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Abstract

While the legislative framework, including the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA) 2015 and subsequent sustainability guidelines, sets out clear objectives for integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations, actual implementation varies significantly. The research adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design, targeting procurement professionals across state corporations and government ministries. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that economic sustainability practices, such as supporting local suppliers and promoting SME participation, are more widely implemented than social and environmental sustainability measures. Social inclusion efforts are constrained by weak enforcement mechanisms and limited follow-up during contract execution, while environmental sustainability remains underdeveloped due to insufficient technical expertise, budgetary constraints, and perceptions of high cost. The study concludes that procurement professionals have the potential to be strategic change agents for sustainable development but require enhanced capacity, institutional support, and performance incentives to achieve this role effectively. Recommendations include targeted training, integrating sustainability indicators into performance evaluations, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, fostering inter-agency collaboration, and allocating dedicated budgets for sustainability initiatives.

Keywords: *Public Procurement, Procurement Professionals, Sustainable Development, Economic Sustainability, Social Inclusion, Environmental Sustainability, Supply Chain, Kenya, PPADA 2015, Procurement Practices.*

1.1 Introduction

Sustainable development has increasingly become a core agenda in public procurement, with procurement professionals playing a pivotal role in translating legislative provisions into tangible outcomes. In Kenya, the adoption of sustainable procurement practices aligns with the country's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 13 (Climate Action). Procurement professionals are the operational link between policy and practice, as they are responsible for embedding economic, social, and environmental considerations in all stages of the procurement cycle—from needs assessment and tender

design to contract award and supplier performance monitoring. Their decisions directly influence whether procurement outcomes contribute to long-term national development priorities or remain confined to short-term transactional efficiency.

Kenya's Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA) 2015 and the Sustainable Procurement Guidelines (2018) provide a strong legislative framework to guide procurement professionals in this regard. These frameworks encourage practices such as promoting local content, reserving opportunities for marginalized groups, adopting green procurement, and enforcing ethical standards in supplier relationships. However, the ability of procurement professionals to implement these provisions effectively depends on their technical capacity, institutional support, and the operational environment in which they work. Challenges such as insufficient training on sustainability criteria, limited availability of sustainable suppliers, and pressure to deliver cost savings can hinder professionals from fully aligning their work with sustainability principles.

The role of procurement professionals in advancing sustainable development also extends beyond compliance with legal requirements. Increasingly, they are expected to exercise strategic leadership in shaping procurement strategies that balance cost-efficiency with long-term societal benefits. This requires moving away from a narrow focus on lowest-price bidding towards approaches such as lifecycle costing, supplier development, and long-term partnership building. Furthermore, their practices influence not only the economic empowerment of local businesses but also the promotion of social equity and the protection of the environment.

Despite the recognition of their importance, research indicates that many procurement professionals in Kenya operate under resource and time constraints that limit their capacity to innovate and drive sustainability initiatives. For example, procurement planning processes often prioritize immediate operational needs over broader sustainable development objectives. Similarly, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for procurement projects tend to focus on budgetary compliance rather than measuring social or environmental impact. This situation underscores the importance of institutionalizing sustainability performance metrics and providing professionals with the necessary tools to track and report on these outcomes.

Therefore, understanding the practices of procurement professionals in Kenya is critical for identifying both the enablers and barriers to sustainable procurement. By examining how these professionals interpret and apply sustainability criteria in their day-to-day work, policymakers and regulatory bodies can design targeted interventions to strengthen capacity, improve accountability, and ensure that public procurement delivers on its potential to drive sustainable economic, social, and environmental development.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although Kenya's public procurement framework, particularly the PPADA 2015 and Sustainable Procurement Guidelines (2018), outlines clear sustainability objectives, the practices of procurement professionals often fall short of fully realizing these goals. Many professionals focus primarily on compliance with procedural requirements and achieving cost efficiency, with less emphasis on integrating long-term economic, social, and environmental considerations into procurement decisions. Factors such as limited technical expertise in sustainability assessment, inadequate institutional support, and lack of standardized performance indicators hinder the consistent application of sustainable procurement principles. Moreover, entrenched procurement cultures, pressure to deliver projects within tight timelines, and insufficient supplier capacity to meet sustainability standards further constrain their effectiveness. This disconnect between legislative intent and professional practice undermines the role of public procurement as a strategic driver of sustainable development, resulting in

missed opportunities to promote inclusive economic growth, social equity, and environmental stewardship in Kenya.

1.3 Research Objective

To determine the practices of procurement professionals on sustainable development in Kenya.

1.4 Literature Review

1.4.1 Theoretical Review

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory provides a compelling framework for understanding the role of procurement professionals in driving sustainable development. According to RBV, an organization's sustainable competitive advantage is derived from its ability to acquire, develop, and effectively deploy valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991). In the context of public procurement, procurement professionals represent a critical intangible resource whose expertise, decision-making skills, and ethical standards can significantly influence procurement outcomes. By applying RBV, it becomes clear that developing the competencies of procurement professionals—through training in sustainability assessment, stakeholder engagement, and lifecycle costing—can enhance the organization's ability to deliver value that extends beyond cost savings to include broader economic, social, and environmental benefits.

RBV also highlights the importance of aligning internal capabilities with strategic objectives. For procurement professionals in Kenya, this alignment means integrating sustainability considerations into the procurement process in ways that support national development goals, such as those outlined in Kenya Vision 2030 and the SDGs. When procurement teams possess advanced knowledge of sustainable procurement practices, coupled with strong analytical and negotiation skills, they can shape supplier markets, influence product and service specifications, and ensure that contracts deliver long-term value. Thus, RBV underscores the need for capacity-building programs and institutional support mechanisms that enable procurement professionals to function not merely as transactional facilitators, but as strategic partners in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

1.4.2 Empirical Review

Globally, the role of procurement professionals in advancing sustainable development has been widely documented, with studies highlighting both the opportunities and challenges inherent in this function. In developed economies such as the UK, Sweden, and Australia, procurement professionals have been found to act as strategic agents in integrating sustainability criteria into public sector procurement processes (Preuss, 2009; Walker & Brammer, 2012). For example, in the UK's National Health Service, professionals have successfully implemented lifecycle costing and supplier sustainability assessments, leading to reduced environmental impact and improved social outcomes. Similarly, in Sweden, the presence of procurement officers trained in green procurement principles has led to measurable reductions in CO₂ emissions in government supply chains. These studies underscore that professional capacity, institutional support, and clear policy mandates are crucial for ensuring that procurement contributes effectively to sustainable development objectives.

In the African context, research reveals a mixed picture regarding the practices of procurement professionals in implementing sustainability-focused procurement. Studies in South Africa have shown that professionals are increasingly applying preferential procurement policies to promote historically disadvantaged businesses (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012). In Ghana, however, research by Osei-Tutu et al. (2014) found that while procurement officers understood the importance of environmental sustainability, actual implementation was hampered by lack

of technical tools, inconsistent enforcement, and limited supplier capacity. Across the continent, the gap between policy and practice often arises from systemic challenges, including corruption, political interference, and inadequate professional development opportunities for procurement staff. These findings highlight that even where strong policies exist, their success depends heavily on the ability and willingness of procurement professionals to operationalize them.

Kenyan studies have emphasized the critical role procurement professionals play in operationalizing the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA) 2015 and related guidelines. Research by Gichuru (2018) found that while many professionals demonstrated high awareness of economic sustainability measures such as SME promotion and local content requirements, fewer actively integrated social and environmental considerations into procurement processes. Similarly, Otieno and Muturi (2020) reported that most procurement officers in public institutions prioritized price competitiveness over lifecycle costs or environmental performance, mainly due to pressure to deliver cost savings and lack of standardized sustainability metrics. These studies suggest that without adequate training and performance incentives, procurement professionals may default to traditional cost-minimization approaches, thereby undermining broader sustainable development goals.

Capacity constraints have been consistently identified as a major impediment to the sustainable procurement practices of professionals in Kenya. A study by Wambua and Karanja (2021) revealed that many public procurement officers lacked exposure to sustainability assessment tools and supplier evaluation frameworks that integrate economic, social, and environmental factors. In addition, limited access to market information on sustainable suppliers made it difficult for professionals to source environmentally friendly products or services that also meet social inclusion requirements. This situation is exacerbated by minimal budgetary allocation for sustainability initiatives, resulting in a disconnect between procurement plans and actual execution. Consequently, even where sustainability clauses are included in tenders, monitoring compliance remains weak, and follow-up mechanisms are rarely enforced.

Literature also highlights the enabling conditions that can enhance the role of procurement professionals in driving sustainable development in Kenya. Studies recommend targeted professional development programs, integration of sustainability performance into job descriptions and appraisals, and stronger collaboration between procurement officers and environmental or social experts (Onyango & Ondiek, 2021). Additionally, the establishment of sustainability reporting requirements can help institutionalize accountability and encourage professionals to go beyond procedural compliance. Such measures would not only improve the technical capacity of procurement staff but also create a culture where sustainability is seen as an integral part of procurement value delivery, rather than an optional add-on. In doing so, procurement professionals can become key agents in advancing Kenya's Vision 2030 goals and meeting its commitments under the SDGs.

1.5 Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design to evaluate the practices of procurement professionals in promoting sustainable development within Kenya's public sector. The target population comprised procurement managers, supply chain officers, and other procurement practitioners working in state corporations and selected government ministries. A stratified sampling technique was applied to ensure representation across different sectors, including infrastructure, health, education, and environment-related agencies. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations.

1.6 Results and Findings

The findings of the study revealed that procurement professionals in Kenya exhibit varying degrees of engagement in integrating sustainability principles into their procurement functions, reflecting both advancements and persistent gaps. A substantial proportion of respondents indicated awareness of the sustainability provisions enshrined in the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA) 2015 and the Sustainable Procurement Guidelines (2018), which emphasize the integration of economic, social, and environmental considerations into public procurement (PPRA, 2018; GoK, 2015). Economic sustainability practices were the most frequently implemented, with respondents reporting consistent application of measures such as promoting local content, enhancing SME participation, and enforcing Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) provisions for youth, women, and persons with disabilities (Kariuki & Wanjohi, 2020; PPRA, 2022). These measures benefited from clear legislative backing and political goodwill, making them easier to operationalize compared to social and environmental dimensions. Nevertheless, the data indicated that sustainability in procurement is often approached in a compliance-driven manner rather than as a strategic tool for achieving long-term development goals (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012; Onyango & Ondiek, 2021).

Regarding social sustainability, the results demonstrated that procurement professionals occasionally embedded social inclusion clauses—such as gender equity, fair labor practices, and opportunities for marginalized communities—into tender requirements (Gichuru, 2018; UNEP, 2021). While these inclusions align with Kenya’s Vision 2030 social pillar and SDG targets, follow-up mechanisms to ensure compliance were weak. Several respondents acknowledged that contract management rarely extended to verifying adherence to these clauses, largely due to insufficient collaboration between procurement departments and social oversight bodies (Muturi & Otieno, 2020; Wambua & Karanja, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of robust monitoring frameworks and standardized reporting tools hindered accountability, resulting in a gap between stated policy objectives and tangible social outcomes. This finding aligns with similar observations in other African contexts, where well-crafted policies exist but implementation falters due to limited institutional capacity and weak enforcement mechanisms (Osei-Tutu et al., 2014; Ambe, 2016).

Environmental sustainability emerged as the least integrated dimension in procurement practice. Despite the existence of policy instruments advocating for green procurement, such as the Sustainable Procurement Guidelines (2018) and the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) 2018–2022, only a minority of procurement professionals reported applying environmental assessment tools or lifecycle costing in their operations (GoK, 2018; UNEP, 2019). Barriers identified included a perceived cost premium for environmentally friendly products, lack of supplier readiness to meet environmental standards, and insufficient training on environmental evaluation techniques (Walker & Brammer, 2012; Onyango & Ondiek, 2021). Many professionals described environmental sustainability as a donor-influenced agenda rather than a core national priority, resulting in ad hoc rather than systematic integration. This mirrors findings from South Africa and Ghana, where environmental criteria are often sidelined due to budgetary constraints and inadequate market infrastructure for green products (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012; Osei-Tutu et al., 2014).

Institutional and systemic factors were also found to significantly influence the practices of procurement professionals. The study identified a lack of dedicated budget allocations for sustainability initiatives, minimal inclusion of sustainability performance indicators in procurement staff appraisals, and inadequate interdepartmental coordination as key inhibitors (Wambua & Karanja, 2021; PPRA, 2022). Procurement officers noted that their performance evaluations are largely focused on compliance with statutory timelines and cost savings,

leaving little incentive to prioritize sustainability objectives (Gichuru, 2018; Onyango & Ondiek, 2021). This performance measurement misalignment has been observed in multiple jurisdictions, where procurement reforms succeed in policy articulation but fail in embedding sustainability into operational and evaluation frameworks (Preuss, 2009; UNEP, 2021).

Despite these constraints, the research documented notable examples of good practice that illustrate the transformative potential of procurement professionals when institutional enablers are present. In certain state corporations, sustainability was mainstreamed into procurement planning, with professionals engaging in supplier capacity-building programs, collaborating with environmental and social experts to design specifications, and tracking performance indicators beyond contract delivery (PPRA, 2022; Onyango & Ondiek, 2021). These cases demonstrated that when procurement units are supported by top management, given access to relevant training, and held accountable for sustainability outcomes, they can play a pivotal role in advancing Kenya's sustainable development agenda in line with Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (GoK, 2015; UNDP, 2020).

1.7 Conclusions

The study concludes that procurement professionals in Kenya play a vital role in influencing the integration of sustainability principles into public procurement, yet their effectiveness is uneven across the three dimensions of sustainable development. Economic sustainability practices have been embraced more readily, largely because they are clearly defined in legislation and supported by government initiatives that encourage participation by local suppliers and special interest groups. Social sustainability considerations, while present in procurement documents, are often undermined by weak enforcement and inadequate follow-up during contract execution, limiting their actual impact. Environmental sustainability remains the most neglected area, with professionals facing barriers such as limited expertise, lack of resources, and the perception that eco-friendly procurement options are more costly. Overall, the findings suggest that while procurement professionals have the potential to be key drivers of sustainable development, this can only be achieved if their role shifts from simply meeting compliance requirements to actively delivering outcomes that balance economic, social, and environmental objectives.

1.8 Recommendations

The study recommends a strategic shift in how procurement professionals are equipped, evaluated, and supported in order to improve the integration of sustainability into procurement practices. Targeted training programs should be introduced to strengthen their skills in sustainable procurement planning, supplier engagement, environmental evaluation, and social inclusion monitoring. Performance appraisal systems should be revised to include sustainability indicators alongside traditional measures such as cost control and timeliness, ensuring that professionals are incentivized to achieve broader development outcomes. Stronger monitoring and enforcement mechanisms should be established to ensure that sustainability provisions included in tender documents are fully implemented during contract execution. Procurement units should also be encouraged to work closely with specialized agencies to enhance technical oversight on environmental and social requirements. Finally, the allocation of dedicated funding for sustainability initiatives would address resource-related constraints and help embed sustainable procurement as a standard practice rather than an optional or externally driven activity.

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