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EFFECT OF SUPPLIER TECHNICAL CAPABILITY ON EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT: A CASE OF TANZANIA RURAL AND URBAN ROADS (TARURA) IRINGA REGIONAL OFFICE

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ABSTRACT :

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of supplier technical capability on effective public procurement at the Tanzania Rural and Urban Roads Agency (TARURA), Iringa Regional Office. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. Structured questionnaires were administered to 84 respondents, complemented by semi-structured interviews with five key informants drawn from the procurement and technical units. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 20 through descriptive statistics, while qualitative data was thematically analyzed to strengthen interpretation of the findings. Results revealed that supplier technical capability had a substantial impact on procurement performance. Respondents highlighted the availability of skilled personnel, the adoption of modern technologies, and the adequacy of machinery and equipment as key factors influencing the successful execution of road projects. Weaknesses in technical capability were associated with delays, cost overruns and compromised quality, thereby undermining value for money in public procurement. The study concluded that enhancing supplier technical capacity is essential for improving procurement outcomes in TARURA. It recommends that TARURA strengthen its supplier evaluation processes, prioritize technically competent contractors, and support capacity-building initiatives to ensure efficiency, transparency and sustainability in road procurement projects.

Keywords: Supplier Technical Capability, Public Procurement and Procurement Performance

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In public procurement, strong supplier technical capacity ensures timely delivery, cost efficiency, and adherence to specifications, thereby enhancing value for money and service sustainability (Mushi, 2021; Swai, 2022). Conversely, inadequate technical capability contributes to delays, cost overruns, poor workmanship, and early infrastructure deterioration, which undermine the effectiveness of procurement systems (PPRA, 2023). Globally, technical competence is treated as a key criterion for supplier selection in public procurement. Developed countries rely on strict prequalification, performance-based contracting, and technology-driven monitoring systems to ensure procurement effectiveness (Rasmussen, 2021). Emerging technologies such as digital procurement platforms, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics are increasingly applied to improve supplier evaluation accuracy and reduce risks (Osman, 2023). These practices demonstrate that prioritizing technical capacity enhances procurement transparency and sustainability.

In Africa, however, weak supplier technical capacity remains a major challenge. Issues such as outdated machinery, limited access to skilled labor and poor compliance with quality standards often result in substandard project outcomes (Adebayo & Nkosi, 2020). Despite reforms, many African governments continue to struggle with road projects plagued by supplier-related inefficiencies, which waste scarce public resources (Iranmanesh *et al.*, 2021). In Tanzania, public procurement accounts for more than 70% of the national development budget, with road construction and maintenance consuming a significant share (Kikwai, 2020). Although the Public Procurement Act of 2023 emphasizes transparency, fairness and accountability, challenges persist. Many road projects experience delays and cost escalations due to suppliers lacking adequate technical capacity, including qualified engineers, modern equipment, and effective project management practices (Mbura *et al.*, 2021; PPRA, 2023).

The Tanzania Rural and Urban Roads Agency (TARURA) plays a crucial role in constructing and maintaining rural and urban road networks. However, at its Iringa Regional Office, supplier-related challenges continue to undermine procurement effectiveness. Reports indicate frequent project delays, poor workmanship and premature road damage linked to insufficient technical competence of contractors (Ngowi, 2024). This suggests that

technical capability is not adequately emphasized during supplier evaluation. Given the importance of road infrastructure for economic growth, poverty reduction and improved service access, strengthening supplier technical capability is essential. This study, therefore, examines the effect of supplier technical capability on effective public procurement at TARURA Iringa Regional Office, focusing on how technical resources, skilled personnel, and modern technologies influence procurement performance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Public procurement in Tanzania is a cornerstone of national development, accounting for more than 70% of government development expenditure (Swai, 2022). Despite these investments, procurement inefficiencies remain prevalent. The Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA, 2023) reports that over 30% of rural road projects experience delays, cost overruns or poor-quality outcomes, largely due to weak supplier capabilities. At TARURA Iringa Regional Office, road projects have frequently faced supplier-related setbacks. Many contractors lack sufficient technical resources, skilled engineers and modern construction equipment. As a result, projects are often delayed, roads deteriorate prematurely and significant financial losses are recorded. The Controller and Auditor General (CAG, 2023) revealed that TARURA lost over TZS 5 billion in failed contracts across several regions, including Iringa, directly linked to poor supplier performance. Such inefficiencies not only waste public resources but also delay socio-economic benefits for communities that depend on reliable road networks. Previous studies in Tanzania have highlighted procurement challenges such as financial constraints, supplier selection gaps, and limited e-procurement adoption (Moshi, 2022; Mwakalinga, 2024). However, little attention has been given specifically to supplier technical capability as a determinant of procurement effectiveness in road agencies. Existing research often discusses supplier performance broadly, without focusing on the technical dimension that directly influences infrastructure outcomes (Ngowi, 2024). This lack of evidence creates a knowledge gap on how supplier technical capability shapes procurement performance in TARURA's regional offices. Without addressing this, TARURA risks continued project delays, poor road quality and financial losses, undermining its mandate to provide reliable rural and urban roads. Therefore, this study investigates the effect of supplier technical capability on effective public procurement at TARURA Iringa Regional Office, with the aim of informing policies and practices that strengthen supplier evaluation and improve infrastructure delivery.

2. Literature Review and Empirical Literature Reviews

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory introduced by Wernerfelt (1984) and expanded by Barney (1991), argued that organizations achieved sustainable advantage by leveraging resources that were valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Within procurement, these resources included financial strength, skilled human capital, advanced technology and long-term supplier relationships. The theory emphasized that suppliers were not only service providers but also strategic resources that directly influenced institutional success. For public procurement entities such as TARURA, RBV was relevant because it explained how suppliers' internal capacities particularly technical capability could enhance cost efficiency, quality and timely completion of road projects. Empirical studies further applied RBV to supplier capability and procurement performance. For example, Nimako (2020) in Australia, Adeyemi (2020) in Nigeria and Ngugi and Mwangi (2020) in Kenya found that suppliers with skilled personnel, advanced technology, and adequate machinery consistently delivered better outcomes in public projects. Similarly, Bwalya (2022) in Zambia and Otieno (2021) in Kenya revealed that technical competence reduced delays and improved quality in infrastructure delivery. However, these studies often focused on urban or well-resourced institutions, overlooking rural and semi-urban contexts where suppliers faced equipment shortages, unskilled labor, and weak monitoring systems. In Tanzania, Mrema and Kitali (2023) confirmed the importance of technical capability but highlighted persistent challenges of poor tools and inadequate expertise. This indicated that while supplier technical resources were critical, past studies underexplored how public institutions such as TARURA Iringa could systematically assess and integrate these capacities into procurement processes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the Tanzania Rural and Urban Roads Agency (TARURA), Iringa Regional Office, which was selected due to persistent challenges in supplier selection for road construction and maintenance. The CAG Report (2023) revealed losses exceeding TZS 5 billion from supplier contract failures in the region, reflecting weaknesses in procurement practices. As Iringa's road networks are critical for connecting rural and urban communities, recurrent damage and impassability during rainy seasons (Ally, 2023) made it an appropriate setting for investigating the role of supplier technical capability in procurement effectiveness. An explanatory research design was adopted to link empirical findings with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that organizational success depends on effectively leveraging valuable, rare, and inimitable resources (Barney, 1991).

The study population consisted of 115 TARURA employees involved directly or indirectly in procurement activities (TARURA HR Office, 2025). Using simple random sampling, 84 staff members were selected for the quantitative survey, while five key informants were purposively chosen for qualitative interviews. Respondents were drawn from departments such as administration, procurement, finance, engineering, planning, quality assurance and ICT. Structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions captured data on supplier financial capacity, past performance, and technical capability, while semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into supplier selection challenges and practices. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 20 through descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and modes to highlight dominant trends. Qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis supported by manual coding after verbatim transcription of interview responses. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Iringa and the Municipal Council, and participants were informed about the study's purpose before providing data. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured through coding and the omission of personal identifiers. Objectivity and integrity were maintained in both data collection and reporting to uphold the credibility of findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The discussion is organized to show how technical capability influences the effectiveness of public procurement within TARURA.

4.1 Supplier Technical Capability on Effective Public Procurement

This section responds to the research question: “What is the influence of supplier technical capability on effective public procurement at TARURA Iringa Regional Office?” The analysis focuses on three main dimensions of technical capacity: the availability of appropriate machinery and equipment, the adequacy of skilled personnel and the application of modern construction technology. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to determine how suppliers’ technical strength contributes to the efficiency, quality and timely delivery of public road projects.

Table 1: Supplier Technical Capability on Effective Public Procurement

Question	Response	Frequency (n=84)	Percent (%)	Mode
Does the supplier have necessary machinery for effective execution of road works?	Available	27	32.1	3.00
	Not Available	27	32.1	
	Not enough	30	35.7	
The number of skilled personnel in the supplier team contributes to quality road project outcomes.	1–5	12	14.3	3.00
	6–10	3	3.6	
	11 or more	69	82.1	
Rate the supplier’s use of modern technology in road construction and maintenance.	Low	12	14.3	3.00
	Medium	26	31.0	
	High	46	54.8	

Source Field data (2025)

Availability of Machinery

The findings in Table 1 show that the availability of necessary machinery for effective execution of road works is distributed almost evenly across the three response categories. Out of 84 respondents, 30 (35.7%) reported that suppliers do not have enough machinery, while 27 (32.1%) indicated that machinery is available and another 27 (32.1%) stated that machinery is not available at all. The mode of 3.00 indicates that the most common response was “not enough” This distribution suggests that while some suppliers are adequately equipped, a significant portion either lacks machinery completely or does not possess sufficient equipment to meet TARURA’s requirements.

These results indicate that lack of sufficient machinery poses a real challenge in the execution of road projects. The fact that the highest proportion of respondents rated suppliers as having “not enough” machinery means that many suppliers operate below the technical threshold required for effective performance. This points to a gap in supplier readiness, which in turn affects the timely and quality delivery of projects. Adequate machinery is critical in ensuring that road construction and maintenance work is completed efficiently and without it, procurement outcomes are negatively affected.

The researcher conducted interviews with respondents to gain more insight into this issue. One procurement officer explained:

“In many cases, contractors come with outdated or limited equipment, which makes it hard for them to deliver quality road projects. For instance, when a supplier has only one grader for a large contract, delays become unavoidable because the work takes much longer to complete. This also increases labor costs and risks damaging the project timeline. Even when machinery is available, lack of spare parts or maintenance issues can cause interruptions. Therefore, the adequacy of equipment directly affects project efficiency and procurement success” (Interview with respondent A. 7/7/2025, 2:15 p.m.).

Another manager added:

“Availability of machinery is one of the key areas we check during evaluation, but often suppliers only hire or borrow equipment temporarily just to win contracts. This compromises long-term project quality. Temporary solutions do not guarantee that work will be done efficiently throughout the contract period. We have observed cases where borrowed machinery fails mid-project, causing serious delays. Ensuring suppliers own sufficient machinery is critical for reliability” (Interview with respondent B. 7/7/2025, 2:30 p.m.).

A third respondent noted:

“Some suppliers underestimate the machinery requirements for large contracts, which leads to repeated stoppages and project slowdowns. It is not just the number of machines but also their condition and suitability that matters. Without proper equipment, even skilled teams cannot meet standards or deadlines. This is why we prioritize machinery checks during supplier selection. Contractors with sufficient, well-maintained machinery consistently perform better” (Interview with respondent D. 7/7/2025, 2:45 p.m.).

These views confirm that machinery availability is a practical and recurring challenge. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that suppliers’ lack of adequate machinery has a strong impact on procurement effectiveness at TARURA. Quantitative data show that over two-thirds of respondents

believed machinery is either not available or not enough, while qualitative evidence highlights that even when machinery exists, it may be insufficient, outdated, or borrowed. Together, these results reinforce that technical capability particularly access to the right machinery is essential for achieving timely, quality outcomes in public road construction projects.

These views confirm that machinery availability is a practical and recurring challenge. Both quantitative and qualitative findings, it is clear that suppliers' lack of adequate machinery has a strong impact on procurement effectiveness at TARURA. Quantitative data show that over two-thirds of respondents believed machinery is either not available or not enough, while qualitative evidence highlights that even when machinery exists, it may be insufficient, outdated, or borrowed. Together, these results reinforce the point that TARURA needs to strengthen technical evaluations, particularly regarding equipment ownership and adequacy, before awarding contracts.

The findings align with those of Ngugi and Mwangi (2020), who established that the availability of specialized machinery directly enhances project delivery timelines and compliance with technical standards in Kenyan road projects. Similarly, Mbatha and Okoye (2021) in South Africa found that lack of adequate machinery contributed to delays and poor-quality outcomes in public works projects. In the Tanzanian context, Mrema and Kitili (2023) also concluded that insufficient or obsolete equipment undermined procurement efficiency and road quality. This comparison indicates that the challenge observed at TARURA reflects a wider problem in African procurement systems, where suppliers often struggle with equipment gaps that limit their capacity to deliver effectively.

Number of Skilled Personnel

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the number of skilled personnel in supplier teams significantly influences the quality of road project outcomes. Out of 84 respondents, a large majority of 69 (82.1%) reported that suppliers with 11 or more skilled personnel achieve better results. Meanwhile, only 12 (14.3%) indicated suppliers with 1–5 skilled staff and 3 (3.6%) cited 6–10 skilled staff. The mode of 3.00 shows that the most frequently reported category is “11 or more” This distribution demonstrates that most respondents associate higher numbers of skilled personnel with improved performance in TARURA road projects.

These findings indicate that workforce capacity is a critical determinant of procurement effectiveness. The predominance of respondents recognizing suppliers with larger skilled teams as more effective means that suppliers with insufficient personnel struggle to meet project requirements. Skilled personnel contribute directly to efficiency, quality assurance and compliance with standards, which ensures that TARURA receives value for money. This evidence also suggests that having a small workforce reduces project capacity and creates delays, while a well-staffed team leads to timely and satisfactory project completion.

To gather further insights, the researcher conducted interviews with procurement officers and project managers at TARURA. One respondent stated:

“For road construction projects, having the right number of skilled personnel is not optional it is a necessity. A supplier with only a handful of technicians cannot manage large-scale road works, which often leads to contract extensions or poor-quality outputs. Skilled personnel ensure that tasks are carried out efficiently and according to specifications. They also help anticipate and solve problems before they escalate into major delays. Therefore, evaluating the workforce capacity of suppliers is crucial for procurement effectiveness” (Interview with respondent D. 7/7/2025, 3:15 p.m.).

Another manager explained:

“We always emphasize personnel during evaluation because skilled engineers, surveyors and supervisors are the backbone of project success. Without them, even if a supplier has the equipment, the work suffers in terms of quality and compliance. Skilled teams also improve safety, reduce errors and maintain adherence to project timelines. Their expertise allows for better planning, execution and supervision of complex activities. In short, human resource capacity is as important as machinery and financial stability when selecting a supplier” (Interview with respondent E. 7/7/2025, 3:25 P.m.).

These responses highlight the direct link between skilled personnel and procurement effectiveness. When combining the survey and interview findings, it becomes evident that TARURA's procurement success is heavily dependent on the supplier's human capital. Quantitative data confirm that the majority of respondents see large and skilled teams as critical to quality project delivery, while qualitative evidence emphasizes that inadequate personnel often lead to delays, low-quality work and increased monitoring burdens for TARURA. Together, these results illustrate that technical expertise is not just supportive but foundational to procurement performance.

The findings resonate with the study by Nimako (2020), which reported that skilled personnel are central to public procurement outcomes in Australia, ensuring timely delivery and adherence to standards. Similarly, Mbatha and Okoye (2021) found that insufficient technical staff in South African public projects led to prolonged timelines and higher defect rates. In East Africa, Ngugi and Mwangi (2020) observed that suppliers with larger skilled teams were consistently more successful in delivering road infrastructure projects. Within Tanzania, Mrema and Kitili (2023) concluded that inadequate skilled labor remains a key cause of poor procurement performance in government road projects. These studies validate the current findings by showing that skilled personnel are universally recognized as a cornerstone of procurement efficiency

Use of Modern Technology

The findings in Table 1 show that the use of modern technology is a critical factor in determining supplier effectiveness in TARURA road projects. Out of the 84 respondents, 46 (54.8%) rated suppliers' use of modern technology as high, 26 (31.0%) rated it as medium and 12 (14.3%) rated it as low. The mode of 3.00 confirms that “high” was the most frequently reported category. This distribution highlights that the majority of respondents recognize the adoption of modern construction technologies as a key driver of efficiency and quality in public procurement.

These findings indicate that technology adoption directly enhances procurement effectiveness by improving project speed, accuracy and durability of outcomes. Respondents' preference for suppliers with high technological capability means TARURA stakeholders value innovation and advanced methods over traditional approaches. This shows that suppliers who rely on outdated tools and methods struggle to meet modern project demands. It also indicates that the integration of modern machinery, digital monitoring tools and advanced techniques ensures not only efficiency but also long-term cost savings for the government.

To explore this further, the researcher conducted interviews with managers and procurement staff at TARURA. One respondent explained:

"The use of modern technology such as advanced road rollers, automated grading machines and digital survey tools makes a huge difference. Suppliers using these technologies finish projects faster and at higher quality levels. Technology also helps reduce human error and ensures more precise measurements and grading. It allows us to monitor progress digitally and intervene quickly if there are issues. Overall, modern tools are essential for achieving timely, durable and cost-effective road projects" (Interview with respondent A. 9/7/2025, 8:15 a.m.).

Another manager emphasized:

"When we evaluate bids, we are keen to see suppliers demonstrate their use of up-to-date technology. Without this, we risk delays and poor-quality roads that require maintenance shortly after completion. Modern equipment ensures that work is done efficiently, safely and to the required standards. It also allows for better project planning and resource allocation. Therefore, technological capacity is a key determinant in selecting reliable suppliers for TARURA" (Interview with respondent B. 9/7/2025, 8:55 a.m.).

These responses demonstrate that technology is regarded as a decisive factor in supplier evaluation. From both the quantitative and qualitative findings, the results indicate that TARURA places strong importance on suppliers' technological capabilities. The survey data show that most respondents rate suppliers with high technological adoption as more effective, while interviews emphasize that without modern equipment and digital methods, projects are prone to delays, inefficiencies and substandard outputs. This means that technological capacity is viewed as a competitive advantage in public procurement and is essential for ensuring that road infrastructure projects meet the required standards.

The current findings are consistent with empirical studies reviewed earlier. Nimako (2020) found in Australia that suppliers with advanced machinery and modern systems consistently outperformed those relying on traditional methods. In South Africa, Mbatha and Okoye (2021) reported that modern technology contributed to faster project delivery and fewer quality defects. Similarly, Ngugi and Mwangi (2020) in Kenya emphasized that suppliers using digital survey tools and automated equipment ensured greater compliance and reduced project delays. In Tanzania, Mrema and Kitali (2023) highlighted that a lack of modern technology was one of the main causes of inefficiency in road construction projects. These comparisons show that the findings from TARURA Iringa Regional Office align with global and regional evidence that modern technology is indispensable in ensuring procurement effectiveness.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that technical capability is a major factor in achieving effective public procurement. Suppliers equipped with the necessary machinery, skilled personnel and modern technology produced higher quality outputs and executed projects more efficiently. Technical competence ensured compliance with project specifications and reduced delays or rework. Consequently, technical capability must be a core criterion in supplier evaluation and selection to enhance procurement performance at TARURA and it is recommended that the organization strengthen its assessment frameworks, encourage technology adoption and support supplier capacity-building initiatives to sustain effective procurement outcomes.

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