

1. Introduction



1.1 Purpose and scope

Governments around the world collectively spend over US\$13 trillion per annum (15% of global GDP) on the purchase, or 'procurement', of goods, services and works to provide citizens with education, public health, security and infrastructure (World Bank 2021). Given the significance of this spending, the decision-making processes governing how public entities purchase have immense implications for the environment, the economy and society. According to a recent Boston Consulting Group report, public procurement produces approximately 7.5 billion tons of direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions, about 15% of the world's total (2022). Shifting government spending towards more sustainable products and services can therefore have a significant impact on the fight against climate change, as well as a transformative effect on markets by driving them towards greener and more innovative products. Public procurement can also promote local industries, small and medium-sized enterprises and disadvantaged groups, such as women and minorities.

This strategic approach to spending, commonly known as 'sustainable procurement' or 'SP' (see Box 1.1), is also practised by private sector organizations committed to reducing their environmental footprint, complying with social standards and/or encouraging sustainability across their supply chains. Large multinational corporations, in particular, can channel their economic power through SP to create a positive impact in their sphere of influence beyond national borders (Dumas 2013).

Indeed institutional purchasers, both public and private, are uniquely positioned to demand transparency about the upstream and downstream impacts of goods and services. They can also join forces to send consistent purchasing signals to the market at a scale that can be transformative.

After two decades of progress, sustainable procurement is regarded by many organizations as

an important instrument in helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ More specifically, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all Member States of the United Nations (UN), identifies 17 SDGs that are at the heart of achieving sustainable development globally. Target 12.7 focuses specifically on the number of countries implementing sustainable public procurement (SPP) policies and action plans.

In an effort to contribute to the global monitoring of SP implementation, UNEP published its first *SPP Global Review* in 2013. Four years later, a second edition was published in the framework of the SPP Monitoring Interest Group of the One Planet Network SPP Programme.

Box 1.1

Defining sustainable procurement

'Sustainable procurement' (SP) refers to the integration of social and environmental considerations into the purchasing processes of public and private organizations alike. When reference is made exclusively to public sector purchasing, the term '**sustainable public procurement**' (SPP) is used.

Sustainable procurement is grounded in the concept of value for money. In the context of procurement, value for money is the result of a cost-benefit analysis that takes into account total cost of ownership or the whole life cost of products. These costs are important, as the initial capital outlay often does not reflect the total costs associated with a product's use, maintenance and disposal. Value for money also considers the social, economic and environmental implications of a purchase for society as a whole. In fact, SP is usually discussed in the context of the three dimensions or pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental.

Typically, SP is leveraged in support of a government's sustainable development objectives across these three dimensions, or, in the case of private organizations, their environmental and/or labour policies (social dimension).

¹ The Sustainable Development Goals are a 'comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative goals and targets' that aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, take action on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, build strong institutions and partnerships and more. Over 150 world leaders adopted the SDGs in September 2015 and committed to implementing them by 2030 (United Nations. 2015. 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>)

The Interest Group continues to oversee the development of the *Global Review* publication as part of its work plan. The *2022 SPP Global Review* extends the work of the earlier two reports, while also adding to existing literature by:

- ◆ Providing a global overview of the current state of SP in national governments, highlighting progress in areas such as SP policy development, implementation and monitoring.
- ◆ Assessing progress towards meeting UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.7.
- ◆ Creating a broader view of SP practice by identi-

fying how private sector actors and intergovernmental organizations engage in SP.

- ◆ Expanding understanding about the drivers, barriers, needs and expectations for SP around the globe by reflecting stakeholder opinions across an array of countries, organizations and professions.
- ◆ Assessing how the COVID-19 global pandemic has affected SP across all types of organizations.
- ◆ Illustrating how international organizations and networks support SP policy development, implementation and research.

1.2 Research methods and limitations

The *2022 SPP Global Review* is informed by primary and secondary research including:

- ◆ A **literature review** and analysis of over 200 sources published between 2016 and 2021 on the topic of SP (and related concepts).
- ◆ An online **Stakeholder Survey** of 322 sustainable purchasing stakeholders and leaders. The survey targeted a broad range of stakeholders from international organizations to local public authorities, companies, non-profits and consultants involved in SP.
- ◆ A **National Government Questionnaire** that assessed SPP activities being advanced by 45 national governments.
- ◆ **SDG 12.7.1 Monitoring Exercise** data for 40 national governments to track progress towards meeting SDG Target 12.7.
- ◆ Twenty-six in-depth, semi-structured **interviews with SP experts** representing the public and private sectors and different world regions. These offer reflections, anecdotes and observations about how the analytical results connect with existing literature.
- ◆ **Recommendations** that draw on the Stakeholder Survey and National Government Questionnaire findings, interview results, and information contained in the literature.
- ◆ **Submissions** from international organizations and networks highlighting their recent activities and initiatives on SP.



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Many of the Chapters combine data analysis with existing literature, as well as reflections, anecdotes and observations from expert stakeholder interviews. As shown in Figure 1.1, this edition of the *SPP Global Review* is more comprehensive than

the earlier ones. Not only did more participants take part in the Stakeholder Survey and National Government Questionnaire, but also the report was expanded to include the private sector and international organizations and networks.

Figure 1.1. Comparison of Global Review Characteristics, 2013, 2017 and 2022

Global Review Characteristic	Report Year		
	2013	2017	2022
RESEARCH APPROACH			
National Government Questionnaire			
Number of government respondents	–	41	93
Number of countries represented	–	41	45
Survey languages	–	English, Spanish	English, Spanish
Stakeholder survey			
Number of stakeholder respondents	163	201	322
Number of countries represented	92	62	92
Survey languages	English	English, Spanish	English, Spanish, French
Literature review			
Number of articles, reports and other sources	174	70	208
Semi-structured interviews			
Number of experts interviewed	20	6	26
REPORT CONTENT			
National government SPP Factsheets	–	√	√
Assessment of global trends	√	√	√
Analysis of progress towards SDGs	–	–	√
Comparison of regional SP activity	–	√	√
Private sector SP analysis	–	–	√
Intergovernmental organization SP analysis	–	–	√
Overview of international support organizations and networks' SP activities	√	–	√
Recommendations on SP	Limited	√	√

The results presented in the *2022 SPP Global Review*, however, are limited by some important research constraints. One such limitation is language – the data collection exercises were conducted in a few main languages (English and Spanish for the National Government Questionnaire and English, Spanish and French for the Stakeholder Survey), while the literature review covered mostly publications in English. In addition, it is unclear how disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic might have affected participation in the surveys.

Despite these challenges, the Stakeholder Survey generated over 300 responses from a wide range of countries. However, survey participants were still predominantly public authority stakeholders,

as in earlier *SPP Global Review* editions, with fewer stakeholders responding from private and non-profit sectors. Given that the survey was distributed by invitation to practitioners in communities already working on SP and related topics, the survey results are probably influenced by a 'self-selection bias' (individuals selecting themselves into a group, causing the sample to be biased). Moreover, given the open nature of the survey invitation, it was impossible to determine the total number of potential participants and therefore conclusions cannot be drawn on as to whether the survey participants are representative of all possible participants. The survey results should therefore be treated as indicative and not representative.

Another limitation was that the National Government Questionnaire was completed by a set of 45 national governments, therefore the findings do not reflect all SPP activity by national governments worldwide. For instance, the United Kingdom, which runs an active SPP programme, did not participate in the study. Nevertheless, according to UNEP's assessment, this sample represents the vast majority of countries leading SPP around the globe (accounting for approximately 70% of global GDP) and is therefore robust enough to allow conclusions to be drawn.

Lastly, data for the 2013, 2017 and 2022 SPP Global Reviews were gathered in 2012, 2016 and 2021, respectively. Findings are not always directly comparable because, in some cases, different questions were asked or similar questions provided a slightly different set of responses. In addition, a different set of stakeholders completed the Stakeholder Survey and National Government Questionnaire across each reporting year. Even so, most topics allowed for comparison and, where possible, high-level trends and shifts are highlighted.

For further information on the research methods employed to support this publication please see Annex 1.

1.3 Report structure

The *SPP Global Review* is organized into two Parts. Part I focuses on the current state of sustainable procurement and progress in national governments and is composed of four Chapters, including the Introduction. Chapter 2 provides a general overview of the current state of SP and emerging trends, drawing upon Stakeholder Survey findings, while Chapter 3 takes a closer look at SP implementation among national governments, using National Government Questionnaire and the SDG 12.7.1 Monitoring Exercise aggregate data. Part I concludes with a set of recommendations for institutional purchasers based on findings from the earlier Chapters.

Part II of the *SPP Global Review*, explores the diffusion of SP to the private sector, international organizations and role of supporting entities. It consists of three Chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 take a closer look at SP implementation among private enterprise and intergovernmental organizations, while Chapter 7 examines how international organizations and

networks are supporting SP mainstreaming through their activities and initiatives.

There are three Annexes. Annex 1 describes the research methods for this publication, Annex 2 provides an overview of the international organizations and networks supporting SP described in Chapters 6 and 7 and Annex 3 is a study on sustainable procurement in local governments.

In addition, the *2022 SPP Global Review* is supplemented by [Factsheets](#)² on the progress of SPP implementation across 45 countries that participated in the National Government Questionnaire. The Factsheets contain detailed information about the policies, activities, and monitoring systems that national governments have in place to promote and implement sustainable public procurement within their organizations and countries.

After two decades of progress, sustainable procurement is regarded by many organizations as an important instrument in helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

² www.unep.org/factsheets-spp-national-governments-2022