

## **SUSTAINABLE SOURCING: THE PATH FOR COMPANIES TO MINIMIZE THEIR ECOLOGICAL IMPACT BY ENGAGING IN RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”*

*-George Bernard Shaw*

Man, society, and the environment are all interconnected. Man has an intrinsic responsibility to defend both nature and society. This fundamental idea includes environmental conservation. However, the rapid expansion of science, technology, and the economy has intensified their negative effects on the environment. They have increased ecological imbalances and environmental deterioration. As a result, numerous particular laws are created to safeguard the environment and ecology. In addition to these laws, the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 and its numerous rules have been created to prevent, control, and mitigate all sorts of pollution. However the applicability of these laws is in jeopardy since firms are hesitant to comply. Businesses are requesting corporate social responsibility (CSR) to protect the environment and care for human resources. CSR refers to businesses voluntarily incorporating social and environmental issues into their operations and interactions with stakeholders, but is it necessary? Various reports have emerged demonstrating that businesses are not even meeting the bare minimal regulatory requirements for greater environmental protection. The second thing that comes to mind after reading these studies and hearing corporations' arguments in favour of CSR is if corporate houses are truly protecting the environment or if they have other goals in mind. Once more, will businesses sacrifice their profits for environmental impact? The first and most important question is whether firms use CSR to hold their shareholders accountable or out of social obligation. This article explores the relationship between corporate social responsibility and environmental preservation as well as the notion of corporate social responsibility. The final step is to present the countermeasures for businesses to take on environmental protection obligations.

**Keywords:** Environmental conservation, ecological imbalances, Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, corporate social responsibility (CSR), human resources.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Due to its critical role in the profitable expansion of businesses as well as the preservation of social and environmental value, "sustainability" is one of the most important phrases for all types of organisations in the twenty-first century. (Corbett and Klassen, 2006; Kolk and Pinkse, 2008). The concern for environmental degradation is one of the three pillars of sustainability that has the most influence on how governments and international businesses conduct their business. The movement first gained traction in the late 1990s, as more people became aware of their "carbon footprint" (CFP) and the effects of global warming. About 150 nations approved the Kyoto Protocol (United Nations, 1997), which aimed for a reduction in the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Furthermore, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) concluded that greenhouse gases have a significant negative impact on our ecosystem. Different nations have developed a variety of regulatory and transactional measures as part of their sustainability programmes, including the Emission Trading System, Carbon Cap and Trade, and Carbon Tax. (Gonzalez et al., 2009). Organizations are increasingly aware of and sensitive to carbon emissions, with companies like Walmart, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Volkswagen, and Ericsson setting carbon targets in the 2011 annual report. To reduce their carbon footprint (CFP), businesses are adopting environmentally friendly equipment, less polluting cars, and greener working procedures. Customers are also influencing this change by increasing socially and ecologically sensitive consumption habits. Implementing sustainable practices can reduce environmental carbon emissions and greenhouse impacts. Issues with sustainable supply chain management, such as green manufacturing, reverse logistics, and green purchasing, have been extensively studied. The importance of environmental costs in supply chain strategy is expected to increase in the coming years. This study focuses on a literature review of sustainable operations, discussing the concepts of sustainable supply chain and CFP, research methodology, findings, and future research ideas.

## **BACKGROUND**

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have been increasingly interested in how corporations and their suppliers' effect on the environment, society and the economy (Walker, H. and Wendy, P.; 2006). Today, more than ever, the strategic significance of supply and procurement as a lever for sustainable growth is clearly visible. Modern business practises demonstrate that companies and their partners are concentrating their procurement strategies on minimizing the environmental "footprints" of their supply chain and procurement operations. Companies have begun to evaluate environmental concerns from a competitive perspective as a result of the desire to increase organizational effectiveness, minimize waste, mitigate supply chain risk, and attain a competitive position. (Humphreys, P.K.; 2003). This study focuses on the integration of environmental and sustainable development pillars into procurement processes, highlighting the growing importance of sustainability. Factors contributing to this include a better understanding of climate change, pressure from stakeholders, and increased transparency. Procurement managers play a crucial role in influencing environmental and social performance through actions like product or service specification, evaluation, supplier selection, and performance evaluation of providers. However, there is a lack of systematic recording of these concepts, which could be useful in promoting sustainable buying. This study offers a critical assessment of sustainable

procurement as a concept and practice, highlighting its practical consequences and research gaps. It provides a synopsis of relevant literature, conversations, findings, and suggestions to help organizations navigate these challenges.

### **Definitions**

According to the quadruple bottom line principles, **sustainable procurement** is the process of acquiring goods and services while taking into account its implications for the environment, the economy, society, and good governance. With some small variations in tactics, objectives, and results, the principles of sustainable procurement are applicable to both the public and private sectors.

**Ethical Sourcing:** whether or whether the focal organisation is formally liable, procuring the resources, goods, and services that an organisation requires from its suppliers in an ethical and socially responsible manner. In order to secure equitable pay for local communities and prevent unethical labour practises like child labour or slavery, ethical sourcing prioritises moral and social values. Sourcing ethically goes beyond the statutory accountability set out by governments.

**Sustainable Sourcing:** obtaining from suppliers the resources, goods, and services a company requires while taking into account the effects of its supply chain strategy and operations on the environment and society. Sustainable sourcing employs a comprehensive strategy that is essential to triple bottom line (business as usual) thinking and considers the environmental and social boundary requirements of sourcing methods. Therefore, sustainable sourcing extends beyond opinions that the Triple Bottom Line is a balancing act, as well as formal accountability regarding sustainability that is imposed by governments.

**Sustainable Supply Chain Management:** Sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) is the incorporation of environmental and social effect along a focus company's and its suppliers' procurement and manufacturing processes, as well as the delivery of such products and services to consumers. As a result, SSCM can concentrate on enhancing the sustainability of both current supply chains and the goods and services themselves. In the end, SSCM contributes to a comprehensive and long-term strategic view of a business and its supply chain, going beyond formal accountability, environmental and social rules imposed by governments, and going beyond perspectives considering the Triple Bottom Line as a balancing act.

### **Sustainable Procurement Concept and Connotation**

Sustainable procurement has lately gained significant attention in international policy circles, reflecting wider concerns to ensure sustainable development. (Brammer, S. and Walker, H.; 2011). By incorporating sustainability concepts, sustainable procurement tries to expand on conventional procurement practices. Acquisition of products, works, and/or services from the provider is referred to as procurement (this may be an individual or organization). According to Van Weel's model description, the procurement process comprises sourcing (planning: needs identification and assessment, supplier selection), contracting, monitoring and evaluation, and expediting (2002). In order to satisfy the needs of the client, sustainable procurement is the "process of procuring goods, works, and services from a supplier that offers the best overall value in terms of both prices and benefits." It is a method by which businesses satisfy their demands for products, services, works, and utilities in a way that maximises value for money over the long term, providing advantages for the business as well as for society, the economy, and the environment while avoiding environmental harm. (CIPS Knowledge Summary

December 2008 issue, also see Greengage Consulting –Sustainable Public Procurement Policy, April 2004. p6, & Aurora Energy’s Sustainable Procurement Policy Document version 3; September 2008)”. The practise of acquiring products and services while taking into account the social, economic, and environmental effects that such purchases have on individuals and communities is known as sustainable procurement. It involves taking into account the materials used in the goods, their origin, who manufactured them, how they were transported, and how they would be disposed of in the end. Sustainable procurement is making purchasing decisions while considering economic, environmental, and social implications into account. This involves raising availability, quality, and pricing. But also social effects connected to the origin of the product or service and environmental life cycle impact.

### **Why is sustainable purchasing crucial?**

Customers, clients, the government, and the general public are putting more pressure on businesses, both public and private, to adopt sustainable procurement practises. In accordance with the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Creation, all relevant authorities should "support public procurement policies that foster the development and dissemination of ecologically sound goods and services." Business owners and professionals quickly implemented policies and plans that incorporated concerns about sustainable development as a response, such as the UK Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production. The Advisory Committee on Consumer Products and the Environment was created by the government as a first step in putting this policy into action. According to a research, conducted throughout Europe and released in August 2009, 80 percent of buyers started sustainable procurement programmes in 2008 and 90 percent consider them "essential" to their company's existence. Sustainable procurement involves an organisation meeting its needs for products, services, utilities, and labour while aiming to maximise net benefits for both the organisation and the global community. In doing so, companies must take into account extrinsic costs in addition to the traditional price and quality procurement criteria. These factors are often broken down into three categories: environmental, economic, and social, or "triple baseline." The optimal use of raw materials in industrial processes, pollution reduction, waste reduction, and energy conservation are the key environmental concerns. Sustainable procurement: potential benefits

### **Management of a Sustainable Supply Chain**

Managing a web of connections that allows for the optimal delivery of goods or services to customers is the focus of supply chain management. It allows firms the opportunity to compile data on how effectively each link in the supply chain upholds social and environmental responsibility in a sustainability framework. The term "sustainable development" was defined in the World Commission on Environment and Development report, "Our Common Future." (Brundtland et al., 1987). The "triple bottom-line" strategy was put out (Elkington, 1994) and took into account social and environmental considerations in addition to profit and loss. Economic expansion is the primary goal of a supply chain, which entails increasing profit and decreasing loss (Goetschalcks and Fleischmann, 2008; Nagurney, 2010a, 2010b). However, the triple bottom-line strategy demands a balance between the three goals. The literature on supply chain management emphasizes the importance of sustainable practices in a sustainable environment. A sustainable supply chain can deliver socially useful commodities or services without endangering the environment. Efficiency and sustainability objectives trade off, but a

sustainable supply chain can provide long-term benefits. It focuses on economic performance, environmental care, and social responsibility, forming the triple bottom-line strategy.

(1) Financial performance: It represents the organisational or player's earnings, which take into account cash flow along the supply chain. The companies are involved in the supply chain in order to profit and expand.

(2) Environmental protection: Environmental protection and safety are its primary concerns. A company should prioritise reducing pollution, minimising the use of natural resources, using biodegradable goods, and recycling.

(3) Obligation to society: It alludes to the social aspect. Workplace safety must be a priority for organisations. They ought to stay away from forced or underage labour. They must undoubtedly contribute favourably to society. There are six strategies to increase supply chain management's sustainability, according to researchers. Those are

(i) A company has to pinpoint the key points in its outdated supply chain where it may introduce new operating procedures to reduce its environmental effect;

(ii) Organizations must put up certain methods to monitor the implementation of the new measuring standards and identify their shortcomings;

(iii) Organizations should determine certain aims for them in accordance with governmental regulations and the research team's capacity;

(iv) try to collaborate with different sustainable links, namely, suppliers for raw materials, logistics;

(v) Companies can purchase offsets for their CFP and can give to various forms of social participation.

Transparent supplier chains are essential for sustainable supply chains, involving reverse logistics, sustainable raw materials, product design, and operational adjustments. Green buying reduces environmental risks and increases sustainability. Research shows eco-efficiency can be integrated with traditional supply chains. Large corporations are adopting sustainable techniques, and quantifying carbon footprint is crucial for ecosystem impact. (2012) examined the supply chains of three potential environmental sustainability building blocks and five distinct fashion firms. Govindan et al. (2013) used a fuzzy multi-criteria method to assess a supplier selection's sustainability performance based on the triple bottom-line approach. Shaverdier al. built a sustainable supply chain evaluation model in the publishing sector using the fuzzy analytic hierarchy process (AHP) (2013).

### **Sustainable Procurement with Good Governance**

Sustainable procurement regulations must consider environmental, social, economic, and governance factors. Understanding greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on communities and society is crucial. Socially conscious aspects like cultural diversity and promoting women- and minority-owned firms are also essential. Sustainable buying supports various businesses, goods, and services, ensuring long-term use of sustainable procurement. In firms that are devoted to sustainability, the economic pillar of sustainability is an essential part of sustainable buying and exposes cost reduction as a key component. All of these three factors are then connected together into the component of good governance, sustainable purchasing it has historically been considered as ecologically friendly the means of delivering services and buying goods for public sector organisations. However, green purchasing in the private sector that is designed inside the supply chain or other parts of corporate operations is also used in

other businesses. Sustainable procurement was recognised as strong corporate governance by Walker and Brammer (2009). Sustainable procurement policies have the potential to solve social and climate change problems. (Alibašić 2018b).

### **Green Purchasing**

The environmental advantages of such tactics are the main emphasis of the majority of sustainable procurement policies. Numerous instances of green public procurement techniques emphasising environmental sustainability were offered by Shakya (2019). In order to comprehend sustainable procurement practises, organisations that are committed to advancing environmental goals and lowering greenhouse gas emissions are crucial factors. Organizations have recently embraced the environmental advantages of buying, and greening of procurement has been ingrained inside them. Energy-efficient computers, low-energy buildings, recycled paper, cleaning services using ecologically friendly materials, and electric, hybrid, or low-emission automobiles are a few examples of green procurement methods. (Theron and Dowden 2017, p. 45). According to Alibai's analysis, other leadership tactics include energy efficiency improvements and sustainable energy policies with contracts for renewable energy (2018a, c).

### **Considering Ethics in Sustainable Procurement**

Understanding ethical issues is crucial for developing a strategic sustainable buying strategy. Reid (2009) adopted an ethical perspective when looking at sustainability. Among the most important concerns affecting the public and private sectors are climate change, social inequality, poverty levels, access to healthcare, housing, environmental degradation, energy, and other disasters. In order to become self-sufficient and sustainable, public sector organisations are taking proactive measures, such as investing in plans for more environmentally friendly procurement practises. Preuss (2007) talked about how sustainable procurement is transforming and becoming an investment in the future. For the public and commercial sectors to undertake sustainable acquisitions and investments, such system transformation and a new norm are required to maintain the highest standards in service delivery in the public sector, ethical consideration in sustainable procurement is crucial. Such moral issues are in line with the ethical obligations and long-term planning outlined 600 years ago by Ibn Khaldun (1406, 1969) in *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Sustainable purchase programs are congruent with worries about global earth stewardship since they are based on morals, religion, and ethics. Zaidi (1981) brought up the moral dilemma of resource exploitation. Better environmental and social results result from sustainable procurement practices, which Worrell and Appleby (2000) referred to as excellent stewardship of natural resources.

### **Sustainability in the Private Sector's Procurement**

To maintain the highest standards in service delivery in the public sector, ethical consideration in sustainable procurement is crucial. Such moral issues are in line with the ethical obligations and long-term planning outlined 600 years ago by Ibn Khaldun (1406, 1969) in *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Sustainable purchase programmes are congruent with worries about global earth stewardship since they are based on morals, religion, and ethics. Zaidi (1981) brought up the moral dilemma of resource exploitation. Theron and Dowden (2017) made the case that the private sector must embrace techniques of public sector procurement since private sector companies rely on billions of contracts in public sector

procurement. Meehan and Bryde (2011) highlight sustainable purchasing as a strategic opportunity for organizations, to promote a just and equal society. Businesses often adopt sustainable procurement practices to gain market share and improve service provision. This is due to commercial opportunities, improved brand value, increased sales with ethical consumers, meeting corporate social responsibility objectives, avoiding negative publicity, and fostering stakeholder goodwill.

### **Frameworks for Sourcing That Is Ethical And Sustainable**

To promote ethical and sustainable sourcing in international supply chains, several initiatives have been launched. The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) was established in 1998 to motivate businesses to act ethically and to advance fair labour practises in their supply chains. To advance ethical commerce, the ETI brings together businesses, labour unions, and non-governmental groups. ETI created a "Base Code" based on the International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, as shown in Table 1. This fundamental code offers guidelines for moral interactions amongst the supply chain partners of the focal enterprises. The United Nations (UN) Global Compact is another international project that focuses on sustainability concerns and aims to encourage businesses to embrace sustainable and socially responsible practises. As seen in Table 2, the 10 principles of the UN Global Compact center on human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption. Additionally, the UN Global Compact developed programmes to promote transparency and traceability in global supply chains as well as responsible management education (UN Global Compact, 2014). (Wall, Mburayi, Johnson, 2020). Other initiatives, like Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Global Organic Textile Standard, and Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), concentrate on particular products or product groups (for a list of international sustainability initiatives by product (group), see UN Global Compact, 2014).

### **Purchase Habits and Supplier-Buyer Interactions**

The purchasing function within a company is widely acknowledged to have the potential to play a strategic role in the organization's (economic) performance (Gelderman and Van Weele, 2005), and it is also widely believed to have a significant impact on sustainability performance (Ageron, Gunasekaran, Spalanzani, 2012; Large & Thomsen, 2011), both at the level of the focal organisation and its supply chain (Luzzini et al., 2015). Ageron et al. (2012) provide a paradigm for sustainable supply management (SSM), focusing on creating a sustainable business from the viewpoint of the focal (purchasing) enterprise. Traditional standards like cost, quality, timeliness, and service are supplemented with sustainability.

From the suppliers' perspective, SSM performance depends on a variety of demographic criteria as well as top management vision and support (Ageron et al., 2012). Additionally, design flexibility is required to handle various power and dependent circumstances in SSM. The Kraljic portfolio matrix (Kraljic, 1983) is viewed as a technique to identify and manage various supplier ties and build buying strategies in the context of purchases. Strategic, bottleneck, leverage, and non-critical product categories are divided into four quadrants in the Kraljic matrix. More balanced power interactions are seen in the non-critical quadrant (Canils & Gelderman, 2007). In a worldwide setting, these questions of power and dependency are crucial for ethical and sustainable sourcing. Focused firms prefer strategic major and multinational suppliers from Western Europe for sustainability in their supply chain. Jointly reliant connections between customers and suppliers are positively connected to socially

responsible sourcing. However, buyer power may limit this focus, such as prioritizing cheaper costs. Traditional purchasing behavior based on the Kraljic matrix is impacted by ethical and sustainable sources. Pagell et al. (2010) found that focused organizations show strategic purchase behavior towards commodities, aiming to build a sustainable supply chain. Relational and contractual governance are key in facilitating buyer-supplier relationships, with relational governance focusing on informal mechanisms and contractual governance on formal procedures.

### **Contextual Effects of Sustainable Procurement**

Design, the use of non-renewable materials, manufacturing processes, service delivery, use, operations, maintenance, reuse, recycling options, disposal, and suppliers' abilities to address these effects along the supply chain should all be taken into account when making sustainable procurement decisions. Realistically, even in traditional procurement and supply chain management operations, the social and economic issues behind sustainable procurement are already apparent. The supplier offer review and/or supplier selection process places the primary emphasis on factors like pricing, user-friendliness, quality, efficiency in delivery, etc. So, for the sake of this essay, we concentrate on the environmental component. We give a quick explanation of how the procurement process is affected in the sentences that follow.

### **Research implications for the future**

Sustainable procurement is a widely accepted concept, but there is limited research on prioritizing it for economic value generation. The interaction of economic, social, and environmental factors in procurement decision-making is uncertain. There is a lack of performance-measuring tools to assess the effects of sustainable procurement on organizational performance. The manufacturing industry has more research on sustainable procurement than public or service sectors. In underdeveloped countries, it is rarely used. For instance, the Republic of Uganda's government announced a ban on the use of "polyethen bags/papers" a decade ago. At the moment, the majority of locally manufactured foods are packaged using the same material. This would increase the likelihood of policy failure. What causes this type of tendency in company operations is not at all evident. This is a possible avenue for research on the subject. The fact that sustainability programmes like sustainable procurement have been successful in industrialised nations with supportive legal (and legislative) frameworks is further evidence of their effectiveness. However, there is no empirical data to support a correlation between the restricted usage of sustainable procurement techniques in developing nations and the lack or insufficiency of sustainability-focused legislation. It is more urgently necessary to do research on this topic from the perspective of emerging nations. It is necessary to do empirical research on the role of public procurement and government in achieving sustainability, particularly about the procurement activities of local and central government organizations in a developing nation like Uganda. According to anecdotal evidence, the role of public sector procurement in sustainability has not been sufficiently researched.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research focuses on four themes in sustainable buying: shifting attention from environmental concerns to social and economic goals, sustainable development and innovation, moral supply difficulties, and measurement problems. Policy changes related to sustainable procurement are suggested, including senior government commitment, promoting



environmentally friendly supply methods, and fostering consumer-driven reactions in supplier marketplaces. The study also suggests educating suppliers, working with SMEs, including sustainability criteria in contracts, assessing vendors, identifying risks, exploring alternative sources, and collaborating with suppliers to promote sustainable supply practices. The research also suggests further investigation into systemic perspectives on innovation and sustainability, and quantifying the effects of sustainable procurement. The workshop successfully brought together various parties interested in sustainable procurement, aiming to create a learning network.

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