

Cost-Effectiveness in Procurement Strategies for Health Programs: Insights from Global Initiatives

OGECHI THELMA UZOZIE¹, EKENE CYNTHIA ONUKWULU², IYADUNNI ADEWOLA
OLALEYE³, CHRISTIAN ONYINYECHI MAKATA⁴, PATIENCE OKPEKE PAUL⁵,
OLUWAFUNMILAYO JANET ESAN⁶

¹Independent Researcher, Lagos, Nigeria.

²Independent Researcher, Lagos, Nigeria.

³Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA.

⁴Independent Researcher, Lagos, Nigeria.

⁵Henry Jackson Foundation Medical Research International Ltd./GTE, Nigeria.

⁶Amazon, USA.

Abstract- *Efficient procurement strategies are crucial for optimizing resource allocation and enhancing health outcomes in global health programs. This paper examines various procurement strategies employed in health programs, including centralized, decentralized, pooled procurement, and framework agreements. It evaluates these strategies based on price, quality, delivery time, and supplier reliability to determine their cost-effectiveness. The paper identifies best practices that contribute to improved procurement efficiency and health program sustainability by drawing on global initiatives like the Global Fund, Gavi, and WHO. Challenges in implementing cost-effective procurement include limited financial resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, technical capacity gaps, supply chain disruptions, and issues of corruption and transparency. Recommendations address these challenges, emphasizing the need for increased financial investment, streamlined processes, capacity building, supply chain resilience, and enhanced transparency and oversight. The implications for policy makers, health program managers, and practitioners underscore the importance of prioritizing procurement as a strategic function in health systems. Future research should focus on leveraging digital technologies, enhancing supply chain resilience, combating corruption, and assessing the impact of capacity-building initiatives on procurement effectiveness.*

Indexed Terms- *Procurement Strategies, Cost-Effectiveness, Global Health Programs, Challenges*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cost-effectiveness in procurement strategies is a crucial aspect of health programs worldwide. Efficient procurement ensures that limited resources are utilized optimally to achieve health outcomes (Bertram, Lauer, Stenberg, Ralaidovy, & Edejer, 2021; Israel, 2023). In many low- and middle-income countries, where health budgets are constrained, cost-effective procurement can mean the difference between the success and failure of health interventions. Efficient procurement strategies not only reduce costs but also improve the availability and quality of health commodities, thereby enhancing overall health outcomes. For instance, procuring affordable yet high-quality medications can significantly increase the accessibility of essential drugs, directly impacting public health positively (Lugada et al., 2022; Pētersone, Ketners, Krieviņš, & Erins, 2020).

The significance of cost-effectiveness in procurement is further underscored by its impact on the sustainability of health programs. Sustainable procurement practices ensure that health programs can continue to operate and provide services over the long term without exhausting available resources (Organization, 2020; Yee, Shaharudin, Ma, Zailani, & Kanapathy, 2021). This is particularly important in global health initiatives, where donor funding can fluctuate, and there is a need to maximize the impact of every dollar spent. Moreover, cost-effective procurement practices help build trust among stakeholders, including donors, governments, and

beneficiaries, as they demonstrate a commitment to transparency, accountability, and the efficient use of resources (Moshtari, Altay, Heikkilä, & Gonçalves, 2021).

The primary objective of this research paper is to explore the various procurement strategies employed by health programs globally and evaluate their cost-effectiveness. By analyzing these strategies, the paper aims to identify best practices that can be adopted to enhance procurement efficiency in health programs. Additionally, the research will investigate the challenges faced in implementing cost-effective procurement and propose solutions to overcome these hurdles. The ultimate goal is to provide actionable insights to help policymakers, program managers, and other stakeholders optimize their procurement processes, thereby improving health outcomes and ensuring the sustainability of health initiatives.

In the following sections, the paper will delve into key concepts and theoretical frameworks related to procurement and cost-effectiveness in health programs. It will provide a detailed analysis of various procurement strategies and their impact on cost and health outcomes. Furthermore, the paper will highlight successful global initiatives implementing cost-effective procurement practices and extract valuable lessons from these case studies. Finally, the paper will address the common challenges in achieving cost-effectiveness in procurement and offer practical recommendations to address these issues. Through this comprehensive analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on cost-effective procurement in health programs and provide a valuable resource for improving procurement practices globally.

II. KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Understanding the key concepts and theoretical underpinnings is essential to comprehensively analyzing cost-effectiveness in procurement strategies for health programs. This section will define the essential terms such as procurement, cost-effectiveness, health programs, and global initiatives

and present the theoretical frameworks that guide this research.

2.1 Key Concepts

Procurement in the context of health programs refers to acquiring goods, services, and works from external sources. This includes procuring medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, equipment, and services necessary for implementing and maintaining health programs (Lysons & Farrington, 2020). Effective procurement involves several steps: planning, sourcing, purchasing, and logistics management. The goal is to obtain the required items at the right time, in quantity and quality, and at the best possible cost (Miller & Lehoux, 2020).

Cost-effectiveness is a measure used to determine the best use of resources to achieve a specific outcome. In health programs, it is often used to evaluate the economic efficiency of different interventions by comparing their costs to their health outcomes (Vanness, Lomas, & Ahn, 2021). Cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) helps policymakers and program managers decide which interventions provide the most significant health benefits for the least cost, enabling them to allocate resources more efficient (Avanceña & Prosser, 2021).

Health programs are organized efforts to improve health outcomes in specific populations. These programs can be initiated by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, or a combination of these entities. Health programs typically focus on disease prevention, health promotion, treatment of illnesses, and health system strengthening. The success of these programs often depends on the efficient procurement of necessary resources (Castañeda-Orjuela, García-Molina, & De la Hoz-Restrepo, 2020).

Global initiatives refer to collaborative efforts by multiple countries, international organizations, and other stakeholders to address health challenges that transcend national borders. Examples include the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (Global Fund), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Health Organization's (WHO) various health campaigns. These initiatives often rely on pooled procurement strategies to achieve economies of scale

and improve access to health commodities for participating countries (Chattu & Aslanyan, 2020; Jafari et al., 2021).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in several economic and management theories that explain the principles of cost-effectiveness and procurement in health programs. One relevant theory is the Principal-Agent Theory, which examines the relationship between principals (e.g., donors or governments) and agents (e.g., health program managers). In the context of procurement, this theory highlights the challenges of ensuring that agents act in the best interest of principals, particularly regarding the efficient use of resources. Effective procurement strategies must address information asymmetry and incentive alignment to achieve cost-effectiveness (Bjurstrøm, 2020).

Another relevant framework is the Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) theory, which focuses on the costs associated with economic transactions. Procurement costs include searching for suppliers, negotiating contracts, and monitoring performance. TCE suggests that organizations should minimize transaction costs to achieve greater efficiency. Reducing transaction costs through streamlined procurement processes and better supplier relationships can lead to significant cost savings and improved program outcomes in health programs (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2020).

The firm's Resource-Based View (RBV) is also pertinent, as it emphasizes the strategic importance of resource acquisition and management. In the context of health programs, this theory suggests that effective procurement is crucial for securing the resources needed to achieve program goals. Health programs can enhance their procurement efficiency and overall performance by leveraging internal capabilities and strategic partnerships (Abdul, Adeghe, Adegoke, Adegoke, & Udedeh, 2024; Ekechukwu & Simpa, 2024; Nwaimo, Adegbola, & Adegbola, 2024). Finally, the Institutional Theory provides insights into how the broader institutional environment influences organizational practices, including procurement. This theory suggests that health programs must navigate

complex regulatory, cultural, and operational contexts to implement cost-effective procurement strategies. Understanding these institutional factors can help program managers design procurement processes that are both efficient and compliant with relevant norms and standards (Ebrahimi & Koh, 2021).

III. ANALYSIS OF PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

3.1 Overview of Procurement Strategies

Procurement strategies in health programs are critical to ensuring that medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, and services are obtained cost-effectively. These strategies vary widely, depending on the specific needs of the health program, the market conditions, and the regulatory environment. Key procurement strategies include centralized, decentralized, pooled, and framework agreements. Each of these strategies has advantages and challenges, and their cost-effectiveness must be carefully evaluated to ensure optimal resource use (García-Goñi, 2022). Centralized procurement involves a single entity, such as a national health authority or an international organization, conducting the procurement process for multiple health programs or regions. This approach leverages economies of scale, leading to lower prices and better terms from suppliers due to bulk purchasing. Centralized procurement can also standardize quality and streamline logistics, reducing administrative costs and enhancing supply chain efficiency. However, this strategy requires robust coordination and oversight mechanisms to prevent inefficiencies and corruption (Parmaksiz, Pisani, Bal, & Kok, 2022).

Decentralized procurement allows individual health programs or regional authorities to manage their procurement processes. This approach can be more responsive to local needs and preferences, allowing for greater flexibility and customization of procurement practices. Decentralized procurement can foster competition among suppliers at the local level, potentially leading to better prices and services. However, it may lack the bargaining power of centralized procurement and can result in higher administrative costs and inconsistent quality

(Petersen, Jensen, & Bhatti, 2022; Rokkan & Haugland, 2022).

Pooled procurement is a collaborative approach where multiple organizations or countries combine to procure goods and services. This strategy combines the participants' purchasing power, achieving lower prices and improved supplier terms similar to centralized procurement. Pooled procurement is particularly effective in global health initiatives, where countries with limited purchasing power can benefit from the group's collective strength. Challenges include coordinating among diverse participants and ensuring fair distribution of the procured goods (Parmaksiz et al., 2022).

Framework agreements are long-term contracts with suppliers that set the terms and conditions for the supply of goods and services over a specified period. These agreements provide flexibility in ordering quantities and delivery schedules, allowing health programs to respond to changing needs without renegotiating contracts each time. Framework agreements can stabilize prices and ensure consistent supply. However, they require effective contract management to avoid compliance issues and meet performance standards.

3.2 Criteria for Cost-Effectiveness

Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of these procurement strategies involves considering several criteria, including price, quality, delivery time, and supplier reliability. Price is a fundamental criterion, as lower procurement costs directly translate to better resource utilization. However, the lowest price does not always equate to cost-effectiveness if it compromises quality or increases long-term costs.

Quality is equally important, as substandard goods can undermine health program outcomes and lead to additional costs for replacing and treating adverse effects. Ensuring that procured items meet predefined quality standards is essential for effective procurement. Delivery time impacts the availability of necessary supplies, with delays potentially disrupting health program operations and leading to adverse health outcomes. Timely delivery is crucial for

maintaining the continuity of care and program activities (Orubu, Ching, Zaman, & Wirtz, 2020).

Supplier reliability encompasses the consistency of supply, adherence to contractual terms, and responsiveness to issues. Reliable suppliers reduce the risk of stockouts and quality issues, contributing to the overall effectiveness of procurement (Gallego-García, Gallego-García, & García-García, 2021). Balancing these criteria requires a comprehensive evaluation framework considering direct and indirect costs and benefits. For example, while centralized procurement may offer the lowest prices, it may entail higher logistical costs and complexity. Conversely, decentralized procurement might provide more tailored solutions at the expense of higher administrative overheads (Adama, Popoola, Okeke, & Akinoso, 2024; Ucha, Ajayi, & Olawale, 2024a).

In conclusion, various procurement strategies are employed in health programs, each with distinct advantages and challenges. Evaluating their cost-effectiveness requires a nuanced approach that balances price, quality, delivery time, and supplier reliability. Health programs can enhance their efficiency, maximize resource use, and improve health outcomes by adopting the most appropriate procurement strategies.

IV. GLOBAL INITIATIVES AND BEST PRACTICES

4.1 Global Initiatives

Global initiatives have played a pivotal role in implementing effective procurement strategies in health programs, showcasing best practices that contribute to cost-effectiveness and improved health outcomes. Notable examples include the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (Global Fund), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Health Organization's (WHO) various health campaigns. These initiatives provide valuable insights into successful procurement practices that other health programs can emulate.

The Global Fund is a prime example of effective procurement in action. It uses a pooled procurement mechanism to leverage the collective purchasing power of participating countries, achieving significant cost savings on essential medicines and health products. The Global Fund's Pooled Procurement Mechanism (PPM) has negotiated lower prices for antiretroviral drugs, tuberculosis medications, and malaria treatments, ensuring these life-saving commodities are accessible to low-income countries. The Global Fund also emphasizes quality assurance, working with prequalified suppliers and conducting rigorous quality checks to ensure that procured items meet international standards.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance has similarly demonstrated the benefits of pooled procurement and strategic partnerships. Gavi has secured lower prices and improved vaccine availability by coordinating vaccine procurement for participating countries. Gavi's Advance Market Commitment (AMC) for pneumococcal vaccines is a notable example, where guaranteed funding incentivized manufacturers to produce affordable vaccines for low-income countries. This initiative has significantly reduced the incidence of pneumococcal diseases, illustrating the impact of innovative procurement strategies on public health (Esan, Ajayi, & Olawale, 2024; Ucha, Ajayi, & Olawale, 2024b).

The WHO's efforts in bulk purchasing and prequalifying medical products have also set a benchmark for procurement practices. The WHO's Prequalification Programme ensures that medicines and vaccines procured by international agencies meet stringent quality standards, fostering trust and reliability in the supply chain. The WHO's bulk purchasing initiatives, such as those for insecticide-treated nets and diagnostic kits, have resulted in lower prices and wider distribution of these critical health products.

4.2 Best Practices

From these global initiatives, several best practices emerge that contribute to cost-effectiveness and improved health outcomes. Leveraging economies of scale is a key practice, as the Global Fund and Gavi

demonstrated. By aggregating demand across multiple countries and programs, these initiatives secure lower prices and better terms from suppliers. This practice particularly benefits low-income countries that might otherwise struggle to afford essential health commodities (Halabi & Gostin, 2023).

Ensuring quality assurance is another critical best practice. Initiatives like the WHO's Prequalification Programme and the Global Fund's rigorous quality checks highlight the importance of maintaining high standards for procured goods. Quality assurance not only protects patient safety but also enhances the credibility and sustainability of health programs (Chang & Kohler, 2020).

Strategic partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms are also vital. Gavi's AMC for pneumococcal vaccines illustrates how guaranteed funding commitments can stimulate production and lower prices. Such partnerships between international organizations, governments, and the private sector can unlock new procurement opportunities and improve access to health products. Transparency and accountability in procurement processes are essential for building trust and ensuring efficient use of resources. Global initiatives often incorporate stringent oversight mechanisms to monitor procurement activities and prevent fraud and corruption. Transparent procurement processes enhance stakeholder confidence and support the sustainability of health programs (Ajayi & Udeh, 2024; Atobatele, Kpodo, & Eke, 2024; Oyeniran et al., 2024).

Capacity building and technical assistance are crucial for enabling countries to implement effective procurement strategies. Many global initiatives provide training and support to strengthen local procurement capabilities, ensuring that health programs can manage procurement processes independently and sustainably. This practice improves procurement efficiency and builds local expertise and resilience.

V. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Challenges in Implementing Cost-Effective Procurement

Implementing cost-effective procurement strategies in health programs is fraught with challenges that can undermine the efficiency and impact of these initiatives. Some common challenges include limited financial resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of technical expertise, supply chain disruptions, and corruption.

One of the most significant challenges is limited financial resources. Health programs often operate under tight budget constraints, especially in low- and middle-income countries. This financial limitation makes it difficult to procure high-quality health commodities in the necessary quantities, leading to price, quality, or both compromises. Furthermore, limited budgets can restrict the ability to invest in advanced procurement technologies and training, further hampering cost-effective procurement. Bureaucratic inefficiencies also pose a substantial barrier. Lengthy and complex procurement procedures can delay the acquisition of essential health supplies, affecting program implementation and health outcomes. These inefficiencies are often compounded by rigid regulations and red tape, which can stifle innovation and adaptability in procurement practices.

Another critical challenge is the lack of technical expertise. Effective procurement requires specialized knowledge in market analysis, contract management, and quality assurance. Many health programs, particularly in resource-limited settings, lack personnel with the necessary skills and experience to manage procurement processes effectively. This skills gap can lead to poor supplier selection, inadequate contract terms, and suboptimal procurement decisions.

Supply chain disruptions are also a common issue, exacerbated by factors such as geopolitical instability, natural disasters, and pandemics. These disruptions can result in stockouts, increased costs, and delays in delivery, severely impacting health program operations. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, highlighted the vulnerability of global supply chains

and the need for resilient procurement strategies. Corruption and lack of transparency in procurement processes further hinder cost-effectiveness. Corruption can lead to inflated prices, poor-quality products, and favoritism in supplier selection. Lack of transparency undermines accountability and erodes trust among stakeholders, including donors, governments, and beneficiaries.

5.2 Recommendations for Improvement

To address these challenges, several actionable recommendations can enhance procurement processes and improve health programs' cost-effectiveness. Firstly, increasing financial investment in health programs is crucial. Governments and international donors should prioritize funding for procurement and supply chain management. Adequate financial resources enable health programs to procure high-quality commodities in sufficient quantities and invest in necessary technologies and training.

Streamlining bureaucratic processes is another vital step. Simplifying procurement procedures and reducing regulatory burdens can expedite procurement and improve efficiency. Governments and health authorities should review and reform procurement regulations to eliminate unnecessary red tape and promote flexibility and innovation.

Building technical capacity within health programs is essential. Providing procurement staff training and professional development opportunities can enhance their skills and knowledge. Health programs should collaborate with academic institutions and international organizations to offer specialized procurement and supply chain management training. Enhancing supply chain resilience is critical to mitigating disruptions. Health programs should diversify their supplier base, develop contingency plans, and invest in technologies that improve supply chain visibility and coordination. Establishing regional procurement hubs can also enhance supply chain stability and reduce dependency on single suppliers.

Health programs should implement robust oversight mechanisms to combat corruption and ensure

transparency. This includes regular audits, independent monitoring, and digital procurement platforms that enhance transparency and accountability. Engaging civil society organizations and beneficiaries in monitoring procurement processes can deter corrupt practices and build trust. In conclusion, while health programs face significant challenges in implementing cost-effective procurement strategies, these can be overcome through targeted interventions. Increasing financial investment, streamlining bureaucratic processes, building technical capacity, enhancing supply chain resilience, and ensuring transparency are critical steps toward achieving cost-effective procurement. By addressing these challenges, health programs can optimize resource use, improve health outcomes, and ensure the sustainability of their initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The research on cost-effectiveness in procurement strategies for health programs has highlighted several key insights. Efficient procurement is vital for optimizing resource use, enhancing health outcomes, and ensuring the sustainability of health programs. Various procurement strategies, such as centralized, decentralized, pooled, and framework agreements, each have unique advantages and challenges. Evaluating these strategies based on criteria such as price, quality, delivery time, and supplier reliability is essential for achieving cost-effectiveness. Global initiatives like the Global Fund, Gavi, and WHO have demonstrated best practices in procurement, providing valuable lessons for health programs worldwide.

The findings of this research have significant implications for policymakers, health program managers, and practitioners. Policymakers should prioritize funding and support for procurement and supply chain management, recognizing the critical role of efficient procurement in improving health outcomes. Health program managers should adopt best practices from global initiatives, such as leveraging economies of scale, ensuring quality assurance, fostering strategic partnerships, maintaining transparency, and building local capacity. Practitioners should focus on continuous improvement

and innovation in procurement processes, utilizing new technologies and approaches to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

Future research should continue to explore the evolving landscape of procurement in health programs, particularly in the context of new challenges and opportunities. Areas for further investigation include the impact of digital technologies on procurement efficiency, strategies for enhancing supply chain resilience, and approaches to combating corruption and ensuring transparency in procurement processes. Additionally, research should examine the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives and their impact on procurement outcomes. Future research can contribute to developing more efficient and sustainable health programs by advancing the understanding of cost-effective procurement strategies.

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