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AISCR **THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES**

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS ON PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

From Planning to Performance

Why the best projects are won
before the execution begins

284 BILLION. 48 MONTHS. 8 YEARS.

**What Happened to the Yaoundé–Douala
Highway?**

When Financing, Land Acquisition
and Procurement Are Not
Synchronized

MEET THE LEADER

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FROM PLANNING TO PERFORMANCE: WHY THE BEST PROJECTS ARE WON BEFORE EXECUTION BEGINS

Projects Are Won or Lost – Long Before Implementation Begins

Every year, governments and organizations invest billions of dollars in infrastructure, healthcare systems, digital transformation initiatives, and public services with the expectation that these investments will improve lives, stimulate economic growth, and create lasting value. Yet around the world, strategically important projects continue to experience delays, cost overruns, and implementation difficulties despite strong political commitment, adequate financing, and technically sound designs.

Why? The answer often lies in decisions made long before implementation begins. Leaders frequently attribute project underperformance to execution failures. The evidence suggests something different. More often, projects struggle because critical decisions concerning procurement strategies, financing arrangements, market realities, supplier capabilities, and risk management were not sufficiently integrated during project preparation. Execution problems are frequently planning problems in disguise.

Cameroon offers two of the clearest illustrations of this pattern anywhere in the world: the Yaoundé–Douala Highway and the Babadjou–Bamenda Road, both examined in detail later in this article. Neither project failed for lack of engineering capability. Both encountered the same challenge organizations face from Europe to Asia to Africa, converting strategic ambition into operational execution. The issue is rarely a lack of vision. The issue is whether organizations have built the capability to prepare for execution, and that capability begins with a specific, learnable discipline: procurement planning.

What Is Procurement Planning?

Procurement planning is the process of determining, before any contract is advertised, what an organization needs to procure, when it needs to be available, how it should be acquired, what risks could disrupt delivery, and how resulting contracts will be managed once awarded. It is the deliberate work of designing a procurement approach around a project's objectives, rather than defaulting to a generic or purely administrative process. The World Bank's Project Procurement Strategy for Development (PPSD) framework, introduced in its 2016 procurement reform, offers a useful working model of what disciplined procurement planning actually involves. A PPSP requires a borrower to assess, before procurement begins: the operational context in which the project sits, its own institutional capability as a client, the realities and risks of the relevant supplier market, the complexity of what is being procured, the risks that a well-designed procurement strategy could mitigate, the stakeholders whose interests and objections will shape delivery, and the specific procurement objectives that support the project's broader development goals. Only after this assessment is complete does the framework call for selecting a procurement route and preparing a procurement plan.

This is a fundamentally different activity from simply issuing a tender. It is strategic preparation, market intelligence, risk analysis, financing coordination, and stakeholder assessment, undertaken before an organization ever approaches the market.

► **How Procurement Planning Contributes to Efficient, Effective Procurement and Public Value**

Procurement planning is not valuable because it produces paperwork early. It is valuable because of what it prevents and what it enables.

It protects value for money. Value for money is not the lowest bid price; it is the best achievable combination of cost, quality, risk, and sustainability across a contract's life. That balance can only be designed deliberately, before the market is approached, not discovered afterward through change orders and contract amendments. Planning is what allows an organization to define the right procurement route, the right evaluation criteria, and the right risk allocation for the specific project in front of it, rather than reusing a generic process.

It improves efficiency by removing delay at its source. Delays that appear during implementation, a stalled disbursement, an unresolved land dispute, a supplier who cannot mobilize, are frequently delays that planning could have surfaced and resolved before contract signature. Addressing a risk during the planning phase is typically far less costly, in both time and money, than addressing the same risk once construction crews and financing agreements are already committed.

It improves effectiveness by keeping procurement tied to outcomes. A procurement process can be technically compliant and still fail to deliver what the project actually needed, if the underlying requirements, sequencing, and market conditions were not properly understood in advance. Planning is what keeps procurement decisions anchored to the development objective, a functioning road, a fully staffed hospital, a working digital system, rather than treating contract award as the finish line.

It builds public value. Public value extends beyond a completed asset; it includes the trust citizens place in institutions to deliver what was promised, on the terms promised, using public resources responsibly. Every cost overrun, renegotiated contract, or multi-year delay on a public project is not only a financial cost, it is an erosion of public confidence in the institutions responsible for delivery. Procurement planning that anticipates land, financing, and institutional risk protects that trust as much as it protects the budget.

It strengthens competition and market engagement. Early, well-designed market engagement, understanding supplier capacity, communicating requirements clearly, and structuring contracts realistically, attracts stronger bidders and better bids. Poorly planned procurements often narrow the field to whichever suppliers are willing to absorb undefined risk, which rarely produces the best outcome for the public purse.

These are not abstract benefits. They are visible, in precise and costly detail, in two of Cameroon's most significant infrastructure projects of the past decade.



▶ **What Cameroon's Own Law Already Requires**

Cameroon's current public procurement framework recognizes the importance of disciplined project preparation. Decree No. 2018/366 of June 20, 2018, instituting the Public Contracts Code, contains provisions addressing needs assessment, preliminary studies, procurement programming, site availability, and financing.

Articles 54 and 55 emphasize the need to define the requirement and undertake the necessary preliminary studies before procurement proceeds. For works contracts, these preparations include consideration of matters such as property impacts, the relocation of existing networks, site availability, and compensation for affected persons. Articles 59 and 60 further emphasize advance programming and the coordination of procurement with site and financing arrangements. Where projects are financed through external agreements, the applicable provisions must also be considered alongside the terms of those agreements.

The Yaoundé–Douala Highway Phase I and the original Babadjou–Bamenda Road project were initiated before the 2018 Code came into force. The current Code is therefore not applied retrospectively to assess their original procurement decisions. Rather, its provisions provide a useful contemporary benchmark for understanding how similar sequencing and coordination challenges can be addressed in future projects.

The experience of these projects therefore reinforces the central argument of this thought leadership article, from “Planning to Performance” and that procurement activities should be coordinated before major contractual commitments are made. The continuing challenge is to translate legal and policy requirements into consistent project-preparation practices and stronger institutional capability.

► Procurement Is an Execution System

Procurement is often discussed as a purchasing activity. In practice, it is an execution system. Every strategic objective ultimately depends on an organization's ability to acquire, mobilize, and govern the resources necessary to deliver results. Roads cannot be built without contractors, materials, and equipment. Hospitals cannot function without technology, medical devices, and support services. Digital transformation cannot occur without systems, vendors, implementation capabilities, and organizational readiness. At the center of this execution system sits procurement planning.

Decisions made during planning influence specifications, procurement strategies, supplier participation, financing arrangements, risk allocation, contract performance, and ultimately project outcomes. Weak planning assumptions rarely disappear during implementation; they resurface, usually at a higher cost. From Strategy, Procurement Planning, Market Engagement, Supplier Performance, Project Delivery to Public Value, the chain is only as strong as its planning assumptions.



► **Two Roads, One Lesson: Evidence from Cameroon**

Cameroon's two most closely watched road projects of the past decade, the Yaoundé-Douala Highway and the Babadjou-Bamenda Road, make this argument concrete. Both projects were technically sound. Both projects were strategically important and supported by significant financing. However, the projects experienced major delays and cost pressures arising from a combination of planning, coordination, land, financing, security, and implementation challenges.

The Yaoundé-Douala Highway: When Financing and Land Are Not Synchronized with Procurement

Work on Phase 1 began in October 2014 with an initial budget of CFAF 284 billion and a 48-month completion target (Cameroon Tribune, 2018). By the time the first 60 kilometres opened to traffic, the project had undergone four contract amendments and its reported cost had risen to approximately CFAF 350 billion (Business in Cameroon, 2024).

Available reports link the delays to several factors, including land compensation, financing disbursement, payment arrears and the coordination of project activities. The evidence suggests that procurement, compensation and financing arrangements were not sufficiently synchronized during implementation.

Phase 2 has encountered similar land-access challenges.



By mid-2025, only 5 of the required 32 kilometres of land had reportedly been cleared, illustrating how unresolved compensation and site-availability issues can continue to delay project delivery (Business in Cameroon, 2025). A 2018 review by an international financial institution placed the highway's per-kilometer cost at roughly USD 11 million, compared with approximately USD 3.5 million in Côte d'Ivoire and USD 3 million in Morocco, a gap that may reflect differences in project scope and engineering requirements, as well as the cumulative effects of delay, renegotiation, and financing arrangements.

Article 60 of the Public Contracts Code required funding availability to be confirmed before bidding was launched and the work site to be legally secured before contract notification. On both phases of this highway, financing disbursement and land compensation continued to be negotiated well after construction was already underway, the precise sequencing the Code was designed to prevent.

The Babadjou-Bamenda Road: When Institutional Coordination and Risk Assessment Lag Behind Contract Award

In October 2016, the World Bank approved US\$192 million for the Cameroon Transport Sector Development Project, of which the Babadjou-Bamenda Road was a major component (World Bank, 2016). The project subsequently experienced delays associated with regional insecurity, institutional coordination, implementation capacity and other operational challenges.

A joint review conducted by the World Bank and the Government of Cameroon identified weaknesses involving staffing, fund-flow procedures and coordination among the institutions responsible for implementation. The project was also disrupted by insecurity, including the destruction of contractor equipment, which required additional safety and social-risk measures before work could fully resume.

In June 2024, the World Bank approved an additional US\$50 million for the broader Transport Sector Development Project. The financing was intended primarily to support the completion and supervision of the Bamenda urban crossing and associated monitoring arrangements (World Bank, 2024). It should therefore be understood as additional financing for the broader project and related urban works, rather than simply as an increase in the original Babadjou–Bamenda road-contract price.

The original project was initiated before the 2018 Public Contracts Code came into force. However, its experience illustrates the importance of the preliminary planning and coordinated programming now emphasized in the Code.

Early attention to land, security, institutional responsibilities, financing and implementation risks can help prevent these issues from disrupting construction after contract award.

The Common Thread

The two projects were initiated under different circumstances and encountered different implementation challenges. Nevertheless, both demonstrate the importance of strong project preparation and coordination before and during procurement. Research on Cameroon's construction sector has identified inadequate site investigation during technical studies and delays between design completion and procurement as important causes of cost and schedule overruns (Bella Akoa, 2011). World Bank assessments have also connected weaknesses in public investment execution with insufficient project preparation and institutional coordination.

Cameroon's current Public Contracts Code provides a stronger framework for addressing these challenges. The continuing priority is to translate its planning requirements into consistent institutional practice. Effective project delivery depends not only on regulations but also on the capability of institutions to coordinate project design, land acquisition, financing, procurement, risk management and contract execution.



► **Further International Lessons**

The London 2012 Olympic Games: Integrated Planning Creates Delivery Confidence The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games required the coordinated delivery of venues, transportation systems, technology infrastructure, and security operations under one of the world's most visible and immovable deadlines. The United Kingdom's National Audit Office identified integrated planning, procurement governance, risk management, and continuous performance monitoring as critical success factors. The London 2012 experience demonstrates how integrated planning, governance, risk management, and continuous monitoring can improve delivery confidence in complex projects.

Major Infrastructure Projects: Procurement Strategy Shapes Value OECD studies of major infrastructure projects demonstrate that procurement strategies significantly influence cost, schedule, quality, and public value outcomes. Large projects involve multiple stakeholders, long implementation horizons, technical complexity, and considerable uncertainty. Procurement strategies that fail to account for market realities, supplier capabilities, financing arrangements, and risk allocation frequently underperform.



Healthcare Projects: Completion Does Not Guarantee Readiness Around the world, healthcare facilities have completed construction but remained partially operational because equipment, information systems, maintenance arrangements, and support services were not planned and procured in time. The facilities existed. The services did not.

Digital Transformation Initiatives: Technology Alone Does Not Deliver Transformation Organizations frequently procure sophisticated technologies before fully understanding business requirements, interoperability needs, cybersecurity implications, and organizational readiness. The technologies often function exactly as designed. The organizations struggle to realize anticipated benefits.

► **The Capability Advantage**

International experience, from London's Olympic delivery to Cameroon's road network, suggests that high-performing organizations share three characteristics:

- They treat procurement planning as a strategic management capability rather than a compliance exercise.
- They invest in market intelligence and risk management before entering procurement processes.
- They integrate procurement, financing, contract management, and project delivery functions into a coherent execution system.

Project performance is rarely determined by procurement regulations alone. It is determined by organizational capability. This explains why organizations operating under similar regulatory environments often produce dramatically different outcomes. The difference lies not in the rules. The difference lies in planning capability.

► **Five Leadership Principles for Moving from Planning to Performance**

- **Treat procurement planning as strategy, not administration.** Embed it in strategic decision-making and project design from the outset.
- **Synchronize procurement and financing decisions.** Procurement activities, financing arrangements, approval processes, and payment schedules should move together, as the Yaoundé–Douala experience shows, misalignment here alone can add years and billions in cost.
- **Build market intelligence before entering the market.** Understand supplier capabilities, market dynamics, lead times, and constraints before launching procurement activities.
- **Design for uncertainty.** Land access, compensation, financing delays, and security risk are foreseeable and should be assessed and mitigated in the planning phase, not discovered during construction.
- **Recognize that contract management begins before contract award.** Performance expectations, governance arrangements, accountability mechanisms, and monitoring systems should be established before contracts are signed.

► **The Leadership Imperative**

The central challenge facing many organizations is not procurement capability. It is leadership capability. No procurement process can compensate for unrealistic schedules, inadequate market intelligence, unmanaged risks, weak financing arrangements, or incomplete project preparation.

Leaders therefore have a responsibility to ask difficult questions before procurement begins:

- Are procurement timelines realistic?
- Does financing support implementation requirements?
- Have market conditions been adequately assessed?
- Are suppliers capable of delivering?
- Have risks, including land, compensation, and institutional coordination, been anticipated and appropriately allocated?
- Will this procurement strategy deliver the intended outcomes?

Organizations that ask these questions early experience fewer surprises and deliver more predictable results, and, over time, earn the public trust that comes with a credible record of delivery.

► **Conclusion: Planning Is the Architecture of Performance**

Projects do not create value because contracts are signed quickly. They create value because leaders invest sufficient discipline in aligning financing, markets, suppliers, risks, institutions, and execution strategies before implementation begins. Procurement planning is not paperwork preceding execution. It is strategic preparation for execution, and, as Cameroon's own infrastructure record shows, it is the difference between a project that delivers on time and on budget and one that takes a decade and multiple renegotiations to reach the same destination. As project environments become increasingly complex and interconnected, the organizations most likely to succeed will not necessarily be those that procure faster. They will be those that plan smarter, anticipate earlier, and execute with greater discipline. The best projects are often won long before implementation begins



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