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# SOCIAL PROCUREMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE NIGERIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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Social sustainability transition in the construction sector seeks to improve safety and health of workers, gainful employment and total inclusiveness. However, one less debated domain within this framework is how employment requirements provide opportunities for the socially disadvantaged such as the poorly educated, youths, immigrants, and disabled individuals to be employed in the construction industry. In Nigeria, there are over 86.9 million people living in extreme poverty. Hence, social procurement as a strategic tool should be used to create employment for these disadvantaged people in the construction sector. Drawing on a systematic review of relevant literature using Prisma to improve the reporting of reviews and analyses, this research examines social procurement practices in other countries with the aim to fill the gap in literature for the Nigerian construction industry highlighting the barriers and strategies for diffusing the approach into the construction industry. The outcome of the result initiates a research domain and promote sound academic debate towards improving total inclusiveness in the Nigerian and African built environment. It was discovered from the results of the study that barriers to social procurement and sustainability in other climes are replica of the Africa's and Nigerian built industry with women having been the most socially disadvantaged groups. It concludes and advocates for a complete overhaul of procurement policies in Nigeria to accommodate the socially disadvantaged groups providing an alternative solution to the increasing shortage of skilled labour force in the construction industry in Nigeria.

Keywords: construction industry, social procurement, social sustainability, socially disadvantaged groups, total inclusiveness

## INTRODUCTION

Social sustainability seeks to improve safety and health of workers, gainful employment, and total inclusiveness. The society and clients in the construction industry are increasingly expecting that the industry should contribute more positively to the communities in which it builds. This have set more challenges for the industry not to concentrate only on productivity and energy efficiency, but also impact significantly to the social wellbeing of the people living in the communities where they are situated in. The UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development which seeks to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development for all by 2030

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(Nnaemeka-okeke et al., 2020), encapsulate the social dimension of sustainability which aims to improve the safety and health of workers; reduce employment discrimination and promote total inclusiveness. But this has always been overshadowed by the environmental and economic dimensions (Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008).

Social procurement being a social policy tool, is used by government, businesses, and the society to create social value. Social value not being a new concept, has of recent, increased interest in the construction industry because of new social procurement legislation around the world with an increased acceptance of the need to ensure construction projects provide social value, rather than simply economic value. (Raiden et al., 2018). Government and socially responsible private clients seek to place new requirements on construction firms to demonstrate how their projects will leave a positive legacy in the communities in which they are built (Burke and King 2015, Petersen and Kadefors 2016, Barraket and Loosemore 2017).

In South Africa, The Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act 5 of 2000 and the Preferential Procurement Regulations of 2001 establishes the obligation of government to award preferential procurement points to enterprises owned by historically disadvantaged persons, including females (ppp.worldbank.org). This policy, therefore, accommodates certain categories of people in the country who have been formerly disadvantaged in the procurement process such as the poorly educated, youths, immigrants, females and the disabled. However, studies in Nigeria have shown that the policy mechanisms for sustainability in Social procurements in Nigeria is inadequate (Olanrewaju et al. 2014; Ogunsanya et al. 2016; Oyewobi et al 2017; Faremi et al. 2017). The Nigerian situation presents a peculiar case with galloping population issues and has been described as been fragile (Okeke et al. 2020). The public procurement Act PPA 2007 which is a tool for industrial policy or used to pursue sustainable development goals (OECD, 2015; UNIDO, 2017), does not accommodate these disadvantaged groups. Hence, not achieving social value. The Public Procurement Act (Amendment) Bill, of 2019 (SBs 106,109, and 158) only reviewed the mobilization fee for contractors, created an e-procurement model and provided a time frame for procurement processes (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre 2019).

Therefore, the paper identifies how employment requirements provide opportunities for the socially disadvantaged such as the poorly educated, youths, immigrants, and disabled individuals to be employed in the Nigerian construction industry through social procurement practices. The objectives perused in this study are (a) highlight the barriers militating social procurement and sustainability practice (b) to identify strategies for integrating these practices into the construction industries in Nigeria. The outcome of the result will initiate a research domain and promote sound academic debate towards improving total inclusiveness in the Nigerian and African built environment and provide an alternative solution to the increasing shortage of skilled labour force in the construction industry. It will also be a focus for government in future social procurement policies.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

This section starts with a conceptualization of the theory on social procurement and Social sustainability followed by the evolving of a conceptual model and an in-depth discussion of the barriers and strategies for integrating these practices into these construction industries that have been identified from the literature.

## Theory on social procurement

Every procurement process needs to have economic, environmental, and social Impact. Social procurement refers to the activities and processes related to the purchase of goods, services and works in public, private or nonprofit sector organizations to generate positive social impacts (Ingrid Burkett, 2010). This process has often focused on ensuring that supply chains generate positive social impacts such as local employment and training, diversity and equality outcomes, and social inclusion. According to Ingrid Burkett (2010), the three ways in which term social procurement is used in organizations are as follows:

- To screen their supply chains to ensure that they do no harm with regards to labour conditions and human rights of workers;
- To add value to the purchase by linking the generation of social impact with the purchase of goods, services and works.
- To refer to the procurement of social services

Therefore, social procurement in this context refers to the inclusion of social value into the procurement of goods, services and construction works.

According to McCrudden (2004), public contracts were linked to labour and employment standards in some countries like the United States or in United Kingdom in the 19th century. Afterwards, government used public contracting to reduce discrimination against women, racial minorities and the disabled. In the construction industry, government can create social value by mandating contractors to employ or purchase from these disadvantaged groups. Studies on social procurement related to employment have for example focused on benefitting local, small, or minority-owned businesses (Walker and Preuss, 2008; Loader, 2016, Loosemore and Denny-Smith, 2016). With few studies on social procurement in specific industries, the construction industry has more potentials to address social challenges through employment and training despite the challenges faced in implementing such policies. Recent research by Petersen (2018) and Troje and Gluch (2019) looked at the institutional changes and the new employment requirements imposed by emerging social procurement policies but less is known about the specific barriers to employment faced by the disadvantaged groups being targeted.

In Sweden, there is a successful use of social procurement in the construction industry to integrate immigrant populations into the labour market (Peterson & Kadefors 2016). Similarly, social procurement has also been used in the United Kingdom to simultaneously provide employment opportunities for women and address gender imbalances in the male-dominated construction industry through projects such as Women in Construction. According to Clarke and Gribling (2008),

there was no evidence of any positive discrimination for women or other target groups or any distinct measures designed to ensure that people from different groups were not discriminated against. Australia is not left out of this success as the Victorian Social Procurement Framework requires all Victorian Government departments and agencies to consider employment and job readiness targets for these socially disadvantaged groups. (Victoria State Government 2018). The refusal of construction industries to comply with government policies for employment of these targeted groups in countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, and South Africa attracts a penalty of being struck off tender lists with government agencies. (Australian Indigenous Procurement Policy 2015).

## Social sustainability concept

Troje & Gluch (2019) described social procurement as social sustainability concept as it involves measures related to health and safety, buying from women-owned and minority-owned businesses, and employment creation for disadvantaged groups. The concept of social sustainability with regards to construction projects, means meeting the needs of the industry, users, and communities where each of these communities have a unique relationship with the project and different expectations and interests from the project (Almahmoud, & Doloi, 2018). Thus, the development of construction projects has the capacity to enhance social sustainability (Du Plessis, 2002). Social sustainability also refers to corporate social responsibility (CSR) which indicates the ethics and social responsibilities, amongst stakeholders resulting from corporate activities with a social dimension (Waddock and Graves, 1997). Safarzad (2017) defined CSR concept as a legal requirement for a company which includes continued commitment toward the community. This increases the efficiency and productivity of the company thereby maximizing its shareholders 'profit while integrating the community's ethical and environmental expectations into the company economic processes.

Eizenberg & Jabareen (2017), proposed a conceptual framework for social sustainability that seeks to enhance the protection of people, regardless of color, origin, culture, or socio-economic status, against risk by fostering the adaptation of just and equitable social, economic, and environmental policies. In the same vein, the triple bottom line theory (TBL) founded by John Elkington can also be referred to as CSR framework with sustainability as its main aim (Brin, and Nehme, 2019). It incorporates the three dimensions of sustainability to achieve continuous profits and long-term social and environmental projects. Therefore, many corporations and nonprofit organizations have adopted the TBL sustainability framework in performing CSR projects.

In the study of the current procurement practices in the Nigerian construction industry, Oyewobi et al., (2017) concluded that Nigeria is yet to embrace the triple bottom line of sustainability initiatives as it places more emphasis on the economic aspect of procurement with social aspect being the most neglected. We would, therefore, like to suggest a conceptual framework that integrates the social aspect of sustainability to the economic and environmental aspect of sustainability while linking the social disadvantaged groups to of social procurement.

Conceptual model

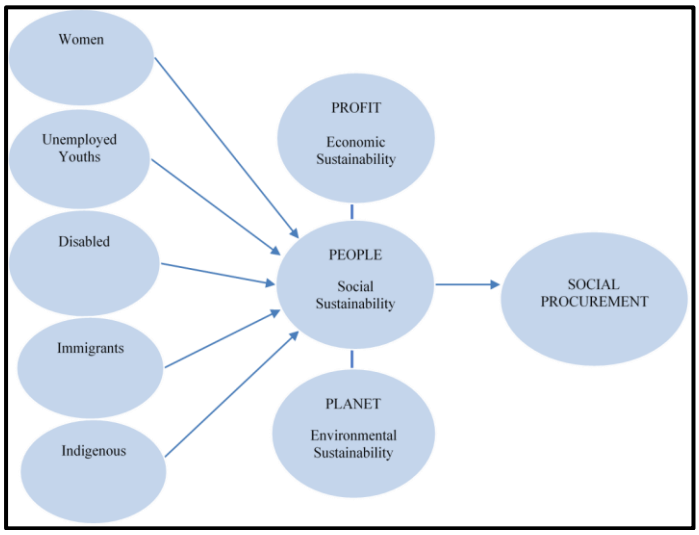



Figure 1: Conceptual model by Author

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model where the social sustainability links the social disadvantaged people (women, unemployed youths, disabled, immigrants and indigenous) to social procurement, Here, the 3 dimensions of sustainability refers to the Triple Bottom Line Theory (TBL). The social dimension of sustainability refers to the people (the disadvantage group). When they are given the opportunity for inclusion, social sustainability is achieved.

## METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research approach and adopted a literature review research design. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was used in this research. We searched goggle scholar database for articles within the year range 2000-2021 with the following keywords: "social procurement"; "social sustainability", "construction industry" and "social disadvantaged groups". Citations from relevant publications were checked to identify the relevant articles. Studies that involved the construction industry and the different social disadvantaged groups in developed countries and developing countries were used. 2750 papers resulted from the search with their titles and abstracts of all references and relevant articles retrieved. Full texts were screened independently, and 1080 papers were retrieved after duplicates were removed. 155 Full text articles were assessed for eligibility while 925 papers were excluded. 132 full text articles were further excluded as they are about social sustainability without involving procurement leaving 32 studies in the qualitative synthesis. Out of the 32 studies, 23 studies were used in the review while 7 studies were further excluded because their abstracts did not reflect the subject topic being searched while 2 studies were also excluded because the full article was not written in English. All reasons for exclusion were documented into a PRISMA flowchart. Using thematic content analysis, data were analyzed and result presented with text and tables. Inferences were deduced based on the results of the study.

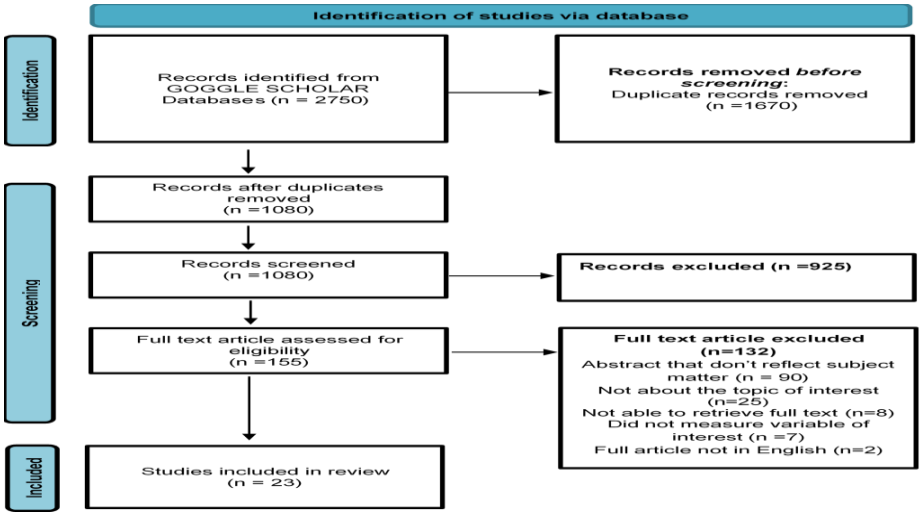


Figure 2: PRISMA diagram showing the process of identification of the studies used in the review.

# ANALYSIS AND RESULT

**Table 1: Overviews of the literature on the barriers to social procurement of disadvantaged groups**

| S/N | Author | Methodology | Location | Research design | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Newton and Ormerod (2005) | Qualitative study | UK | Survey | No appropriate policies and practices were in place to support disabled job applicants through the recruitment process. It is likely that contractors are not fulfilling their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act |
| 2 | Amaratunga et al (2006) | Quantitative and Qualitative | UK | Literature review | women are confronted by a significant number of barriers, beginning with difficulties in joining the field of construction through to capturing the most senior position in the organization's hierarchy. |
| 3 | Ginige et al (2007) | Quantitative | UK | Literature review | The negative image of the construction industry stands as a barrier for the recruitment and retention of women. Welfare facilities (such as medical support and childcare) are also inadequate. |
| 4 | Clarke and Gribling (2008) | Quantitative and Qualitative | UK | semi-structured interviews | No evidence of any positive discrimination for women or other target groups or any distinct measures designed to ensure that people from different groups were not discriminated against. |
| 5 | Shier et al. (2009) | Qualitative | Canada | interview | workplace and employer discrimination are the primary factors impeding people with disability from securing and maintaining employment in the labour market. |
| 6 | Clarke and Wall (2009) | Mixed method | UK and Netherlands | Interviews and questionnaires | Policy in each country addresses the nature of exclusion in different ways. The conclusion drawn is that a sector-specific approach is needed if disability policy in Britain is to be more in tune with the social model—as apparent from the comparison with the Netherlands. |
| 7 | Chan and McCabe (2010) | Quantitative | UK and Europe | Literature review | There were several emerging disparities in terms of age, gender, employment status, and employment conditions. This is due to the marginalization of youths in recruitment into the sector, resilience of women in weathering unemployment, proliferation of non-traditional forms of employment relationship and decline of working conditions. |
| 8 | Ormerod and Newton (2013) | participatory research approach | | interviews | There is need for inclusive approaches within the construction industry by creating awareness that disabled young people can be employed within construction industry while dispelling of the myths that construction is for able-bodied, fit, men. |
| 9 | Quaigrain et al. (2014) | Quantitative | Canada | Literature review | The construction industry's disability management practices remain inadequate. Disability management continues to be a burden to construction employers for the most part, making it difficult to challenge traditional perceptions. |

**Table 1 Cont'd: Overviews of the literature on the barriers to social procurement of disadvantaged groups**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Akomolafe & Mohammed (2015) | Quantitative | Nigeria | Literature review | women are confronted by a significant number of barriers, especially joining the industry through the most senior position in the organization's hierarchy in order to create avenue for other women. |
| 11 | Khatleli (2015) | Qualitative | South Africa | case studies and interviews | increased loyalty to the employers as result of better conditions and pay. Although all the foreigners were regarded to be disciplined productive workforce, their perception of acceptance differed by their country of origin. |
| 12 | Loosemore (2015) | Quantitative | UK | interviews and documentary analysis | Changes are needed to traditional procurement practices. social value requirements were to be incorporated into the existing subcontracts which is a challenge to the supply chain giving a negative stereotype of the disadvantaged groups which the social enterprises employ. |
| 13 | Petersen and Kadefors, (2016) | Quantitative | Sweden | Case studies | Findings suggest that the changes in the construction industry can be understood as an ongoing institutionalization process, where the institutional work of procurement- and construction actors are reshaping old institutional logics towards a more socially service-oriented sustainable industry. |
| 14 | Denny-Smith & Loosemore (2017) | quantitative | Australia | Theoretical framework | social procurement policies which is aimed at helping Indigenous people can inadvertently create negative social outcomes and even disempower the very groups they are designed to help. |
| 15 | Reid and Loosemore, (2017) | Qualitative | | semi-structured interviews | social procurement in construction is currently compliance-driven, confined to low value and low risk activities and delivered mainly by existing industry incumbents who do not understand how to deliver social value, or by micro-organisations that do, but which suffer from a lack of scale and opportunity. |
| 16 | Oyewobi,. et al (2017) | Mixed method | Nigeria | Literature review, interview and document analysis | The current procurement practices in the Nigerian construction industry is yet to embrace the triple bottom line of sustainability initiatives as it places more emphasis on the economic aspect of procurement. The most severe barrier to sustainability is lack of government commitment. |
| 17 | (Akinsiku & Ajala, 2018) | stratified random sampling | Nigeria | survey questionnaire literature review | The barriers which influenced female under-representation in the Nigerian construction industry include; male dominance, family commitments, and long working hours. |
| 18 | Quaigrain & Issa (2018) | exploratory and quantitative | Canada | review of literature | Return-to-work, disability and injury management practices are the most important indicators while physical accessibility and claims management practices are the least important |
| 19 | Loosemore et al. (2019) | conceptual framework | Australia | semi-structured interviews | The results demonstrate the conceptual merit of Furneaux and Barraket's (2014) typology in a construction industry context by highlighting the different constraints on social value creation for each typology. |
| 20 | Mupanemunda, M (2019). | Qualitative | Australia | Content analysis, descriptive statistics, and logistic regression were applied | social procurement can alleviate various forms of inequality both in people's lives and in the communities in which they live. However, significant implementation challenges must be overcome to ensure that the social benefits generated are distributed equitably across various stakeholders involved in the procurement process. |
| 21 | Carlos Oya (2019) | sequential mixed methods | Africa | Comparative framework. | Overall, the project shows that national, sector and economic context are more important in understanding labour conditions in Africa than the country origin of the firm itself. |
| 22 | Loosemore et al. (2020) | Qualitative | Australia | survey | Subcontractors see significant business risks associated with safety, productivity and costs with disengaged youth as the highest risk cohort, followed by migrants and refugees, people suffering disability, ex-offenders, women and Indigenous workers and employment priorities reflect these perceptions. |
| 23 | Pham et al (2021) | empirical | Vietnam | survey questionnaire | Organizational and industrial barriers negatively affect corporate social responsibility practices. Also, education, training and government support could help construction firms in reducing the impact of such barriers. |

Source: Authors

The result of table 1 shown above revealed that just view few studies on social procurement and sustainability have been conducted in Africa and particularly Nigeria. In presenting our findings, the result is based on the review of related articles which indicates the challenges faced by the social disadvantaged in social procurement in construction industries. The barriers and challenges identified in other climes are not different from the perceived obtainable barriers in the African and Nigerian settings. Of all the disadvantaged groups targeted by new social procurement policies, women represent the most well researched group in construction industries with the focus on professional than tradeswomen or disabled women (Amaratunga et al., 2006; Akinsiku & Ajala, 2018; Akomolafe & Mohammed, 2015; Loosemore et al., 2020). As revealed in table 2 below, they are also the group with the most barriers as confirmed by the findings of Amaratunga et al., (2006); Akomolafe & Mohammed (2015); Akinsiku & Ajala, (2018) and this human species account for a reasonable number of Nigeria's total population. The male dominated image and culture of the construction industry is a barrier for employment of women. This is in line with Fielden et al., (2000) as reported in Akomolafe & Mohammed (2015), where the industry's poor image is a reason why so many people, regardless of gender, are uninterested in a career in construction. Also, women have been continuously marginalized in Nigerian construction industry as reported by Akomolafe & Mohammed (2015) and Akinsiku & Ajala, (2018) as they are always fewer than men in such industries. This Research has identified the barriers to employment which is the cause of this underlying problem in the construction industry. Therefore, women should be given the significant policy focus in Nigeria like in Australia as reported by Loosemore et al (2020) where gender diversity in the construction industry is now recognized.

The study also discovered that another important barrier of the disadvantaged group that ranked highest is lack of government commitment. The current procurement practices in the Nigerian construction industry is yet to embrace the triple bottom line of sustainability because it places more emphasis on the economic aspect of procurement than the social or environmental. This corroborates the findings of Oyewobi et al., (2017). Also, lack of support from government is a barrier to the employment of the social disadvantaged group which suggests that social procurement legislation is not being accompanied by the necessary support structures. The same can be said about the 2007 procurement act in Nigeria. This finding is in line with Newton and Ormerod (2005) where No appropriate policies and practices were in place to support disabled job applicants through the recruitment process which suggest that there were no strong policies or penalties. Therefore, it was very likely that contractors were not fulfilling their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. This gives us an idea of where policy makers should focus on when implementing the social procurement policy. The table 2 presented below summaries the categories of the five socially disadvantaged groups, various barriers identified in literature and suggested strategies that can be diffused into the Nigeria's construction industry to become socially responsible.

**Table 2: Summary of barriers and strategies for the employment of socially disadvantaged groups in Nigeria**

| DISADVANTAGED GROUPS | BARRIERS | STRATEGIES |
|---|---|---|
| Indigenous People<br>Disabled.<br>Unemployed Youths<br>Women<br>Immigrants &Refugees | Lack of support.<br>Poorly designed & implemented policies.<br>Non-enforcement of gender equity & diversity policies<br>Cost of training<br>Cost of supervision,<br>Career knowledge<br>Inability to fit in<br>Low technical skill<br>Lack of qualifications<br>Lack of mentorship & role models<br>Reduced apprenticeships / training<br>Poor education<br>Wage differentials<br>Recruitment practices<br>Family commitments<br>Cultural differences<br>Cause of conflict<br>Stigmatization/discrimination<br>General view of women inability to work in construction industries.<br>Harassment<br>Male-dominated structure<br>Sexism<br>Health needs<br>Literacy/numeracy<br>Perceived safety<br>Poor work quality<br>Poor productivity<br>Productivity risks<br>Risk to reputation<br>Unreliability<br>Increasing workplace casualization,<br>Long working hours<br>Work commitment<br>Working environment<br>Modifying workplace | Education and Training<br>Encourage Best Practices<br>Improved Compliance and Efficiency.<br>Reduced Unemployment,<br>Learning About Social Procurement and Employment-Creating Practices,<br>Lowered Maintenance Costs,<br>Reduced Welfare Costs,<br>Opportunities for Recruitment<br>Use of Contract Clauses. |

Source: Authors

# CONCLUSION

This research examines social procurement practices in the Nigerian construction industry highlighting the barriers and strategies for diffusing the approach into the construction industry to achieve social sustainability. Based on a review on existing literature on the disadvantages group affected by social procurement policies in other countries with the woman group review from Nigeria, our findings indicate that priorities in hiring with regards to number of barriers (woman, unemployed youths, disabled, immigrants, indigenous), strongly reflects policy focus which the Nigerian Government should implement. It was discovered that barriers to social procurement and sustainability in other climes are replica of the Africa's and Nigerian built industry with women having been the most socially disadvantaged

groups. There is no doubt that social procurement is an effective way for the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to achieve social value and integrate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into any organizational activity. However, to fully utilize the opportunities presented by social procurement policies, much work needs to be done to address the barriers faced by various disadvantaged groups. The potential impact of this research is that it will contribute to social sustainability and provide an alternative solution to the increasing shortage of skilled labour force in the construction industry.

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