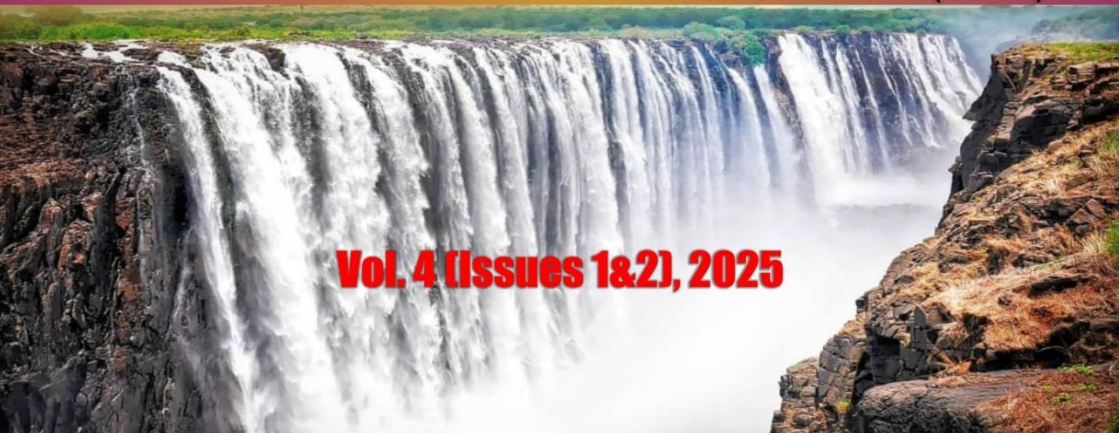




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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF PROCUREMENT REFORMS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE

MEETING BANDA¹

Abstract

This study explores procurement reforms and social and economic impacts on local communities in Zimbabwe, focusing on how these reforms have influenced transparency, community participation and inclusive economic development in rural settings. Utilising a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to stakeholders involved in public procurement, including suppliers, local authorities and community members. The targeted sample size was 60 respondents. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, KMO, Bartlett's test, and structural equation modeling (SEM) are employed to analyse the relationships between procurement reforms and their perceived impacts. The results indicate that procurement reforms have positively contributed to increased access to public procurement opportunities, reduced corruption and fostered greater accountability and trust among community stakeholders. Additionally, the introduction of digital tools and social media platforms has facilitated improved information dissemination, vendor engagement and monitoring of procurement activities, aligning with global trends in circular economy and digital governance. These findings support existing literature emphasizing the transformative potential of transparent procurement systems in enhancing service delivery and promoting equitable development (Kristensen *et al.*, 2021; Chikwere *et al.*, 2023). The study concludes that while significant progress has been made, sustained political will, capacity building and community empowerment remain critical to ensuring the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of procurement reforms in Zimbabwe's local governance landscape.

Keywords: Procurement reforms, local economic development, community empowerment, transparency and accountability

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INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

Globally, public procurement has evolved beyond its traditional role as a mechanism for acquiring goods and services into a strategic tool for driving social equity, economic development and environmental sustainability. In recent decades, governments worldwide have recognised that reforming procurement systems can contribute significantly to national development objectives by fostering transparency, enhancing efficiency and supporting inclusive growth. According to Pouikli (2021), procurement systems that are well-regulated and transparent not only save public funds, but also encourage competition and innovation, thereby strengthening the economic fabric of nations. Moreover, public procurement reforms have increasingly incorporated social and environmental dimensions such as green procurement and gender-sensitive policies to maximise developmental returns across all sectors of society.

In the regional context, many African countries have embarked on procurement reforms to address inefficiencies, reduce corruption and harness the economic potential of local enterprises. These reforms are often aligned with broader goals of poverty alleviation, job creation and institutional accountability. For instance, regional initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasize the importance of inclusive economic policies and sustainable practices, including procurement reforms that prioritise local suppliers and community participation. However, despite these initiatives, implementation remains uneven across the continent due to institutional weaknesses, limited technological capacity and insufficient community engagement. Karunarathne and Thilini (2022) note that procurement in many African settings is still vulnerable to elite capture and opaque processes that limit its developmental impact.

In Zimbabwe, procurement reforms have emerged as a central pillar in efforts to rebuild the economy and promote social equity following years of economic instability. The Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act [Chapter 22:23], introduced in 2017, aimed to modernise procurement practices, promote transparency and enhance value for money. Yet, while the legal framework has improved, the practical implementation of reforms continues to face major hurdles, including corruption, exclusion of local suppliers and inadequate monitoring systems (Chilunjika *et al.*, 2022). Zimbabwe's rural communities, in particular, have struggled to benefit meaningfully from public procurement due to limited capacity, weak

infrastructure and lack of access to procurement information. These gaps have widened socio-economic disparities and impeded community development, especially in regions where unemployment exceeds 90% and basic services remain underfunded.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, but also highlighted the transformative potential of localised procurement. Valaskova *et al.* (2021) observe that shifts in consumer behaviour during the pandemic saw a rise in demand for locally produced goods and services, underscoring the importance of supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through targeted procurement policies. Procurement strategies which prioritise local suppliers not only reduce supply chain vulnerabilities, but also stimulate domestic production, job creation and resilience. Moreover, Truong and Truong (2022) argue that such adaptive procurement approaches can support long-term economic recovery and promote sustainable consumption patterns.

Beyond economic benefits, procurement reforms in Zimbabwe carry significant social implications. By empowering local suppliers, particularly women, youth and marginalised groups, these reforms can foster social inclusion, reduce poverty and enhance community cohesion. A more participatory procurement process can build a sense of ownership and trust among community members, especially when reforms are responsive to local needs and preferences. This approach aligns with the Stakeholder Theory which emphasizes inclusive governance and recognises the importance of engaging all parties affected by a decision in the decision-making process. The Institutional Theory further supports this view by emphasizing the importance of robust systems and structures to guide procurement reforms in a manner that ensures accountability and long-term effectiveness.

This study explores the intersection of procurement reforms, local economic development and social well-being within Zimbabwe's rural communities. It seeks to understand how institutional reforms, digital tools and inclusive policies are shaping procurement outcomes and whether these reforms are effectively contributing to sustainable development. By analysing both the economic and social dimensions of procurement, the study provides insights that are vital for crafting more inclusive, resilient and equitable procurement strategies in Zimbabwe and similar contexts.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zimbabwe faces a persistent challenge in translating procurement reforms into meaningful socio-economic outcomes for local communities. Despite policy intentions aimed at promoting transparency, inclusiveness and local economic development, the practical implementation of these reforms remains fraught with systemic issues. One of the most pressing problems is the prevalence of corruption and lack of transparency within public procurement processes. Delardas *et al.* (2022) report that over 40% of public procurement contracts are affected by irregularities, undermining both the integrity of the system and public confidence in government institutions. This opacity disproportionately disadvantages SMEs which are often excluded from bidding opportunities due to opaque criteria and entrenched patronage networks. Compounding this issue is the limited capacity of local businesses to meet procurement standards, a gap that Kurniawan *et al.* (2021) attribute to insufficient training, limited access to finance and lack of awareness about procurement procedures. This structural weakness reduces the participation of local suppliers and stifles opportunities for job creation and local economic empowerment. The situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted supply chains and altered consumer behaviours, leaving many local enterprises unable to adapt to new market demands (Truong and Truong, 2022). In a country where unemployment rates are estimated to exceed 90%, the inefficiencies and inequalities embedded in procurement systems contribute to deepening poverty and socio-economic exclusion. The failure to address these challenges not only weakens the potential impact of procurement reforms, but also jeopardises their role as a tool for community development and national economic resilience.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the social impact of procurement reforms on local communities in Zimbabwe, including transparency, community participation and social cohesion.
2. To evaluate the economic effects of procurement reforms on local economic development, such as participation of local suppliers, job creation and livelihoods.
3. To examine the role of digital tools, social media and sustainability practices in enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of procurement reforms in Zimbabwe's rural communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Institutional Theory, which provides a robust foundation for analysing the influence of established systems, rules and norms on organisational behaviour and policy outcomes. The theory posits that organisations operate within a structured environment composed of both formal regulations and informal social expectations that shape their actions. In the Zimbabwean context, this theory is instrumental in understanding how procurement reforms are implemented within a web of institutional constraints and facilitators. Institutions—ranging from government laws, procurement policies and financial regulations to unwritten social codes and traditional governance systems—serve as guiding mechanisms that determine how procurement decisions are made and enforced. The formal rules provide the legal framework for accountability, while informal practices influence how those rules are interpreted and applied in real-life scenarios. Thus, understanding procurement reform requires a detailed examination of both types of institutions to uncover where gaps, overlaps, or contradictions may occur in practice.

The relevance of the Institutional Theory becomes more apparent when examining the effectiveness of procurement reforms in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural settings where institutional capacity may vary significantly. Kristensen *et al.* (2021) underscore the importance of strong institutional foundations for successful public procurement, arguing that without clearly defined processes and enforcement mechanisms, procurement systems are vulnerable to inefficiency, favoritism and corruption. In such cases, even well-intentioned reforms may falter due to poor implementation and weak oversight structures. In Zimbabwe, these institutional weaknesses have manifested in inconsistent tendering procedures, delayed supplier payments and inadequate monitoring systems, all of which undermine trust in public procurement. The theory helps explain why these issues persist despite policy-level interventions. It reveals how deeper systemic norms, such as a lack of transparency or entrenched patronage networks, continue to shape procurement behaviour. By analysing these institutional barriers, the theory aids in identifying where reforms need to be strengthened or restructured to ensure they translate into tangible improvements on the ground.

Complementing this approach is the Stakeholder Theory, which offers a people-centered lens by focusing on the roles, interests and influences of

various actors involved in the procurement process. It asserts that organisations must consider the needs and expectations of all individuals or groups affected by their operations. In the case of public procurement reforms, this includes not only government agencies and contractors but also local communities, civil society organisations, SMEs and even end-users of publicly procured goods and services. This theory is particularly valuable in the Zimbabwean context, where procurement decisions often have a direct impact on service delivery, job creation and community development. It emphasizes that meaningful reform is unlikely without the active engagement and buy-in of these diverse groups. Their participation is crucial for identifying community needs, setting priorities and ensuring that procurement decisions are aligned with developmental goals. Moreover, when stakeholders feel involved and valued, they are more likely to support and monitor the implementation of reforms, thereby enhancing accountability and sustainability.

The study draws upon the Stakeholder Theory and the Institutional Theory to explore how procurement reforms influence local communities in Zimbabwe. The Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the critical importance of engaging all affected parties, such as community members, local suppliers and civil society, in public governance processes. When procurement systems are transparent and participatory, they foster trust, social cohesion and greater accountability. This theoretical perspective aligns with the study's focus on how reforms have shaped community participation and social well-being. Ausat (2023) highlights that inclusive governance mechanisms supported by stakeholder engagement, can significantly influence public perception and decision-making, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and social impact of procurement.

From an economic perspective, the involvement of local businesses in procurement activities is closely tied to both theories. The Institutional Theory helps to explain how formal rules and structures, such as procurement regulations, digital platforms and sustainability policies, create pathways for economic inclusion. By promoting the participation of local suppliers, encouraging job creation and supporting livelihoods, procurement reforms can serve as a tool for inclusive economic development. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools, social media and sustainable practices into procurement processes reflects the evolving institutional environment that guides public sector behaviour. These tools not only

improve efficiency and access, but also strengthen community voice and environmental accountability. Together, these theoretical frameworks offer a holistic understanding of how procurement reforms, shaped by institutional mechanisms and stakeholder participation, are transforming Zimbabwe's rural communities, both socially and economically.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer purchasing behaviours has been profound (Truong and Truong, 2022). Hayu *et al.* (2021) reveal that the pandemic has led to significant shifts in how consumers prioritise their purchases, emphasizing essential goods over non-essential items. This behaviour change has implications for local businesses, particularly in Zimbabwe, where many rely on consumer spending to sustain their operations. Similarly, Delardas *et al.* (2022) discuss the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, noting that economic disruptions have disproportionately affected vulnerable populations. This aligns with Truong and Truong's findings, highlighting the need for businesses to adapt their strategies to meet changing consumer demands. Both studies underscore the importance of understanding consumer behaviour in the context of procurement reforms, as these insights can inform more effective public procurement strategies. As local communities navigate these challenges, adapting to shifts in purchasing behaviour becomes essential for economic recovery.

In the realm of public procurement, the concept of value for money is critical, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe's rural district councils. Chikwere *et al.* (2023) highlight the challenges faced by these councils in achieving value for money in their procurement processes. They argue that effective procurement practices are essential for enhancing service delivery and ensuring that public funds are used efficiently. This is echoed by Kristensen *et al.* (2021), who emphasize the need for circular public procurement practices to optimise resource use and minimise waste. By integrating sustainability into procurement practices, local governments can not only achieve cost savings, but also promote environmental stewardship. This shared perspective highlights the importance of aligning procurement processes with broader socio-economic goals, ensuring that reforms contribute to both economic and environmental sustainability. The convergence of these ideas suggests that successful procurement reforms in

Zimbabwe must prioritise efficiency and sustainability to maximise their impact.

The role of social media in shaping consumer behaviour and public opinion cannot be overlooked, particularly in the context of procurement reforms. Karunaratne and Thilini (2022) discuss how social media advertising influences purchase intentions, revealing that consumer perceptions are increasingly shaped by online interactions. This aligns with Ausat's (2023) exploration of social media's impact on economic decisions, where public opinion can drive local purchasing behaviours. In Zimbabwe, these dynamics are particularly relevant as local businesses seek to engage consumers and build brand loyalty. The ability to leverage social media effectively can enhance the visibility of local suppliers, making them more competitive in the procurement landscape. As procurement reforms aim to support local businesses, integrating social media strategies into these efforts can amplify their effectiveness. Thus, understanding the interplay between social media and consumer behaviour is crucial for designing procurement policies that resonate with communities.

Moreover, Zhang *et al.* (2021) examine the impact of consumer perceived value on repeat purchase intentions, underscoring the significance of consumer satisfaction in fostering loyalty. This research highlights that positive online reviews can significantly influence purchasing decisions, suggesting that local suppliers in Zimbabwe must focus on enhancing their perceived value to attract consumers. The insights gained from this study resonate with the findings of Truong and Truong (2022), where changing consumer priorities necessitate that businesses adapt to meet evolving demands. By prioritising customer satisfaction and leveraging positive feedback, local businesses can better position themselves in a competitive procurement environment. This convergence of ideas emphasizes the importance of maintaining high standards of quality and service as essential components of procurement reforms.

The circular economy concept presents an innovative approach to waste management and resource efficiency that is relevant to public procurement in Zimbabwe (Purchase *et al.*, 2021). Their literature review highlights the benefits and challenges of implementing circular practices, emphasizing the need for systemic changes in procurement processes. This concept aligns with Kristensen *et al.* (2021), who advocate for circular public procurement

to promote sustainability and reduce environmental impact. Both studies suggest that integrating circular economy principles into procurement can lead to significant economic and environmental benefits. In Zimbabwe, where resource scarcity is a pressing issue, adopting circular practices could enhance procurement efficiency and contribute to sustainable development. The intersection of these ideas underscores the potential for procurement reforms to not only drive economic growth, but also address critical environmental challenges. Thus, embracing circular economy principles within procurement policies can lead to more resilient and sustainable local communities.

Furthermore, the challenges of fiscal decentralisation in enhancing socio-economic rights are explored by Munyede, Chikwawawa and Mazambani (2021). Their research highlights the importance of effective local governance in promoting economic development and social equity in Zimbabwe. This aligns with the arguments made by Scoones and Murimbarimba (2021), who discuss the implications of land reform on small towns and communities in Zimbabwe. Both studies emphasize the need for inclusive policies that empower local communities and enable them to participate actively in economic decision-making. As procurement reforms aim to enhance local economic development, incorporating insights from these studies can facilitate more equitable outcomes.

The study investigates the multifaceted impacts of procurement reforms on local communities in Zimbabwe, with specific emphasis on social, economic and technological dimensions. From a social perspective, procurement reforms that promote transparency, community participation and social cohesion are essential in rebuilding trust between citizens and public institutions. The emphasis on local governance and inclusive engagement structures is especially important in marginalised and rural communities, where historical exclusion has limited opportunities for meaningful participation. Ausat (2023) supports this by emphasizing how stakeholder inclusion and participatory governance can influence public opinion and decision-making outcomes. When communities are consulted and actively involved in procurement processes, reforms are more likely to be perceived as fair, responsive and aligned with local needs, thereby promoting social harmony and equity.

Economically, procurement reforms have the potential to catalyse local development by enhancing the participation of SMEs, supporting job creation and improving livelihoods. Chikwere *et al.* (2023) note that enhancing local supplier access to public tenders can deliver tangible economic benefits, especially in rural areas where formal employment opportunities are limited. The integration of local suppliers into the public procurement system not only stimulates local economies, but also reduces dependency on external suppliers. The research recognises that when reforms are designed to include marginalised groups, such as women and youth, they become a tool for inclusive economic empowerment. This aligns with the goals of procurement modernisation, which aim not only to increase efficiency, but also to create equitable growth pathways within communities.

Incorporating digital tools, social media and sustainability practices further enhances the effectiveness and inclusiveness of procurement reforms. The digitalisation of procurement systems can improve access to information, reduce corruption and promote accountability, particularly when combined with real-time community feedback mechanisms. According to Delardas *et al.* (2022), the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the necessity of agile, data-driven approaches to procurement that reflect evolving consumer behaviour and local priorities. The use of digital platforms and social media enables governments to communicate more effectively with stakeholders, gather public input and respond quickly to emerging challenges. Moreover, the adoption of sustainable procurement practices, such as green public procurement, supports environmental conservation and encourages eco-innovation among local suppliers. These technological and environmental considerations ensure that procurement reforms are not only inclusive and transparent, but also future-oriented and resilient to shocks.

The interconnectedness of consumer behaviour, public procurement and socio-economic outcomes underscores the complexity of implementing effective reforms in Zimbabwe. Delardas *et al.* (2022) highlight that the socio-economic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitate a re-evaluation of procurement strategies to better support local communities. The need for transparency, efficiency and responsiveness in procurement processes is echoed across various studies, reinforcing the importance of building trust between government entities and local

businesses. By focusing on creating an enabling environment for local suppliers, procurement reforms can facilitate economic recovery and growth. Moreover, integrating insights from social media and consumer behaviour research can enhance the relevance of procurement policies, ensuring they resonate with the community's needs. This holistic approach to understanding the socio-economic landscape can lead to more effective and sustainable procurement outcomes in Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is guided by the Pragmatism Research Philosophy, which emphasizes practical solutions to real-world problems through the integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This philosophy is particularly suitable for the research because it allows for a more holistic exploration of the social and economic impacts of procurement reforms on local communities. By adopting a mixed methods design, the study is able to incorporate diverse perspectives from various stakeholders involved in the procurement process, including registered SMEs, local government officials and community members. Pragmatism encourages flexibility in data collection and analysis and thus, the study is structured to draw meaningful conclusions from both numerical data and subjective experiences. This approach enables the researchers to bridge the gap between theoretical models of procurement reform and their actual implementation and outcomes on the ground.

To ensure a representative and inclusive sample, a two-stage sampling technique was applied, combining both probability and non-probability sampling methods. In the first stage, probability sampling was used to randomly select a subset of SMEs from a known population of 100 registered enterprises. This approach ensured that each enterprise had an equal chance of being selected, thus enhancing the representativeness and objectivity of the sample. In the second stage, non-probability purposive sampling was used to target specific types of SMEs based on size, sector and level of involvement in public procurement, ensuring diversity within the selected group.

A total sample size of 60 respondents was determined using a simplified formula for finite population sampling as outlined by Yamane (1967), which is expressed as:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2),$$

where n is the sample size,
 N is the population size (100)
 e is the margin of error (0.10 for a 90% confidence level).

Applying this formula yielded a sample size of approximately 50, but the research opted for 60 to enhance the reliability and generalisability of the results, while accommodating for potential non-responses or incomplete data. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires, which allowed for standardised data capture across the sample. This approach enabled the study to measure key indicators consistently and draw meaningful conclusions about the effects of procurement reforms on SMEs.

For data analysis, quantitative responses were processed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to identify significant trends and relationships between procurement reforms and their outcomes. Ethical clearance was secured before data collection and respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time and how the data would be used solely for academic purposes. This ethical approach enhanced the credibility and integrity of the research findings.

FINDINGS

A total of 48 respondents out of 60 completed the questionnaires, representing an 80% response rate. Interviews were also conducted and saturation was achieved at 14 participants. The purpose of this study is to examine the social and economic impacts of procurement reforms on local communities in Zimbabwe, particularly focusing on transparency, capacity development, inclusiveness and sustainability.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Key Procurement Reform Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transparency in Procurement	48	4.12	0.67
Inclusion of Local Suppliers	48	3.98	0.75
Community Capacity Development	48	3.85	0.81
Environmental Sustainability	48	3.43	0.95
Economic Impact on Communities	48	4.08	0.70
Social Impact on Communities	48	3.90	0.78

Table 1 reveals a generally positive perception of procurement reforms across several dimensions. The mean score for transparency in procurement is the highest at 4.12, suggesting that respondents strongly agree that reforms have improved openness. The standard deviation of 0.67 indicates relatively low variation in responses, showing consensus among participants. The inclusion of local suppliers had a slightly lower mean of 3.98, but still suggests favorable perceptions. Community capacity development and environmental sustainability scored moderately with higher variability, indicating room for policy refinement. Interestingly, economic impacts on communities also scored high, reinforcing that procurement reforms are driving local economic growth. These findings are in line with Ausat (2023), who argues that public opinion, shaped in part by digital platforms and social media, significantly influences economic decisions and policy perception. As procurement reforms are increasingly discussed and scrutinised in public fora, consensus around certain aspects such as economic impact may reflect the widespread visibility and endorsement these reforms receive. Conversely, the variability in perceptions of sustainability and community capacity could be attributed to uneven access to information, or disparities in implementation across regions. The high score for perceived economic impacts reinforces the idea that procurement reforms are effectively contributing to local economic development, validating the argument that well-structured reforms can translate into tangible benefits for communities.

SAMPLE ADEQUACY TESTS

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity

Measure	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.841
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	$\chi^2 = 519.85$ (df = 120), $p < 0.001$

The KMO) value of 0.841, as shown in Table 2, indicates a meritorious level of sampling adequacy. This implies that the sample was sufficient to conduct factor analysis, ensuring the credibility of the results. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), which confirms that the variables were interrelated enough for dimensionality reduction techniques to be meaningful. These results support the robustness of the underlying constructs measured in the survey. High KMO values above 0.8 are considered desirable in social science research. These findings justify the use

of advanced multivariate techniques like SEM to assess relationships among the studied variables. Hence, the data meet critical preconditions for factor analysis and structural modeling. This methodological rigour is consistent with the observations made by Chilunjika *et al* (2022), who emphasize the importance of systematic and empirically sound approaches in evaluating governance mechanisms within Zimbabwe’s procurement systems. Their study on the tendering process at the Zimbabwe’s State Procurement Board highlights the pitfalls of politicised procurement and calls for reforms based on empirical evidence and transparent evaluation methods. By ensuring that the data meet critical assumptions for structural modelling, this research builds on such literature by demonstrating how empirical rigour can inform and strengthen procurement policy decisions aimed at improving governance, transparency and development outcomes.

SCALE RELIABILITY TESTS

Table 3: Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability for Construct Scales

	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Transparency in Procurement	5	0.872
Inclusion of Local Suppliers	4	0.851
Community Capacity Development	4	0.814
Environmental Sustainability	3	0.788
Economic and Social Impacts	6	0.894

Table 3 shows that all constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency. Cronbach’s Alpha values for all variables exceeded the 0.7 threshold, indicating high reliability of the scales used. The economic and social impact construct had the highest reliability at 0.894, reflecting strong inter-item correlation. Transparency and inclusion of local suppliers also scored above 0.85, signifying a reliable assessment of procurement reform outcomes. Even the lowest alpha value of 0.788 for environmental sustainability still meets acceptable levels, suggesting that the measurement scale was adequately robust. These findings validate the survey instrument and confirm that the respondents understood the items consistently. Therefore, the data collected can be trusted for subsequent statistical analyses, including SEM.

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING (SEM)

Table 4: SEM Path Coefficients and Significance

	Standardised Coefficient (β)	p-value
Transparency → Economic Impact	0.43	0.001
Inclusion of Suppliers → Social Cohesion	0.39	0.004
Capacity Development → Economic Impact	0.36	0.006
Environmental Sustainability → Economic Impact	0.28	0.012
Economic Impact → Social Wellbeing	0.45	0.000

The SEM path results presented in Table 4 highlight several statistically significant relationships. Transparency in procurement has a strong positive effect on economic impact ($\beta = 0.43$), reinforcing the importance of openness in public processes. The inclusion of local suppliers also significantly contributes to social cohesion ($\beta = 0.39$), emphasizing the role of inclusive policies in building community ties. Findings from the structural model reveal key pathways through which procurement reforms influence socio-economic development and are well-supported by existing literature. The significant influence of community capacity development on economic impact ($\beta = 0.36$) underscores the necessity of investing in local competencies to drive economic progress. This aligns with Chikwere, Chikazhe and Tukuta (2023), who emphasize the role of capacity-building in enhancing the effectiveness of procurement processes and achieving value for money, particularly in Zimbabwe's rural district councils. Strengthening community knowledge and skills ensures that local stakeholders can actively and competently engage in procurement activities, thus contributing to inclusive economic growth.

Similarly, the positive relationship between environmental sustainability and economic impact ($\beta = 0.28$), highlights the emerging importance of green procurement practices. While slightly weaker than other paths, this finding reflects growing recognition that sustainable procurement can contribute to long-term economic resilience. This resonates with global shifts in procurement policy that emphasizes eco-friendly sourcing, as discussed by Ausat (2023), who points to the evolving influence of public awareness, including environmental consciousness, on economic decision-making shaped through digital platforms such as social media.

The strong predictive relationship between economic impact and social well-being ($\beta = 0.45$) reinforces the idea that financial empowerment has ripple effects on broader social outcomes. Economic growth driven by inclusive procurement can reduce inequality and improve quality of life, a finding consistent with the work of Chilunjika *et al.* (2022). Their study highlights how procurement reforms, when freed from patronage and politicisation, can serve as a tool for delivering public goods effectively and equitably. Collectively, these statistically significant paths ($p < 0.05$) validate the relevance of the adopted theoretical frameworks and demonstrate that procurement reforms, when aligned with local capacity, environmental consciousness and equitable economic principles, serve as powerful drivers of both economic and social advancement.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have shown a significant shift in local procurement outcomes and community satisfaction due to procurement reforms, particularly in rural areas of Zimbabwe. One of the major insights relates to the economic inclusion and improved transparency in tender processes, which have boosted the participation of local suppliers and SMEs. This aligns with Chikwere, Chikazhe and Tukuta (2023), who emphasise the importance of transparency in enhancing value for money in public procurement. The structural equation model results also reveal a strong correlation between community involvement and perceived procurement effectiveness. This supports Kristensen, Mosgaard and Remmen (2021), who discuss the critical role of local stakeholder engagement in circular public procurement practices. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics show that digital platforms and reforms have enhanced access to procurement information, which correlates with the global shift toward digital governance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Delardas *et al.*, 2022). Overall, the reforms have had a positive economic and social impact, with community members reporting increased satisfaction with public procurement outcomes.

The social impacts of procurement reforms are particularly significant in terms of trust-building and community cohesion. According to the reliability analysis, constructs like fairness, transparency and responsiveness demonstrated high internal consistency and were highly rated by respondents. These results are consistent with the findings of Truong and Truong (2022), who report increased trust and changes in consumer

behaviour due to institutional transparency during the pandemic. Community members reported that procurement systems were no longer seen as exclusive or corrupt, but as inclusive and participatory processes that empower local entrepreneurs. The feedback loop, established through reform-related feedback mechanisms, gave voice to previously marginalised groups. This is in line with Ausat (2023), who emphasized the role of media and public opinion in shaping institutional practices and public engagement. Therefore, the reforms have not only strengthened procurement systems but also enhanced social capital among local populations.

Economically, the reforms contribute to increased local job creation and income generation, especially for small-scale contractors and vendors. The results show that a significant number of previously excluded local businesses are now participating in procurement tenders, leading to improved livelihoods. This outcome aligns with the circular economy principles discussed by Kurniawan *et al.* (2021), who observe that local sourcing and waste reduction practices can yield sustainable economic benefits. Additionally, digital innovations introduced by the reforms reduced transaction costs and corruption, thus encouraging more vendors to participate. These findings mirror the economic shifts noted by Valaskova, Durana and Adamko (2021), who identified changes in purchasing behaviour due to trust in institutional reforms. The increased vendor participation also suggests improved perceived value and satisfaction, supporting Zhang *et al.* (2021), who argue that consumer-perceived value influences repeat transactions. Consequently, the reforms have established a more inclusive and economically viable procurement ecosystem.

The literature also emphasizes the critical role of social media in shaping procurement perceptions and decisions. In this study, social media campaigns and community engagement platforms were instrumental in raising awareness about procurement opportunities. Respondents noted that the dissemination of procurement notices via WhatsApp and Facebook increased inclusivity and transparency. This supports the work of Wulandari and Rauf (2022), who highlight the role of digital platforms in shaping consumer decisions. These platforms also enable community feedback and monitoring of procurement activities, further reducing corruption and enhancing trust. Karunarathne and Thilini (2022) also observe that social media advertising plays a significant role in influencing public attitudes

towards institutional decisions. In rural Zimbabwe, the accessibility of these platforms has democratised information flow, particularly for youth and women entrepreneurs. As such, digital and social media tools have proven essential to the success and public acceptance of procurement reforms.

Behavioural change among community members, particularly with local procurement participation, has also been a notable outcome of the reforms. The shift from skepticism to active involvement is consistent with changes in purchasing behaviour observed globally during crises. For instance, Hayu, Sulistiyawan and Salim (2021) observe that consumers turned to more trusted and accessible sources during the pandemic, mirroring local communities' embrace of transparent procurement systems. In Zimbabwe, this behavioural change is supported by training workshops and reform communication, which build procurement literacy. These efforts help break down historical barriers that have excluded rural communities from public supply chains. Additionally, the perception of procurement as a community-driven process fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. As Purchase *et al.* (2021) noted, stakeholder engagement is central to sustainable resource management and community resilience. The behavioural transformation observed suggests long-term benefits for procurement sustainability and community empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that procurement reforms in Zimbabwe have had a significantly positive impact on both the social and economic dimensions of rural communities. These reforms have enhanced transparency, inclusivity and efficiency within procurement systems, leading to increased participation of local suppliers. Socially, the reforms have helped rebuild trust in public institutions and promoted community cohesion by including marginalised voices. Economically, reforms have expanded opportunities for local businesses, thereby improving livelihoods and stimulating local economies. The use of digital platforms and social media has further amplified these impacts by promoting awareness, accountability and engagement. The behavioural shift from distrust to participation demonstrates the transformative potential of well-implemented procurement policies. Overall, procurement reforms have strengthened institutional-community relations and paved the way for sustainable development in Zimbabwe's rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the social and economic impacts of procurement reforms, it is essential for the government to scale up digital procurement platforms. This involves investing in digital infrastructure and providing relevant training to ensure equitable access to procurement information across all communities, including those in remote and marginalised areas. Expanding access to such platforms can enhance transparency, increase participation and reduce barriers for local businesses. In addition to infrastructure, institutionalising community feedback mechanisms is crucial. Regular tools such as surveys, social media polls and community meetings should be utilised to capture the public's views, allowing for the continuous improvement of procurement systems based on real-time feedback and experiences.

Promoting procurement literacy is another vital recommendation. Through workshops and outreach campaigns, especially targeting youth and women, communities can be empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage effectively in public procurement processes. This not only builds capacity, but also ensures broader representation in economic opportunities. Furthermore, encouraging local sourcing and circular practices should be prioritised in procurement policies. By emphasizing the use of locally produced goods and services, governments can stimulate local economies, create jobs and promote sustainability in line with circular economy principles.

Monitoring and evaluating procurement reforms regularly is also imperative. Independent third-party audits and tools such as community scorecards can offer objective insights into the effectiveness of reforms and their social and economic impacts. These evaluations help in identifying gaps and ensuring accountability. Moreover, enhancing collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs), such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), can extend the reach of reforms to under-served populations. These partnerships play a crucial role in promoting inclusive participation and building trust between communities and public institutions. Procurement policies must remain dynamic and responsive. Policy-makers should utilise data and evidence generated from on-going reforms to adapt and refine procurement strategies. By grounding decisions in empirical evidence, reforms can be more effectively tailored to meet the evolving needs of different

communities, ensuring long-term relevance, efficiency and inclusivity in public procurement.

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