

An exploratory study of the concept of social procurement in the construction industry in Botswana: contractor's perspective

Concept of
social
procurement

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Abstract

Purpose – Governments worldwide seek to optimize value in public project bids. Social procurement (SP) has become a global tool for achieving project goals. The purpose of this study is to assess the understanding of SP among contractors and identify its drivers to optimize the value associated with public projects.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 15 major contractors were interviewed to obtain their views on SP, appreciate their current practices and identify the main drivers of SP in projects. A semistructured interview was used to gather relevant data. Neo-institutional theory is the lens of the study used to provide the focus of the research. The collected data were analyzed using the thematic data analysis technique.

Findings – The study found that SP is understood as corporate social responsibility and is not handled in a structured manner guided by policies or clearly defined procedures. Additionally, research has shown that compliance requirements, rather than value and goodwill, are the main inspiration for SP practices.

Research limitations/implications – The study's limitation is the fact that it was conducted in the context of Botswana and only used the interview technique as the solo data collection method. The other limitation is the lack of empirical literature on SP concerning the lack of SP policy in Botswana.

Originality/value – This study raises awareness of the concept of SP among contractors in Botswana and eases its implementation within the industry.

Keywords Social procurement, Sustainability, Social value, Contractor, Construction, Institutional theory

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

The purchase of goods and services that have a direct and indirect social impact is referred to as social procurement (SP) (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014), and this involves organizations leveraging their purchasing power to deliver secondary goals (Barraket *et al.*, 2015; Loosemore and Reid, 2019). SP can unlock decent construction while increasing employment opportunities (Barraket *et al.*, 2015; Hurt-Suwan and Mahler, 2020). It is used to address issues concerning disadvantaged people, excluded minorities, young people and disabled individuals (Barraket *et al.*, 2015; Troje and Anderson, 2020; Troje, 2021; Denny-Smith *et al.*, 2021). Purchasing from local small and medium enterprises, providing or improving working conditions and health and safety, buying from social enterprises and minority businesses, and hiring vulnerable groups (Loosemore, 2016; Raiden *et al.*, 2018) are some of the ways SP delivers social value in construction. Furneaux and Barraket (2014) explain that strives to maximize public value by broadening supply chains to include a range of private and third-sector players. Wontner *et al.* (2020) and Botlhale (2017) highlight that SP implemented through public spending should enhance socioeconomic issues faced by a country. Discussions with contractors, defining social contract specifications, implementing social award criteria and reserving contracts for social enterprises are just a few of the many measures that have been developed to advance social goals in procurement (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014).

According to Loosemore *et al.* (2021c), SP policies that target construction firms are the main drivers of SP. SP strategies are employed in infrastructure building projects by developed nations through policies such as the social value Act of 2021, The public contract regulations of 2006, (Law 9/2017 of 8 November on Public Service Contracts), and EU Law 9/2017, among others, to solve social concerns in their countries and improve governance from the standpoint of their citizens (Loosemore *et al.*, 2020; Loosemore *et al.*, 2020; Loosemore *et al.*, 2021c). It is worth noting that compared to several countries where SP is taking center stage, driven by supporting policies, Botswana does not have an SP policy despite having Part XI of the public procurement act emphasizing social value. However, there are schemes, regulations and policies that seek to promote social values.

The Botswana public procurement act of 2021, PART IV section 46 domestic preference states that “a margin of domestic preference may be applied to eligible bid” addressing social value. It also states that the minister may mandate a small-and medium-sized enterprise procurement proportion. The Botswana public procurement act of 2021 uses supporting policies and laws to enhance social empowerment, such as the citizen economic empowerment policy (CEEP), the 2010 economic diversification drive (EDD), and the local preference scheme (1976). The economic inclusion act of 2021, which resulted from CEEP’s shortcomings, gives selected persons priority in government procurement of products and services. The public procurement act and public tenders emphasize these support policies and laws to produce social benefit.

This research will use neo-institutional theory’s (NIT’s) coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphisms to understand SP from a contractor viewpoint and its drivers. Troje (2023) acknowledges the fact that a contractor plays a critical role in the successful delivery of SP; hence, the study assesses the contractor’s understanding of SP. The government uses SP to address social challenges, including unemployment (Raiden *et al.*, 2018; Loosemore *et al.*, 2021a, b, c, d). Globally, SP is changing the public contract award process by emphasizing social value (Loosemore, 2016). Contractors must carefully link their company plans with the government as a key customer. Social criteria in construction have impacted procurement and management for suppliers and purchasing organizations (Sutherland *et al.*, 2015). This challenges contractors to have a good understanding of SP to fully exploit the concept. Despite increased demand on contractors to produce social value via projects in developing nations such as Botswana, no research has examined contractors’ comprehension of SP as

critical stakeholders to SP's success in Botswana. SP is often lauded for its social benefit, although construction research is limited. The evaluated literature also shows a theoretical knowledge gap in SP understanding, practices and frameworks (Barraket *et al.*, 2015; Loosemore, 2016; Petersen, 2018; Troje and Anderson, 2020; Troje and Gluch, 2020). This clearly shows the SP knowledge gap that researchers should investigate. Troje (2023) explains that comprehension of how the construction sector can contribute to SP is still a challenge.

The study aims to assess the understanding of the concept of SP among contractors and its drivers to optimize the value associated with public projects. In the context of Botswana, this study is the first of its kind with a focus on the construction industry and how it provides an additional benefit to the community beyond the project output. This study will therefore deposit its mark on the body of SPs by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1. How do contractors view SP?

RQ2. What are the key drivers of SP in the construction industry?

The current study qualitatively investigates SP through semistructured interviews involving 15 major construction players in Botswana with the aim of gathering their views on SP, its practices and drivers. NIT is used as the lens of the study by focusing on its three isomorphisms when interpreting data using the thematic analysis approach. The paper results, discussion and conclusion are then presented to address the research questions. The results of this study will raise awareness of the concept of SP and better inform policymakers/clients of contractors' preferred ways of promoting SP in the construction sector.

2. Literature review

The research problem is conducted through the lens of NIT to gain an in-depth understanding of SP in Botswana's construction industry. This section of the paper explores various literary materials on SP to gain an informed perspective on the concept for better handling of the research questions.

2.1 Theoretical background

NIT emerged in the late 1970s as a counterargument to the idea that institutions are logical and only react to economic duress for resources. Neo-intuitionism is a modernization of the old institutionalism doctrine, combining components of the old theory with non-institutionalist forms found in recent political ideas (Selznick, 1949; March and Olsen, 1983; Scott, 2008). NIT offers a valuable perspective of figuring out how organizational fields are built and how they contribute to organizational shifts, Scott (1995). The central claim made in the three main classical articles of the NIT is that organizations embraced new practices not because they were especially productive or efficient but rather because they offered the organization a veneer of legitimacy (Zucker, 1977; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) further added a fresh perspective by proposing isomorphism (structural similarity), to the examination of institutions. Isomorphism occurs when one unit in a population comes to resemble other units in the population that confront the same set of institutional constraints (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The present research employs NIT in Botswana to investigate SP in the construction industry by interviewing contractors guarded by the three-isomorphism proposed by (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983):

- (1) Mimetic isomorphism this category describes the widespread tendency for social actors to model their behavior after that of more successful institutions (nations,

businesses, economies) (Judge *et al.*, 2010). It is a way for organizations to deal with the difficulty of deciding what action to take, Carpenter and Feroz (2001). This involves contractors imitating behavior of other successful contractors who are benefiting from SP practices.

- (2) Coercive isomorphism emanates from dependency on resources and concerns about legitimacy (Judge *et al.*, 2010). Coercive isomorphism, according to Boolaky *et al.* (2020), is predicated on a financial and technological dependence that renders organizations vulnerable to the demands of resource providers. As a result, since smaller institutions rely on the backing of larger ones, the former might put pressure on the latter. For instance, SP clauses are an example of how the government of Botswana exerts pressure on contractors to deliver social value through exploiting their buying power.
- (3) Normative isomorphism-takes place when an organization is driven to uphold societal commitments and joins professional groups to gain a common knowledge base, disseminate best practices and establish the legitimacy of its operations (Mantzari *et al.*, 2017). This happens when contractors institutionalize SP practices because they are treated as legitimate, best practice and are socially recognized.

There has been additional development in NIT by Oliver (1991), which builds on the work of DiMaggio and Powell and offers a more nuanced and sophisticated explanation of the interaction and reactions of organizations to institutional constraints. Oliver (1991) examined the relatively unexplored process of de-institutionalization and proposed several possible explanations for it. Deinstitutionalization in this context means the decline or end of a formalized organizational procedure. Oliver (1991) identified five distinct responses to organizational strategies: acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation, ranging from passive conformance to aggressive opposition to institutional processes. However, Oliver's contribution is seldom referenced in procurement studies using NIT such as (Loosemore *et al.*, 2021a, b, c, d). On this basis, NIT's ability to examine organizational fields and their responses to environmental pressures, this paper employs this theory as a lens through to understand SP from the perspective of contractors as influenced by the wider social forces shaping their SP perceptions, practices, strategies, policies, procedures and drivers. On the other hand, responding to environmental pressures will compel contractors to abandon or discontinue or change certain practices of procurement or be resistant to the pressure as (Oliver, 1991) outlines. The power of NIT to explain how organizations are influenced by similar institutions and their network partners, such as the government or clients, positions the theory as the perfect lens through which to help address the two research questions.

Additionally, Suchman (1995) explains that the legitimacy of an institution is "the widespread conviction that its actions are desirable, proper or appropriate in light of some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" As a result, the organization's ability to adapt to institutional pressure is fundamental to its long-term viability. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest that when rational agents work to alter an organization, it will become more and more like others in the same areas. The study found the neo-institution theory ideal for understanding environmental elements that affect actors' conduct. NIT isomorphisms reveal contractor behavior toward SP. Unlike conventional economic theory, organizations react to socially created views of efficient and successful organizational behavior (Deephouse and Carter, 2005; Alvesson and Spicer, 2019). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) performed an in-depth analysis of NIT and found that there are in fact three distinct forms of isomorphism: mimetic, coercive and normative. A study titled "The institutional drivers of SP implementation in Australian construction projects" using NIT by

(Loosemore *et al.*, 2021) discovered that coercive isomorphism is the leading driver of SP. Another study, “sustainable procurement in Australia and UK universities,” used NIT to investigate SP in sustainable procurement . . .

2.2 Construction sector

COVID-19 did not spare the construction sector; it was severely affected by the pandemic, and it is among the sectors earmarked for economic resuscitation (Caldera *et al.*, 2022). In Botswana, the construction sector accounts for 6.8% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while employing more than 50,000 people (Research and Market, 2022). The report also stresses that the construction sector is driven by public expenditure, with the government as the main client. Serame (2022) highlights the enormous difficulty that Botswana is facing due to an unfavorable trade imbalance and significant unemployment rates. Most developed countries are combating these problems by using SP policies in their projects. Governments across the globe are emphasizing the significance of SP (Lerusse and Van de Walle, 2021), and it is essential for stakeholders such as contractors reliant on state tenders to have an in-depth understanding of concepts such as SP that are valued by their clients for strategic alignment purposes.

2.3 Sustainable and social procurement

Supply chains seeking social responsibility are increasingly adopting sustainable procurement (Caldera *et al.*, 2022). Sustainable procurement involves sourcing and supply chain objectives for sustainable development (Walker *et al.*, 2012). Sustainable procurement balances social, environmental and economic factors in a company’s purchasing and supply procedures (Walker and Phillips, 2009). Social value is fundamental to SP and public procurement sustainability. Public procurement sustainability fixtures job creation as one of its critical roles (Da Costa and Da Motta, 2019). The three dimensions of environmental, social and economic sustainability should be considered when discussing sustainable public procurement in the construction industry (Montalbán-Domingo *et al.*, 2018). She also places SP under social sustainability. Economic and environmental sustainability research is well known, while social sustainability research is scarce (Montalbán-Domingo *et al.*, 2018; Bernal *et al.*, 2019). The knowledge gap on social sustainability is one of the key factors that inspired the researchers to explore this area.

Researchers in Norway, Germany, Estonia and Belgium found that managers are inclined to promote secondary government and support social value, innovation and the environment (Lerusse and Van de Walle, 2021). All participants agreed that pricing matters when choosing vendors. SP involves buying necessities to meet main and secondary goals (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014; Loosemore and Reid, 2019). SP occurs when the private and public sectors use their purchasing power to solve societal issues and provide value (Edling, 2015; Barraket *et al.*, 2015; Loosemore, 2016). The definitions show that primary and secondary goals are addressed by leveraging purchasing power (Barraket *et al.*, 2015; Loosemore *et al.*, 2020; Mupanemunda, 2020). Contractors’ awareness of SP increases the likelihood that they will adapt to customers’ social clause demands. SP addresses unemployment-, diversity-, inclusion-, equality- and training-related issues (Bernal *et al.*, 2019; Okeke and Nnaemeka-Okeke, 2021; Troje and Gluch, 2020).

2.4 Benefits of social procurement

SP was attractive to Sweden for numerous reasons, including addressing rising unemployment and marginalization (Edling, 2015; Alaraj *et al.*, 2019; Troje, 2021). SP is used to create jobs, train people and close the gap between rich and poor people (Raiden *et al.*,

2018; Loosemore *et al.*, 2021a, b, c, d). They further state that this is facilitated through a SP policy, as seen in countries such as South Africa, the UK, Canada and Australia. Infrastructure and building investment may provide social benefits according to Loosemore *et al.* (2021b, d). SP can reduce unemployment and marginalization, according to researchers. According to various scholarly studies, SP targets disadvantaged minorities such as homeless people, immigrants, disabled people, women, ex-offenders, social enterprises and long-term unemployed people (Wright, 2013; Loosemore, 2016; Barraket and Loosemore, 2018). Some social policies are voluntary (Loosemore *et al.*, 2020). In conclusion, SP reduces unemployment and isolation.

2.5 Strategies to implement social procurement

SP involves new government-corporate partnerships to create social value via market processes (Barraket *et al.*, 2015). Governments produce social value via SP target groups or supplier contracts with SP provisions (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014). This requires construction contractors to hire or buy from indigenous Australians (Australian Government, 2015), social businesses or Australian disability firms (Victorian Government, 2018). Contracting parties may add more social factors to their contract selection criteria to guarantee that their buying power employs the underprivileged and long-term jobless (Cravero, 2017). The best price-quality ratios emphasize value beyond the economic approach by examining bids that specify their social value initiatives. This study will enhance contractors' understanding of SP for better implementation.

Targeted procurement, which unbundles important contracts for small, disadvantaged contractors, is a key government procurement strategy (Windapo *et al.*, 2019; Windapo *et al.*, 2019). Targeted or preferential procurement requires large contractors to engage targeted contractors, helping small contractors (Windapo *et al.*, 2019; Tzenez, 2019). SP rules might be required or prescriptive for the targeted population (Loosemore *et al.*, 2020). This affects how contractors motivated by bidding clauses will deliver social ideals in project contracts. The mimetic and legitimacy elements of isomorphism in institutional theory are fully demonstrated, as contractors' social efforts are dictated by the client (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Karyawati *et al.*, 2020). Bernal *et al.* (2019) discovered the following to improve social value: training procurers; educating the public about the social value produced by public tenders; creating evaluation standards capable of identifying and quantifying the social value provided; and, in addition to pricing considerations, introducing objective accounting models for these additional factors. This stresses the importance of formalizing SP.

2.6 Drivers of social procurement

According to Sutherland *et al.* (2015), when viewed from the perspective of contractors, organizational, local and national goals, as well as the desire to build stronger relationships and encourage innovation in service delivery, were the main driving forces behind SP. This highlights that the drivers of SP emanate within and outside the organization. Wright (2015) found that the 2012 UK social value is a crucial tool that directs clients' social value activities and governs social value needs. It is constantly found in studies of the women in construction project, which promoted women in the building of the London Olympic Park. SP policy is a leading driver of the concept within public projects (Halloran, 2017; Loosemore and Reid, 2017; Loosemore *et al.*, 2020; Fuentes-Bangués *et al.*, 2021). This stresses the fact that SP is done by contractors seeking legitimacy from the funders or government of projects, as postulated in NIT (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Karyawati *et al.*, 2020). This also demonstrates the fact that the SP approach is driven by an external force in this case, which is the government. Troje (2021) also emphasizes that institutional forces and legislation

are key drivers for the implementation of SP policies. Additionally, (Loosemore *et al.*, 2021c) reiterate the importance of a paradigm shift in the conventional norms and practices in the construction industry to embed SP and support effective SP implementation in products.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research approach

The study adapts interpretivist philosophy, which is the opposite of positivism and is lauded for its ability to provide a fuller understanding of global reality. As a result, this mindset guarantees that the study produces numerous viable perspectives rather than just one (Denzin, 2010). Interpretivism is praised for its capacity to grasp human experience in specific contexts and for giving researchers a chance to understand the topic they are studying in more detail (Creswell and Tashakkori, 2007; and Creswell, 2009). Furthermore (Maxwell, 2012), contends that interpretivism possesses iterative power, which stimulates the synthesizing and resynthesizing of meaning. These are some reasons why researchers find this research approach appealing.

3.2 Interviews and data collection

Fifteen major Botswana contractors engaged in semi-structured interviews to evaluate their understanding of procurement. The semistructured method used in this study is ideal for revealing the theory's key premise (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and because it prioritizes data quality over quantity. The technique included open and closed questions to provide high-quality data (Basis and Pollalis, 2018) and allow participants to openly communicate their opinions (Kabir, 2016). This explains why the researcher chose semi-structured interviews and sample size.

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to stray from question frames and share their experiences, helping researchers and participants make sense of complex, multidimensional and interconnected concepts that are difficult to describe using other methods (Keene *et al.*, 2016). Participants in the study were selected through convenience sampling pedagogy that relied heavily on the public procurement regulatory authority (PPRA) Website. The PPRA website lists all public bids won by contractors or construction businesses, including project values and winners. All the chosen contractors won major tenders between 2020 and 2022. The sampling method was most effective since it enabled the researcher to easily find participants. Due to COVID-19 standards, contractors were called and interviewed via phone. The interviews were conducted over four months and recorded. Participants were asked about SP, how their project spending affects local communities, what obstacles stand in the way of SP, what strategies can promote SP, whether they have an SP policy and whether they would consider adopting one, and what they think can drive SP in the construction industry.

3.3 Data analysis

Data gathered through the semistructured telephone interviews were analyzed through the thematic analysis method, which involved finding, evaluating, and documenting common social structure themes in each respondent's data and "shaping" the tales inductively. Referencing (Guest *et al.*, 2012; Loosemore *et al.*, 2020), the inductive thematic analysis consisted of five stages as reflected in Table 1 below:

Table 1 outlines the various stages that the data went through in its transformation from raw data to the various themes created, which are the basis of the discussions.

The rigorous exercise of repeatedly indulging in data, as outlined in Table 1, aligned the data meaning to the theoretical framework and resulted in three main themes inductively

Table 1.
Thematic analysis

Stage	Description
1. Immersion in the data	This phase entails repeatedly reading the interviews. This was repeated until the researcher had gained adequate comprehension of the data
2. Categorization/ coding	This step involves organizing and generating an initial list of items or codes from the dataset that exhibit recurring pattern questions and a conceptual framework critical to shaping the themes
3. Theme Search	This step involves looking for overarching themes in the codes, which are phrases or sentences that identify what the data mean about the research questions and conceptual framework
4. Refining themes	This step involves continuing to look for data that supports or refutes emerging themes and allows for further expansion or revision of themes' connections between overlapping themes to identify new patterns and issues
5. Reviewing	Defining and naming themes (via iterative data collection and analysis until theoretical saturation was reached)

Source(s): [Guest et al., 2012](#)

designed as follows: corporate social responsibility (CSR), internal and external drivers, and policy focus that guided the findings and discussions.

[Table 2](#) provides an example of the coding process that produced the three themes created through the back and forth process of indulging with the data.

[Table 2](#) shows that most participants were engineers assigned the responsibility of purchasing and sourcing materials and services. However, these individuals had experience ranging from 5 to 15 years executing this task. According to the participants, engineers are typically in charge of project procurement. [Bernal et al. \(2019\)](#) explain that raising awareness of SP and educating procurement staff may greatly increase SP in public projects.

[Table 3](#) outlines the portfolios of the participants.

4. Results and discussion

This installment discusses the interview findings considering the various themes that emerged, either correlating with or diverging from the study objectives.

4.1 Understanding the concept of social procurement by contractors

The first theme is the definition of SP, which answers the first research question. The data show that just two individuals could describe SP without help. As shown in ([Table 4](#)), the remaining participants needed assistance from the researcher to authenticate their acquaintance with SP procedures. According to the outcomes, SP is CSR, as contractors saw no difference between CSR and SP, which was new to most participants. These data confirm ([Loosemore et al., 2021](#)) that construction project customers are using SP to fulfill their CSR.

The study found that many individuals were unfamiliar with SP but could connect to it once the researcher described it and provided examples. SP may help firms meet their CSR objectives, create new business possibilities, develop shared knowledge and trust and boost productivity ([Ponzoni et al., 2017](#); [Troje and Kadefors, 2018](#)). This research shows that even though participants may not comprehend SP's new institutional logic, they are actively implementing CSR behavior that advances SP. The contractors' feedback shows that SP is still considered CSR despite its rising popularity. SP is rising globally according to [Troje and Anderson \(2020\)](#). It is not surprising that many contractors do not recognize SP as a separate concept from CSR since the results show that the new institutional logic is yet to displace the

Excepts summary	Description/inductive	Label	Theme (inductive and theoretically informed)
<i>Another relevant example involves JCB operations, where we engage BH to conduct training for part of our team</i>	Familiar with SP practices, such as training, understood as CSR activity	Training	Corporate social responsibility (Normative isomorphism)
<i>We subcontract vendors located where the projects are based</i>	Perform activities that resonate with SP despite not understanding SP	Local hiring and subcontracting	
<i>We have trained many our employees who joined us without skills; these guys can assemble scaffolds through the training offered</i>	The participants had no idea what SP is. Once the researcher explained the concept, the interviewee gave an example of their CSR activity, which is also an SP practice	Capacitating through training	
<i>I would truly recommend it be implemented, and the government should also enforce it</i>	The government should add social clauses	Social clause	Contract focus (Coercive isomorphism)
<i>Embed in tender or use tender clauses to compel people</i>	The government should add requirements as part of its criteria	Tender clause	
<i>Yes, I would, but it should be embedded in tenders</i>	Embed in the tender and compel the bidder to implement it	Embed in tenders	
<i>My supervisor has the power to implement such a policy, but in my own company, I would recommend it</i>	Power to influence change within the structures	Internal force driver	Internal and external drivers of SP (Normative and coercive)
<i>The only way to make them do SP is by inserting contract clauses they would have to comply with</i>	External forces can disrupt institutional logic	External force driver	
<i>The government can emphasize SP, contractors will comply</i>	Social clauses stimulate interest in SP	External force driver	

Source(s): Table created by the authors

Table 2.
Example of coding structure

old institutional logic in institutions, as shown by (Glover *et al.* (2014). This demonstrates that the government, as a customer trying to influence contractors' procurement behavior, must re-strategize in their efforts to promote SP.

Table 4 outlines key CSR practices that are common and consistent across all participants, and this outlines the way contractors make a positive impact. These practices are laudable for being in existence, but the study did not focus on examining the extent to which these practices occur, considering the project value to appreciate the degree of social impact. The following extracts shed light on the understanding of SP by contractors:

Some companies that we are subcontracting are companies owned by our former employees. (P1)

Another relevant example involves JCB operations, where we engage BH to conduct training for part of our team so they can effectively operate the machines. (P15)

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Contractor	Portfolio	Qualification	Experience
1	Former Director	Engineering	5 years
2	Senior Project Manager	Engineering	10 years
3	Assistant Site Agent	Engineering	8 years
4	Procurement Officer	Procurement	7 years
5	Director	Engineering	14 years
6	Director	Engineering	10 years
7	Procurement Manager	Procurement	6 years
8	Procurement Officer	In-house learning procurement	8 years
9	Project Manager	Procurement	5 years
10	Project Manager	Engineering	15 years
11	Procurement Officer	Procurement	6 years
12	Construction Site Manager	Engineering	12 years
13	Procurement Manager	Procurement	8 years
14	Project Manager	Project Management	9 years
15	Procurement Manager	Engineering	8 years

Table 3.
Outlines the portfolios
of the participants

Source(s): Table created by the authors

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CSR practices	Description
Donations	Building houses Nursery school building Bus stops donation
Training	Job training Short-term training Attachments Internship
Small Medium Enterprise Support	Use of small local companies Subcontracting former employees who run small construction companies
Subcontracting	This was significantly influenced by contract clauses although for a few, it was a voluntary initiative
Employment	The hiring of locals where the project was based

Table 4.
Social corporate
responsibility practices

Source(s): Table created by the authors

We have trained many of our employees who joined us without skills, but as we speak, these guys can assemble scaffolds through the training offered. (P3)

The preceding excerpts illustrate that these construction companies are implementing social value measures to improve community life; however, their scale is unknown given the public project tender value. Participants' SP behavior reflects the impact of external pressure. This supports (Furneaux and Barraket, 2014; Cravero, 2017) the idea that social practices are done for conformance. According to Ball and Craig (2010), institutional theory emphasizes conformity as a survival goal that increases stability and resource availability. These behaviors are CSR driven, not SP-driven. This research found that SP procedures meet customer expectations, confirming (Ball and Crag, 2010) that firms adapt to their environment. Contractors respond to client or government tender requirements using coercive techniques, displaying an element of conforming to the competitive advantage. Participants echo this:

Of course, there are many instances where social efforts and practices are driven by the government or tender clause. (P12)

To be honest, it is mostly because most tenders require us to demonstrate how we will make a difference in the company. (P13)

These excerpts show that contractors are forced to conduct CSR by the government. In addition, Table 2 indicates that contractors prefer being coerced to implement SP. The government's SP agenda continues to disrupt construction businesses' procurement and management systems. This shows how inflexible the contractors' organizational processes are to change and the new procurement standard. Contractors like the old procurement methodology because they prefer coercive methods such as inserting contract terms to change their procurement management system. This action goes against acknowledged norms and standards in a field such as the construction industry (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Thus, many contractors could not articulate a new procurement concept (SP) and could only connect to it once the researcher gave instances of its operations. These contractors' lack of voluntary SP adoption or response to innovation shows weak normative and mimetic isomorphisms.

SP is a new institutional logic in the construction sector that disrupts or redefines the traditional logic of procurement (Petersen, 2018), causing conflicts that impede innovation (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Troje and Anderson, 2020). The misalignment that prevents SP implementation results from a discrepancy between the contractors' old institutional logic and the client's new institutional logic. This opposing institutional logic forces the government to explore a more forceful method to achieve the intended effect. SP policies are relational according to (Loosemore *et al.*, 2021a, b, c, d). Collaboration may resolve mismatches and build synergy between these parties. In this study, normative isomorphism is pressure to conform to industry standards and contractors are trying to conform to client/government standards. However, (Loosemore *et al.*, 2021a, b, c, d), found that normative pressures are the second largest driver of SP policy adoption after coercive forces. As seen in Table 3, engineers, not procurement professionals, do procurement, which may explain contractors' undisrupted institutional logic.

However, some contractors displaced mimetic pressures from the research, implying that they are compelled to behave in a specific manner for legitimacy and competitive advantage (Krajnovic, 2018). The following quotes imply mimetic pressure:

We have partnered with a company in one of our projects through joint venture to benefit the local company as per the tender requirement and mainly because it is a winning approach from our observation as it appeals more to the client. (P5)

Mm, I think because it can improve our reputation in society, that is the leading reason why we would implement it. (P4)

These sentiments imply that the collaboration approach is adopted because it is considered appealing to the client, and they have seen it work for other players in the same sector. Additionally, in the second quote, the participants highlight that they engage in social activities because they build their brand. This is also a key trait of mimicking what is considered to work for other institutions, which contractors do to enhance their advantage. It is worth noting that these normative and mimetic pressures are the result of a voluntary decision based on the contractor being legitimized by the environment.

4.2 What are the key drivers of social procurement in construction?

4.2.1 *Influencing factors.* Influence is among the leading themes of the study, which addresses the second research question. Influence factors are classified into two categories: internal and external forces that influence the implementation status of SP in an organization as highlighted in Table 5.

4.2.2 *Internal factors.* Internal factors focus on the policy position of the institution, and the leadership is of SP. This aspect of the finding poses traits of normative pressure and is attributed to the poor status of SP. The following extracts from the interviewees elucidate this position:

Only my supervisor has the power to implement such a policy, but in my own company, I would recommend it. (P15)

It will always be difficult to promote anything that internally, as an organization, is not promoted. (P1)

The only way to make them do it is by inserting contract clauses they would have to comply with. The government should also take an evaluation of compliance of such a serious nature. (P14)

Normative isomorphism, which emphasizes leadership commitment, is crucial to formalizing SP internally, according to the respondents. The first two quotations show that contractors' SP procedures are not always documented. Contractors have not yet completely adopted SP because they have not integrated it into their procurement processes. Normative pressures emphasize the need to incorporate working or accepted conduct that influential parties such as clients have recognized into corporate culture and norms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Contractor systems lack SP rules and formal documentation, contradicting normative demands and expressing their preference for coercive pressure to adopt SP.

The last excerpt shows how government provisions affect the internal and contractor perspectives of SP. The government's value of SP will encourage those reliant on the government to be more sensitive to SP to be strategically aligned with the government (Loosemore and Reid, 2019; Loosemore et al., 2020; Fuentes-Bangués et al., 2021). Contractors lack normative isomorphism, which relies on organizational rules, norms and structures to gain legitimacy. Thus, government and contractor strategies are misaligned. This imbalance hindered SP (Frag et al., 2016). To achieve the intended effect, the government must expand its SP activities beyond contract emphasis to supplier focus, market development focus and policy focus. This would disrupt contractor procurement and align suppliers and clients for SP deployment.

4.2.3 *External influence.* Key stakeholders are external influences. According to the study, external influence comes from the government. This influence is mostly government client coercion. This research found that social provisions in government contracts enhance SP. Contractors' expressions imply that they will not change their procurement structure without pressure. Contractors must follow government tender stipulations. Furneaux and Barraket (2014) agree that governments indirectly create social value by inserting SP elements in supplier contracts. Contract focus using social provisions in contracts is an SP factor that forces suppliers to follow social clauses (Newman and Burkett, 2012). The following excerpts show external force input:

Influence factor categories	Description	Examples
Internal Factors (organizational controllable factors)	Leadership Commitment	Prosocial procurement policy
	Internal Policy	Social procurement policy
External Factors (outside the contractors control)	Competency: Is procurement done by professionals?	Hire procurement professionals
	Government Clauses	Adding prosocial procurement clauses
	Tender Selection Criteria	Increasing the factors of social criterion in tender selection

Table 5. Provides a summary of the internal and external factors

Source(s): Table created by the authors

The only way to make them do it is through inserting contract clauses they would have to comply with . . . The government should also take an evaluation of compliance with such. (P14)

Surely if the government reiterates this social procurement, contractors can feel obliged in the quest to gain a competitive edge. (P12)

I would recommend it be implemented, and the government should also enforce it. (P10)

Yes, I could recommend it, but the government should take the lead. (P7)

Embed in the tender or use tender clauses and oblige contractors. (P11)

Yes, I would, but it should be embedded in tenders. (P1)

The preceding excerpts demonstrate the government’s influence on contractors, the major beneficiaries of government bids. To enhance SP, Botswana should maximize its authority and increase social value components in contract selection criteria. This is supported by (Loosemore *et al.*, 2020; Loosemore *et al.*, 2021c), who found that government policies drive SP popularity. In Botswana, SP is mostly contract-focused, and the results of the study show that the old institutional logics are still dominant, which indicates little impact of the new institutional logic. The contract focus approach should be used with other SP dimensions to maximize its effect.

Botswana’s public procurement act 2021 is a broad document that covers many areas and leaves the decision to emphasize social criteria to leaders, making it difficult to sustainably implement. To balance contract emphasis, a policy-focused SP should be explored to complement the existing approach. Bernal *et al.* (2019) note that experts are increasingly agreeing that public bids should incorporate social value. Instead of using criteria that contradict the equality principle and foster corruption, they want an objective mix of financial and social aspects. If Botswana wants to fully profit from SP, it needs a dedicated SP policy designed from consolidating the various social schemes. The participants are willing to adopt SP if the primary customer requires them to do so.

Table 5 provides a summary of the internal and external factors.

Table 5 outlines the influence factors discussed previously and captures the competency issue, having appreciated the various portfolios of interviewees where there are few participants with procurement qualifications. Delegating procurement to trained or qualified professionals would most likely increase the promotion of SP. Bernal *et al.* (2019) stress the importance of training procurement professionals as part of strategies for improving the social value delivered by projects. Taking into account the observations on the participant portfolios, it will be advantageous to train the personnel who conduct the procurement, as most of them are qualified engineers rather than procurement professionals. In summary, the themes have effectively demonstrated how the external environment, both within the same industry and inter-organizationally, can influence the actions of contractors in the hunt for competitive advantage.

4.3 Policy

The policy theme examines contractors’ willingness to follow client-required SP rules. This theme shows the government’s coercive authority to change contractors’ institutional logic. Table 5 also highlights the internal and external policy related influence among drivers of SP. The second question is whether SP drivers depend on this coercive isomorphism. The “understanding SP question” showed that only two respondents could explain SP, with the remainder exhibiting weak comprehension. Contractors do not have an SP policy and see SP as CSR. This gives the government a compelling reason to prioritize social responsibility as a customer to advance SP.

Although some interviewees said they had minimal impact on policy formulation, all recommended SP policies. These extracts support the interviewees’ policy suggestions.

I would truly recommend it be implemented, and the government should also enforce it. (P9)

Yes, I would implement the SP policy; people like me in procurement offices must know about SP so they can help the government achieve its secondary goals. (P2)

Yes, I could recommend it, but the government must take the lead. (P4)

In summary, the participants expressed excitement about the idea of implementing SP policies and formalizing the approach, although they also reiterated the importance of the client (government) making it compulsory. Loosemore *et al.* (2021) explain that coercive isomorphism is the most powerful driver of SP, followed by mimetic isomorphism and normative isomorphism adoption in their study of Australian construction projects. This is also significantly aligned with this study, as contractors believe that SP implementation can be accelerated by being embedded in the tender as a requirement. The following extracts reiterate this sentiment:

The only way to make them do it is through inserting contract clauses they would have to comply with. The government should also take an evaluation of compliance with such a very serious. (P14)

The quotation above further emphasizes the coercive isomorphism element of institutional theory, which underlines the influence of external institutions on clients. This study highlights the fact that mimetic and normative isomorphisms can be adopted once coercive isomorphisms lay the foundation. This agrees with the findings of (Loosemore *et al.*, 2021). The paper also notes that, despite traceable SP activities such as CSR, SP is still relatively informal in its creation because coercive isomorphism rather than mimetic or normative motives that emphasize the new institutional logic drive it. Contractors are willing to strategically align their internal structures and systems with the extra national influencer's values for legitimacy (Deephouse and Carter, 2005; Alvesson and Spicer, 2019). This shows how coercive isomorphism might enable mimetic isomorphism in NIT, which is resourceful, although it needs to be substantiated with other SP aspects.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to assess the understanding of the concept of SP in the construction sector from the perspective of the contractor. This shows the construction industry's weak knowledge of SP since managerial commitment and established SP procedures are lacking. The study also found that contractors believe that coercive tactics are the best way to promote SP. This outcome is crucial in ensuring that the government, as a significant customer using its buying power, understands what contractors, as key stakeholders, think about promoting SP in the construction industry to inform customized SP strategies. The study also found that contractors do not have policies for social value initiatives, which is why SP is not structured and hence why they prefer coercive pressure to adopt SP. This discovery makes it clearer that the new institutional logic has a difficult task ahead of it: dismantling the dominant logic currently used by contractors. The research results support the findings of (Glover *et al.*, 2014; Loosemore *et al.*, 2021a, b, c, d; Nawaz and Gutibie, 2022), who highlight the significance of coercive pressures for the successful implementation of SP. Disrupting the dominant logic would require the integration of the three-isomorphism behavior. Furthermore, contractors consider SP a CSR. This is because SP and CSR share the same practices, such as employment creation, training, small and medium enterprises and subcontracting. SP and CSR are becoming compulsory in many countries due to their capability to address social issues and secondary government objectives (Tucker *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the study further shows that SP is driven by external pressures such as contract clauses that appear inadequate, and contractors recommend increasing social clauses in the contract. This shows that internal drivers such as management

commitment and internal policies are currently weak and will most likely be effective once the contract clauses have compelled the contractor to implement SP.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Coercive isomorphism has been identified as the leading driver of SP compared with the other two isomorphisms, which is aligned with the findings of (Loosemore *et al.*, 2021), who also discovered that coercive isomorphism is the main driver of SP implementation, followed by the other two isomorphisms. However, coercive isomorphism would also need to be substantiated with the other two isomorphisms once it has laid a solid foundation. Furthermore, contractors believe that mimetic and normative isomorphism can become popular once coercive approaches through contract clauses have been successfully implemented. This means that once social clauses have been embedded in the tender through a coercive approach, contractors will be under duress to strategically align themselves to the standards set by the client and foster a pro-SP culture in their institution to gain a competitive advantage. This would eventually introduce the new institutional logic.

5.2. Practical implication

This research is essential to promoting a positive perception of SP within the construction sector in Botswana. The results of this research provide fresh information that may help policymakers in Botswana improve their social empowerment programs for the construction sector. This will ultimately maximize the impact of SP in the construction sector and ensure the input of contractors, who are key stakeholders in reviewing SP policies.

5.3. Managerial recommendations

This article highlights the need for contractors to strategically align themselves with the policies of the government or client and increase their creativity in social value initiatives as the sustainability agenda continues to gain momentum. Misaligned policies between the client and contractors have been recognized as a hurdle to the implementation of SP (Rouillard *et al.*, 2015; Farag *et al.*, 2016; Kirk *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, there is a need to formalize SP practices and effectively capture them through policy or CSR in the quest to gain a competitive edge. Construction company managers should embrace the new institutional logic in which the government looks beyond just the cost of a project in competitive tenders. Loosemore (2016) discovered that there is a need to move away from conversational procurement practices that focus on cost to more social value-oriented approaches to tap into existing opportunities. The study indicates that contractors prefer coercive pressures as a vehicle to promote SP. However, other SP dimensions, such as supplier focus, market development focus and policy focus, need to be increased to realize a greater impact.

5.4. Limitations and future research

This study is focused on the viewpoint of the major contractor; hence, a more comprehensive analysis including small and medium firms will provide better results. Second, semistructured interviews were employed to collect subjective data. A mixed-method approach to data collection might alleviate this shortcoming. The other limitation is the lack of empirical literature on SP concerning the lack of SP policy in Botswana. However, again, another limitation of the study is the lack of understanding of the concept of SP by the construction industry in Botswana. A future study could also examine Botswana's SP contractors' challenges and practices. For instance, creating jobs does not guarantee decent pay and benefits. Research on the scale of these activities in relation to project value would help optimize the supply chain and client/government values.

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