic growth. Participants acknowledged the shared challenges faced across jurisdictions and highlighted the importance of sustained collaboration, transparency, and innovation.

The Government of Sarawak, in partnership with regional and international stakeholders, demonstrated strong leadership in hosting this event, helping to advance a regional vision for integrity-based procurement reforms.

The outcomes of this workshop will inform future technical assistance, policy reforms, and collaborative initiatives, and serve as a foundation for follow-up activities tailored to national contexts.