



Methodology for mapping
**Sustainable Public
Procurement and
the Sustainable
Development Goals**

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Overview

- 1.1. Many studies have explored the contribution of sustainable procurement towards achieving sustainability objectives. Most have focused on qualitative assessments by deep-dives on specific case studies. Others have attempted to quantify this contribution, with varying degrees of success. Their main limitations are linked to the challenge of separating "projects" from "procurements", or "products" from "processes", together with being able to make generalisations on the basis of very diverse data.
- 1.2. This project set out to explore how we might express the potential contribution of Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP)¹ towards the SDGs. The clear brief, which helped anchor the methodology, deduction process and conclusions, has been to focus on the "added value" that SPP can contribute within a given scenario. For example, if the requirement is for a greener transport system, and procurement has a role to play in meeting this need, our analysis set out to understand the benefits that SPP techniques could generate that are beyond the core requirement. In this example, these could be jobs, innovation, growth, skills, etc. The methodology described in this report attempts to quantify this added contribution in terms of the SD Goals and Targets.
- 1.3. In brief, the aim of this project was to formalise the widely and reasonably held empirical view that SPP can positively contribute towards delivering on the sustainability agenda. This link has been established and the contribution quantified. The conclusions should help rebuild the business case for SPP and reframe it in the broader context of the SDGs.

¹ While the main focus of the project was on sustainable public procurement, the methodology and conclusions may also be applicable to ordinary (non-public) procurement.

Methodology

The Methodology for mapping sustainable procurement and the sustainable development goals consists of 7 steps, cf. figure 1. These 7 steps are explained below the figure.



Figure 1: 7 steps of the methodology

Step 1 – Formulating the research question

The thesis of this project is that SPP has demonstrable links with, and can contribute to, each of the SDGs and targets. This is very much aligned with a similar analysis previously carried out for Infrastructure¹. To establish these links the project team designed a methodology that would rely on mapping SPP contributions to the 169 SDG targets. SPP can be broken down in a variety of ways; the primary concern was to identify an existing robust SPP framework upon which we would tether the analysis and mapping.

Step 2 – Selecting an appropriate SPP framework

ISO20400:2017, the international standard that provides guidance to organisations on integrating sustainability within procurement, was selected as the SPP framework for the analysis. While the ISO guidance is not specific to public procurement, it was reviewed by a group of public procurement experts to ensure that a consistent focus was placed on reasonable and suitable actions that could be made in a public procurement context. Many of the suggested actions and indeed the results of the framework can be applied to both public and private settings, but not all. The authors of the report have maintained this direction because of the risk-averse and rule-based nature of public procurement, which demonstrates that the private sector can follow the public sector rules, but not vice versa.

¹ Please see the UNOPS report: https://unops.economist.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Infrastructure_underpinning_sustainable_development_EN.pdf

Step 3 – Rationalising the evaluation methodology

ISO20400:2017 is comprehensive and extensive. It consists of 4 sections, each with several chapters and requirements. Using the whole ISO20400:2017 framework would have been a mammoth task – too detailed to be useful. Instead, the team reviewed the standard and summarised it, through a series of iterations, in 21 Sustainable Procurement Demands and 48 Sustainable Procurement Criteria². Sustainable Procurement Demands are the necessary building blocks that an organisation needs to ensure in order to deliver SPP; Sustainable Procurement Criteria is the evidence that an organisation would be expected to provide to demonstrate that the Demands have been met.

Sustainable Public Procurement demands – the main components of sustainable procurement, arranged in thematic groups, which can otherwise be understood as organizational functions or elements that would exist in a procuring entity’s makeup – for example, governance structure, human rights policy, environmental impact evaluation process, etc. – i.e. the framework on which SPP depends.

Sustainable Public Procurement criteria – the main activities or actions, described in detail, that need to happen in order for the “demands” to be demonstrated or met. i.e. how SPP delivery may be evidenced.

The following example is provided to further demonstrate the difference between a demand and a criterion. In this instance, the criterion can be tested for in a procurement exercise and provides evidence that the organization has a process in place to address human rights abuses.

SPP Demand	SPP Criterion
<p>“The procuring organisation has a process to identify and mitigate human rights abuses or other negative impacts on human rights across its own operations and supply chains”</p>	<p>“There is an evidence-based list of high-risk procurements, categories or suppliers/supply chains that helps the procuring organisation focus activity where it is most needed”</p>

² Initially the criteria were taken right out of the ISO guidance. However, this was felt to be much too cumbersome (with more than 100 criteria) and so the authors summarized the criteria into a more manageable set of 21.

The Demands and Criteria were organised in 7 thematic groups, reflecting the various aspects of organisational change necessary for SPP, and in line with/ mirroring the ISO20400:2017 standard. These were:

	Organizational governance	Enabling sustainability by communicating its priorities internally and externally, training employees in sustainability, and making procurement decisions based on social and environmental factors such as total cost of ownership and circular economy principles
	Human rights	Ensuring that human rights issues are properly addressed throughout the supply chain, eliminating discrimination of all kinds, and considering the impacts of the procurement on the rights of stakeholders
	Labour practices	Upholding universal workers' rights through the supply chain, including health and safety, and supporting human capacity development
	The environment	Preventing pollution and waste, using resources such as air, water, energy and natural materials sustainably, and considering climate change impacts throughout the procurement
	Anti-corruption/ fair competition	Working to eliminate all forms of corruption and bribery, and supporting underrepresented supplier groups such as women and young people through the procurement process and supply chain
	Consumer issues	Advocating for consumer rights, requiring adherence to local and international laws, purchasing re-used products or requesting take-back programmes where possible
	Community development	Supporting under-represented groups, creating local employment opportunities for women through contract delivery, or considering local innovative solutions

Additional details regarding what each thematic group includes are noted in the diagram below:

Organizational governance 	Human rights 	Labour practices 	The environment 	Anti-corruption/ fair competition 	Consumer issues 	Community development 
Decision-making processes and structures	Due diligence; HR risk situations and avoidance of complicity	Employment and employment relationships and fundamental rights at work	Prevention of pollution; protection of the environment, biodiversity and restoration of natural habits	Anti-corruption	Fair marketing, factual and unbiased information and fair contractual practices; protecting consumers' health and safety	Community involvement and innovation
	Grievance	Health and safety at work	Sustainable use of resources	Fair competition	Sustainable consumption	
	Discrimination and vulnerable groups; civil and political rights	Human development and training in the workplace	Climate change mitigation and adaptation	Respect for property rights		
	Economic, social and cultural rights					

Step 4 – Mapping SPP against SDGs

The SPP Demands and SPP Criteria were mapped against the SD Goals and Targets in a matrix (169 targets by 48 demands). Each Criterion was cross referenced with each target; where a connection/link was established, this was expressed as Direct or Indirect, depending on whether the target was within the scope of the Criterion's main intended outcomes (Direct) or a collateral or secondary effect. For example:

4.1.2 Suppliers are asked to evidence their activities to reduce their environmental impacts across their operations and significant environmental impacts across their supply chains, as part of bidding for public tenders

Impacts directly towards target 3.9:

3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination – because it clearly links the efforts of the private sector/suppliers to reduce their usage of hazardous chemicals through their supply chain.

However, it indirectly impacts on target 12.2:

12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources – because reducing environmental impacts will only be possible through the development of preferences for the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.

Each linkage was expressed in the mapping with the development of a clear logical statement, and colour coded as either direct or indirect. Where no direct or indirect linkages were established, these cells were highlighted.

Step 5 – Validation

The ensuing analysis was repeated and validated by three Sustainable Procurement experts to add additional confidence. In some cases, linkages were added, and in others where the connection was not deemed credible, linkages were removed.

It is worth noting that links between SP Criteria and the SD targets can be argued to exist in the vast majority of cases. To keep to the original brief about “added value” the team focused on clear and explicit connections. The links described above aimed at highlighting more significant contributions rather than the background “signal noise”.

Step 6 – Analysis

Once the mapping was complete, it was fairly straightforward to analyse the results. The team added up Direct and Indirect links for each SD target (across) and each SP criterion. The analysis validates the original thesis and quantifies the additional contribution of SPP towards the SDGs.

Overall, 83 of the 169 SDG targets were found to be directly influenced by SPP, whereas 128 of the 169 targets were found to be indirectly influenced by SPP. In total, 82% of targets were either directly or indirectly influenced by SPP. Additional information and data on the analysis are available in the appendix.

Step 7 – Case studies

A number of case studies were identified that could help illustrate the contribution of SPP towards the SDGs. These were matched with the corresponding SDG. The key contributory elements of each case study were highlighted in a diagram. Only Direct links were used in this process.

To be selected, case studies needed to demonstrate: a clear contribution from procurement; additional benefits to the main objective; and replicability (diverse geographic spread was an overarching criterion for selecting the case studies to strengthen replicability). Research and detailed interviews were carried out and the original candidate pool of 40 was narrowed to 17 – one for each SDG. These were selected on the basis of most linkages (direct/indirect) with the corresponding SDG’s targets and relevance to the overall SDG theme, e.g. a medical case study associated with a health-related SDG. Summaries of these case studies are included in the report, whilst the more detailed versions have been kept on file for future reference.

Limitations

The correspondence between SDGs and the SPP framework developed for the purpose of this work is qualitative and naturally includes an element of subjectivity. It is possible that some of the details might differ, depending on the expert advisors making the connections. However, we do not anticipate these deviations to have a decisive overall effect.

The methodology is prone to producing conservative linking results. This is because it focuses on the "added value" of SPP, i.e. where the benefits are beyond the main objective of each project. This may be misinterpreted as a lower contribution than anticipated, so it is important to communicate it clearly. Having the report and the methodology peer reviewed by a third party expert is one of the initial limitations and may provide additional credibility if pursued in the future.

One of the limitations of the report is that while the methodology seeks to evaluate the linkages between sustainable public procurement and the SDG targets, it has not necessarily been validated through a comparison of the sustainable procurement actions with "normal" procurement actions. In an ideal scenario, the report would compare and contrast the impact that a normal procurement process has with the added value of a sustainable procurement process. This may be an area of future research that can and should be explored.

Other limitations in the methodology pertain to the fact that while the approach used for this analysis seeks to replicate that of the infrastructure report noted above, linkages have not been validated through the use of academic research. The team felt that while this effort would enhance the credibility of the findings, this would significantly extend the resource and time required to develop the report, and this was not feasible.

Additionally, in reviewing some of the cases, while the analysis focused primarily on how the individual procurement actions are linked with individual SDG targets, quantifying the contribution of the impact on those actions on targets was not particularly straightforward. In some cases, for example when the inclusion of sustainability criteria such as "recycled material" or "no toxic chemicals" is logically beneficial to the natural environment and human health, it is almost impossible to identify the extent to which those criteria or actions have contributed to the targets.

This is compounded by the fact that in most if not all cases, procurement is a time limited process, at the end of which goods or services have been delivered. Most procurement exercises are evaluated on their ability to deliver the goods or services efficiently, but stop short of exploring/measuring the outcomes/benefits of those processes several weeks, months or even years afterwards. Many of the cases included in the report were developed through several cumulative procurement processes, but for the sake of simplicity, the report focuses on just one major process, and does not consider the larger historical or political context that may have played a crucial role in the successful completion of the cases.

Recommendations and next steps

This project aimed to quantify (in % terms) the qualitative contribution of SPP towards the SDGs. This did not extend to quantifying the overall improvement e.g. tonnes of waste or CO₂ avoided, contribution to the (local) economy, GDP, population health improvement, etc. This could be attempted as a next step, based on a much larger sample of geographically diverse case studies (to create statistically significant results).

The second part of the above further development could be to extrapolate this contribution to capture the value added from SPP if applied to the 6.5tr Euros of the global public procurement market.

It would be helpful to explore developing a decision-making tool based on this analysis to enable the selection of SDGs that a particular SPP project would seek to contribute towards.

Furthermore, it would be helpful to consider validating the linkages established through academic research, and to conduct a comparison between a "non-sustainable" procurement process, and a "sustainable" procurement process to determine the exact added value of the latter over the traditional approach. Unfortunately, it is quite hard to find these cases in real world contexts.

Appendix

– Analysis of impacts on SDGs

Most impacted SDGs (holistic)

The analysis points to the fact that SPP has the potential to influence 82% of all SDG targets and that it impacts 100% of all SDGs in one way or another. Within these, the SDG with the most potential SPP influences was SDG 11: Sustainability Cities and Communities, which accounted for 108 linkages (39 direct and 69 indirect). This was followed closely by:

- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, which accounted for 69 linkages (41 direct and 28 indirect);
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, which accounted for 51 linkages (28 direct and 23 indirect);
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, which accounted for 53 linkages (23 direct and 30 indirect), and
- SDG 2: No Hunger, which accounted for 52 linkages (22 direct and 30 indirect)

SDG 15: Life on Land was also heavily influenced by SPP with 64 linkages, although only 4 of these were considered direct.



Figure 2: Impact of SPP on SDGs. Legend: red denotes indirect linkages, while yellow denotes direct linkages

Most impacted SDG targets (individual)

While SPP was found to influence all SDGs, a particular influence was noted on the following SDG targets. This helps highlight the extensive impact that SPP can have on preventing and reducing marine pollution of all kinds.

- Target 10.4: "Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality", impacted 17 times by SPP;
- Target 11.6: "By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management", impacted 16 times by SPP;
- Target 11.B: "By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels", impacted 15 times by SPP, and
- Target 14.1: "By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution", impacted 15 times by SPP.

Most influential procurement actions

The analysis highlights that having "a comprehensive policy framework that underpins the implementation of the organisation's sustainable procurement programme" has the most significant contribution towards achieving the SDG targets. Overall, nearly 40 individual SDG targets were influenced by this criterion. This was followed closely by:

- "There is a programme in place to deliver sustainable procurement, through for example procurement interventions", which influenced 34 individual targets;
- "Procurement decisions are made on evidence around sustainability impacts and benefits which may include Total Cost of Ownership, Life Cycle Analysis and circular economy approaches", which influenced 33 individual targets, and
- "Suppliers are asked to evidence their activities to reduce their environmental impacts across their operations and significant environmental impacts across their supply chains, as part of bidding for public tenders", which influenced 32 individual targets.

What this indicates is that comprehensive and supportive SPP policy frameworks can be a significant enabler in delivering the SDGs. It also suggests that an evidence-driven approach to sustainability by both demand and supply can have a big impact on delivering the SDG targets.



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