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9

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Appraising the entrenchment of sustainability into government procurement in sub-saharan Africa: results from the public sector in south west Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Sustainable public procurement (SPP) enables the entrenchment of sustainable development (SD) goals in countries. In the last few years, several studies have examined the implanting of sustainability into public procurement; however, empirical studies on the incorporation of SPP in developing countries have been largely neglected.

Methodology: In an attempt to fill this research gap, the paper utilises a survey to examine the embedding of sustainability into public procurement in Nigeria. Results were achieved through questionnaires sent to 103 respondents working in the Nigerian public sector.

Findings: The findings of this study show that the main bottlenecks in implementing SPP in public sector organisations are the lack of top management support and the lack of expertise.

Originality: This paper contributes to the concepts of SPP and developing countries literature by integrating these areas into one study. At policy level, it gives more insight into the main bottlenecks in the embedding of sustainability into public procurement.

Keywords: Nigeria; sustainability; supplier relation management; procurement policy and processes; public sector; developing countries.





INTRODUCTION

Jacques (2014) portends that the current path of human consumption of the earth's ecosystem is unsustainable because

- 1 it results in deep social crises from systematic exhaustion and
- 2 it leads to an unjust distribution of wealth and well-being.

The world is facing increased sustainability challenges; because of increased economic and industrial activities, the planet is already undergoing the effects of global warming, the degradation of ecosystems and a depletion in non-renewable energy resources (Adebayo, 2015a).

This research aims to examine and assess the level by which sustainability measures have been incorporated into the public sector in developing countries. Specifically, the study examines sustainable procurement in six South Western states in Nigeria; the states are, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Lagos States.

The remaining sections of this study are presented as follows: The first part provides an introduction to sustainability and literature review of sustainability and Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) concepts. The paper then expounds on the research objectives, methodology and methods for data analysis. The results are then presented followed by a discussion of the findings, the last part of the paper will provide the conclusion, limitations and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of Sustainability is an indefinite concept; this is mainly because it is multifaceted and assimilates a wide range of factors and thus, *consequently*, there is an absence of specificity in terms of focus. In addition, it is an opaque term because it means different things to different people; for instance, some business firms view sustainability as an awkward notion that encumbers their operations, some firms see it as an opportunity to develop their Public Relations (PR) profile while other organisations view it as an opportunity to generate value. From a public policy perspective; in the main, there is increasing cognition of the effects of Climate Change (CC) and the need to articulate and apply policies to combat its effects. However, there are still elements of political disparagement towards the effects of CC. It is even more intricate at the individual and household viewpoint; there are a myriad of opinion on the veracity of scientific evidence of the effects of CC and its consequences on Sustainable Development (SD).

Brundtland et al. (1987) defined sustainability as development that meets the needs of the current generation without impeding on the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Fuller (2008) presented a more encompassing description of sustainability by positing





that — sustainability is making the world work for 100% of humanity, through spontaneous cooperation, without environmental and ecological offense or disadvantage to anyone. The concept of sustainability involves the preservation of the earth — its resources, human, plant, sea and animal life. These objectives presents a multifarious and elaborate range of issues that cuts across transdisciplinary functions. Essentially, untying and providing solutions to sustainability issues have economic, biological, physical, chemical, anthropological, demographic, ecological and social dimensions; this explains why there are no specific sustainability theoretical frameworks.

Existing sustainability models and structures are mainly:

- 1 drawn from policy initiatives and efforts
- 2 drawn from other functional¹ theoretical models and perspectives that are used in explaining sustainability challenges.

Some of the main theoretical perspectives that this paper will draw upon include

- 1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory and
- 2 Resource-Based View (RBV) framework.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

IISD (2013) states that CSR promotes a vision of business accountability to a wide range of stakeholders, apart from shareholders and investors. They further posit that the concept of CSR is underpinned by the idea that corporations can no longer act as isolated economic institutions operating in detachment from the broader society. Tate et al. (2010) as cited in Piecyk and Björklund (2015) describes CSR reports as ways by which organisations communicate social and environmental actions and strategies to the public. In a study on building CSR into strategy, Galbreath (2009) argued that there is a strong relationship between firm performance and its CSR policies.

McWilliams and Siegel (2001) present a different perspective to the discourse; they claim to have identified flaws in existing econometric studies on the relationship between social and financial performance. They explained that existing models estimate the effect of CSR by regressing firm performance on CSR performance, however they argue that a misspecification occurs because investment in Research and Development (R&D) is not included in estimations, they contend that CSR has a neutral impact on financial performance of the firm.

This is somewhat, a valid assertion, given the level of empiricism of their study, however, further evidence from the majority of studies in the body of literature (Galbreath, 2009; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Tate

¹The theories are mainly drawn from Marketing, Economics, Accounting and Physical Science Literatures.





V.O.A. Adebayo

et al., 2010) imply that organisations benefit from having CSR policies that takes into account the sustainability implications of their operations. The authors have not been able to provide further evidence of their stance in the face of contemporary evidence.

There are several examples of organisations that have faced challenges as a result of CSR performance. A notable and recent illustration is the case of Volkswagen; in September 2015, it was found that Volkswagen was illegally using 'cheat devices' to evade clean air standards since 2009. This revelation has led to the resignation of some of the board members, reduction in sales and projected financial losses, and most importantly, a reputational damage and loss of trust that might not be recovered in a long time.

Conversely, companies such as Timberland have received public recognition and goodwill for some of its green initiatives, which include a reduction in its emissions by 50% from 2006 to 2014 (Timberland, 2015).

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Peteraf (1993) opines that the RBV lists four conditions that underlie sustained CA, *all of which must be met*. These includes, superior resources, ex-post limits to competition, imperfect resource mobility and ex-ante limits to competition.

Barney (1991) and Galbreath (2009), expound on these conditions by postulating that the main emphasis is on:

- 1 creating, possibly acquiring and leveraging resources that are casually ambiguous
- 2 socially complex
- 3 difficult to imitate and
- 4 pass through critical time-dependent stages.

According to Ray et al. (2004), the RBV asserts that firms gain and sustain CAs by deploying valuable resources and capabilities that are inelastic in supply. Galbreath (2009) posits that firms who engage stakeholders beyond market transactions – which cannot be easily imitated by competitors can enhance the value of these relationships, thereby enhancing CA.

One of the ways that organisations can foster CA, not easily replicable, is by engendering policies and processes that goes beyond the mundane. For example, Walmart has created extensive supplier relationship networks that includes concepts such as co-branding, product development strategies, co-ownership frameworks that allows the organisation to ensure that production of its merchandises are sustainable. These networks are relatively complex but it gives the organisation a CA over competitors and has led to improved supplier relationalexchangesandmorerelevantly, it has led to improved sustainable performance.



Linking RBV to sustainability objectives of the firm shows various ways by which organisations can create CA over their competitors.

Public procurement

Thai (2008) in a paper on re-examining public procurement, explained that the government is typically involved in four major economic activities:

- 1 the provision of legal framework for economic activities
- 2 redistribution of income through taxes and spending
- 3 provision of public goods
- 4 purchasing of goods, services and capital assets.

McCrudden (2004) adds the social dimension to the debate, the paper considers how governments use public procurement to achieve social outcomes. The paper contends that rather than just regulating market participants through competition laws and minimum wage laws, governments play an active role in the market itself.

Historically, public procurement was a gateway for bureaucracy, corruption and practices in both the developed and developing world; Blackburn et al. (2004) explained that corruption within state institutions was a great concern globally. They opined that public officials hold unique positions of power, abuse of which can lead to significant and long lasting damage to socio-economic development. Mauro (1997) as cited in Blackburn et al. (2004) presents evidence that corruption distorts public expenditures from growth – supporting areas such as education and health towards less productivity enhancing projects such as infrastructure and defence.

The level of malpractice is more pronounced in many African countries and more so in Nigeria (Carrillo, 2000; Rose-Ackerman, 1975). As cited in Adebayo (2015b), Economist (2012) and Watts (2009) report that Nigeria has generated a total of \$1 trillion since 1960, out of which \$400 billion has been professedly embezzled. The newly elected leader of Nigeria, President Buhari stated that over \$150 billion has been misappropriated by public officials since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999 (Ibukun, 2015).

In recent years, public procurement has become a veritable tool for stimulating and coordinating social and economic change. Indeed, governments are using inherent resource and economic influence to impact and accomplish social, economic and redevelopment outcomes. In Nigeria, public procurement is still in a transformational stage. The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) is in charge of public procurement activities in the Nigerian public sector. BPP (2012) explained that before 2007, the Nigerian public sector did not have a centralised public procurement body. Most government ministries, departments and parastatals had internal purchasing departments that managed





V.O.A. Adebayo

their processes and activities. The Olusegun Obasanjo administration instituted a World Bank led reform of the Nigerian public procurement structure; this eventually culminated in the formulation of the BPP. BPP (2015) states that it was established to obtain the best value for money on behalf of the Nigerian government. The body handles all federal procurement projects and decision making frameworks including bid evaluation, supplier analysis and evaluation, contract award and procurement monitoring. At the state level, aggregately, most public procurement decisions are less centralised and much more fragmented. As opposed to the federal BPP, the state public procurement are conducted internally within the state ministries and parastatals without any principal oversight. It is noteworthy to state that there are no standard public procurement practice in the states, *in other words*, there is dichotomy in the public procurement operations of the six states that the research study focused on.

Sustainable procurement in Nigeria

The principal challenge in positing and explaining the notion of sustainability lies in the convolution surrounding the exact definition of the concept. Indeed, businesses and governments have faced challenges in expounding and outlining what sustainability exactly entails, its effects and the overarching consequence on businesses and the human race. Brammer and Walker (2009) posited that SPP sits at the interface between SD and public procurement – a crossing point between public procurement principles of value for money, fairness, equity and the TBL of SD – Economic, Social and Environmental.

Brammer and Walker (2011) in a survey conducted across 20 European countries stated that governments actively promote SME participation in public procurement in order to promote local economies. However, Johnsen et al. (2015) portended that the practise of focussing on SMEs is at odds with public procurement regulation and could be seen as distorting competition. Most countries are incorporating sustainability into public procurement frameworks to achieve triple bottom line targets. In respect to the Nigerian public sector, the concept of Sustainable Procurement (SP) is still at its infancy in Nigeria; principally, there are no entrenched or distinctive policies that focus on sustainable public sector procurement.

SP can be of benefit in the following ways:

Environmental

Nigeria has experienced the negative impact of environmental degradation, CC and the depletion of the ecosystem (Berry, 2011; Clark, 1999; McCarthy, 2009) argued that sustainable procurement can be a potent policy mechanism for engendering SD. Recent efforts have been made to lessen the effects of economic activities on the environ-





ment. Nigeria, recently submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) to the UN Commission on Climate Change (UNCC); the document indicates that Nigeria intends to cut its total Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 45%² by 2030 if they receive international support.

Economic

SP can also be used to stimulate a more economically vibrant society; indeed, SP can be a policy tool to promote local economic development and local regeneration. One of the most notable advantages of SP is the promotion of SMEs. Akenroye and Aju (2013) posited that SMEs can be empowered economically if they have better access to public procurement contracts. Several academic studies have also alluded to the importance of public procurement to SME development (McCrud-den, 2004; Wong and Aspinwall, 2005). The concept of the inclusion of SMEs in public procurement is rooted in SP; *hence*, the adoption and application of SP in public procurement provides an opportunity to facilitate SME inclusion.

Social

Nigeria is inundated with a multitude of socio-economic problems including unemployment (UN, 2009). The population explosion in Nigeria also represents a significant challenge for SD. UNDP (2015) estimates that the Nigerian population will exceed 400 million in 2050, surpassing the USA and it will reach three-quarters of a billion (750) million in 2100. This population increase will have an immense impact on the environment, it will lead to infrastructural pressures and further erode the quality of life of the average Nigerian.

From the foresaid, it can be argued that SP can help governments to:³

The aim of the research is to examine the adoption of SP and the inclusion of SPP in public sector organisations in the SW of Nigeria. In particular, the study will consider the environmental dimension of sustainability. In other to achieve this aim, the paper utilised a quantitative cross sectional method for data collection and analysis.

²The 45% reduction in carbon emissions is dependent on international support. Without international support, they estimate that there will be a reduction of 20%.

³Promote local economic development and coordinate local regeneration programmes:

- limit the effects of socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, housing and transport problems
- redress inequality by SME inclusion and
- ensure that suppliers promote workforce welfare.



For this study, a quantitative analysis was conducted; specific questionnaire items were developed to collect data relevant to the outlined objectives of the study. Specifically, the study employed a cross-sectional field study survey method, using online questionnaires that was sent to selected professionals who work in public sector procurement in Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Lagos States. The questionnaires were sent to 103 selected procurement officials and to maintain privacy, the respondents were assured of complete confidentiality. A response of 58 was received. After data was collated, ten of the responses were incomplete and were therefore discounted; this brought the total number of responses to 48. Data analysis was carried out utilising the statistical software – SPSS.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the survey.

Demographic results

In terms of the demographics of the survey participants, 72% are at the Procurement Officer/Analyst cadre, 16% are managers while 6% indicated that they are Graduate/Entry staff.

Sustainability policy and motivations for incorporating sustainability into procurement decisions

The research sought to establish if organisations have implemented sustainability policies. Respondents were asked if their organisations have sustainability policies. About 83.33% of the participants indicated that they did not.

Environmental policy

Results from the environmental component of the survey administration are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Mean ratings for the environmental dimension of sustainability

Variable	N	X	SD
Energy wastage	48	3.46	1.08
Water pollution	48	3.42	1.11
Releases to water	48	3.42	1.17
Waste and by-products	48	3.52	1.08
Air pollution	48	3.48	1.02
Deforestation	48	2.5	1.1
Emissions to Air	48	2.65	1.13
Protection of endangered species	48	2.44	1.08





This section of the research sought to measure the aspects of the environmental dimensions of sustainability that had been embedded into the organisations. In the main, the researched organisations have incorporated energy, waste, water and air pollution measures into their operations. However, deforestation, emissions to air and the protection of endangered species have not been sufficiently embedded in the organisations.

Appraising the entrenchment of sustainability into government procurement

Main aspects in selecting suppliers

Main aspects considered in selecting suppliers. Ranked in order of importance.

Item	Total Score ₁	Overall rank
Cost	791	1
Financial capacity	651	2
Quality of goods and services	642	3
Reputation	553	4
Reliability	515	5
Service level	436	6
Customer focus	393	7
Innovation	250	8
sustainability	134	9

₁ Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first are valued higher than the following ranks, the score is a sum of all weighted rank counts.

Figure 1 Main aspects considered in the selection of suppliers

Results from the study (this can be seen in Figure 1) show that cost, financial capacity and the quality of goods and services are the main aspects considered in supplier selection. The results show that sustainability is the least value considered when public sector organisations in SW Nigeria select suppliers.

DISCUSSION

Sustainable innovation and development is not just a moral imperative but presents opportunities in both private and public sector organisations. The creation of clean energies, greener technologies can act as a co-benefit to the firm's goals of profit maximisation and cost minimisation. In the public sector, it provides an opportunity to embed sustainability into policy and procurement activities in order to achieve the goals of the TBL sustainability dimensions.

The study reviewed research constructs such as the CSR and RBV models. The CSR model is predicated on the premise that organisations (*both private and public*) can no longer act in isolation of the broader society. Galbreath (2009) posits that firms perform better when CSR





V.O.A. Adebayo

policies are adopted. This paper measured the extent to which public sector organisations in SW Nigeria have embedded environmental dimensions of SP in their operations. The results show that 83.3% of the respondents stated that their organisations did not have a SP. This demonstrates insufficient policy instrumentation towards sustainability issues. This is disparate to research outcomes by Brammer and Walker, (2009, 2011); Walker and Phillips (2008). About 73.19% of the respondents also indicate that they did not have a SPP in their organisations, this shows that sustainability has not been rooted into procurement operations and decision making; the results also shows that the vast majority of organisations do not include specific sustainability criteria in their tenders. The study also measured the incorporation of environmental sustainability factors into the researched organisations. The results are analogous to the results from (Brammer and Walker, 2009). This reveals that organisations that embed environmental components of sustainability focus on energy, water, waste and air pollution. Essentially, there is insufficient emphasis on broader issues such as deforestation, protection of endangered species and emissions to air.

From a country-wide standpoint, the Nigerian Federal Government recently submitted its INDCs to the UNCC where it has pledged to cut its total GHGs by 45% in 2030. Some of the areas the government intends to concentrate on are the reduction in air emissions, reduction in gas flaring and a rebalancing of its transport systems in order to facilitate a modal shift from road to rail for both passenger and freight transport. However, shortly after submitting its INDCs, the government commissioned an extensive oil exploration programme in Northern Nigeria; there could be an argument that this will significantly affect its green targets and additionally, the lack of a SP and SPP at the federal level are restrictive factors.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This paper contributes to the body of literature concerning the incorporation of sustainability in public sector organisations. The paper focuses on the adoption of SP and SPP in the researched organisations. Additionally, the paper specifically considers the extent to which the organisations have imparted environmental components into their operations; the main bottlenecks to the adoption of SPP are also highlighted. In terms of policy significance, the paper allows public sector organisations, especially in developing countries to have further appreciation of the importance of creating CSR and sustainability policies and also to improve their sustainability performance. At practitioner level, it enables public procurement staff to gain deeper understanding of the various parameters of environmental components





of sustainability and also the importance of SPP and the inclusion of sustainability criteria into procurement tenders. Nonetheless, the paper has some weaknesses, there could be an argument that the paper has not included the social and economic dimensions of sustainability into the measurement. Further research on this paper may include a qualitative methodology to allow for deeper analysis and it might also integrate the inclusion of the social and economic dimensions of sustainability.

Appraising the entrenchment of sustainability into government procurement

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V.O.A. Adebayo

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Victor O.A. Adebayo is currently conducting research on sustainable procurement in public sector organisations in developing countries. He has five years' experience working as a procurement practitioner where he participated in both private and public sector procurement and sustainability projects. He has a Master's degree in Business (Internationalisation) from Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland and has also completed a Masters in Purchasing and Supply Chain Management, University of Westminster, London. He has written academic papers on the embedding of sustainability in public sector procurement and has written and presented several conference papers.

**Appraising the
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