



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPACT OF GREEN PROCUREMENT ON PROFITABILITY AMONG FUEL RETAILERS OPERATING IN MASHONALAND CENTRAL PROVINCE IN ZIMBABWE

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#### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions on the impact of green procurement on profitability among fuel retailers in Zimbabwe. The study also explored the green procurement practices implemented, the challenges faced in implementing green procurement and ways to develop positive perceptions towards the impact of green procurement on profitability among fuel retailers. The study was qualitative and confined to a sample of 12 participants. Interviews, observation and document analysis were utilised to collect data. The findings of the study were that: fuel retailers do not have established green procurement policies; with regard to transportation and delivery, there was a strong perception on the impact of green procurement on profitability in fuel retailing firms that green procurement is costly; one of the stronger perceptions regarding the impact of green procurement on profitability is that it weakens competitiveness and reduces sales volumes; a lack of executive support has been a significant challenge in the implementation of green procurement practices in fuel retailing firms; increased stakeholder lobbying is regarded as one of the potent ways with which positive perceptions regarding green procurement may be developed in fuel retailing firms. Some of the study's recommendations were that: Fuel retailing firms must adopt green procurement as a written policy with clear guidelines and Fuel retailing firms must utilise suppliers of green products and services.

#### INTRODUCTION

The fuel industry in Zimbabwe is important to the economy but also harmful to the environment. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2018), Zimbabwe faces an energy crisis like most of the countries in the world due to its reliance on non-renewable energy forms that are unsustainable especially in the light of the changing climate. Non-renewable energy sources, especially fossil fuels used in industry, emit greenhouse gases which promote climate change. Like in most land locked countries in Africa, Zimbabwe does not have any indigenous sources of oil and natural gas and thus depends on imports for liquid fuel (UNICEF, 2018). Makonese (2018) opines that the majority of Zimbabwe's refined petroleum and diesel are imported via a pipeline from the port of Beira in Mozambique to Mutare district in Manicaland province. As well, petroleum and diesel are imported from South Africa. Oil fuel imports cost the country a lot of foreign currency (US\$ 454 million in 2017) or 15.7% of total import expenditure (UNICEF, 2018). Zuva (2017) put forward that Zimbabwe has one blending plant at Chisumbanje in Manicaland province which was commissioned in the year 2007 but started trading in 2012. Moreover, Zuva (2017), states that from independence in

1980 to 2010, the government controlled the industry from importation, storage, distribution through the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM) and pricing through Acts of Parliament. Thus, the NOCZIM was the sole importer but this changed in 2011 when the government deregulated the industry and allowed more players to import fuel using own resources. Many players were allowed to import fuel for resale to bulk customers as wholesalers or retailers. Therefore, in Zimbabwe, there are over eighty registered fuel importers, seven registered fuel wholesalers and over three hundred retailers or service stations countrywide. The Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority (ZERA) was established in 2010 to assist in the day to day operations of the sector. There is stiff competition within the retail sector with many players competing mainly on service excellence and on price (Makonese, 2018). For that reason, the industry is heavily regulated and entry requirements into the business are prohibitive (Zuva, 2017). For instance, the regulatory requirements for Environmental Management Agency (EMA), requires over US\$2000-00 per site and councils need on average US\$800-00 per site annually to issue certificates. However, Chari and Chiriseri (2018) found that in Zimbabwe cost price was still a major selection criterion in awarding tenders and that environmental and social considerations were not being incorporated in the purchasing decisions within the fuel sector. It is against this background that this study

assessed the perceptions of the impact of green procurement on profitability among fuel retailers in Zimbabwe.

## Literature Review

**Green procurement strategies in supply chain management:** Baffour et al (2017) studied the environmental policies of 10 fuel stations in Accra, Ghana and their impact on the environment and business performance. The study was of a mixed methodology and distributed 100 survey questionnaires to middle management and low ranking employees. The study also conducted 20 interviews on senior management employees and made on site observations. It was found that the green procurement policies of the fuel retailers were tentative with only forecourt sheds, underground single skinned metal tanks were generally the only environmentally savvy equipment at over 75% of the fuel stations. As well, it was also found that only 15% of the fuel stations had any leaks and spillage monitoring technology and vapour collection equipment. However, the study also found that the participants had the perception that green procurement was of no consequence to their organisational performance. Therefore, it was concluded that most fuel retailers had not adopted green procurement.

Rasthom and Nembane (2018) carried out a study of market trends of the petrol and diesel market in South Africa between 2007 and 2018 which included an analysis of the green procurement policies and practices of fuel retailers and their impact on financial performance. The study relied heavily on secondary data and key informant interviews. The study was qualitative and utilised 25 participants. It was found that even though perceptions regarding green procurement had evolved from that of indifference to that of positive regard among fuel retailers between 2007 and 2016 in South Africa, very few of the retailers had actually fully adopted green procurement. It was also found that retailers only adhered to the basic environmental regulations set out by the ministry of energy such as underground storage tanks, appropriate waste disposal, drainage systems and forecourt shades but very few had spills and leakage monitoring equipment and vapour collection technology. The study concluded that fuel retailers in South Africa did not consider green procurement to be beneficial to financial performance but only a necessity for compliance with the law.

**Green procurement and profitability in supply chain management:** Kanza (2017) investigated the impact of green policies on profitability among fuel retailers in Mozambique in which green procurement was a component. The study specifically investigated the extent to which green procurement had been embraced by fuel retailers in Mozambique and how this had affected their profitability. The study was qualitative, it utilised interviews, observation and documentary analysis. The study was confined to 33 participants that were purposively sampled. It was found that Agile Oils had only tentatively adopted green procurement practices. Based on the findings, it was concluded that green procurement because of its limited adoption could not significantly affect profitability. However, Kanza (2017) noted that as compared to other fuel retailers that had adopted green procurement measures, Agile experienced relatively lower profit margins. As with previous empirical studies discussed in this section, the study revealed that there is limited adoption of green procurement measures among African fuel retailers.

Furthermore, the study hinted at the suggestion that higher levels of green procurement practices may result too in higher profitability. A study by Rawalndipi (2016) explored how supply chain management affected profitability among the fuel retailers in Islamabad. The study was interested in understanding how the weaknesses and strengths of a sample of fuel retailers in Islamabad affected their ability to earn revenue per any given time period. A mixed methodology and a multi-case study design was used where 5 fuel retailers were assessed. The study utilised survey questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The study was confined to 150 participants. It was found that the five fuel retailers generally had sound supply chain management practices. The study found that the challenges faced by the retailers in their supply chain management were environmental rather than internal. It was also found that environmental challenges of supply chain management affected delivery, cost and organisational performance. Therefore, this resulted in profit targets not being met. The retail fuel companies constantly fell considerably below quarterly revenue thresholds. Chibwe (2017) investigated the impact of sustainable procurement on organisational performance at Acil Fuels in Tanzania. The major objective was to explore whether adopting sustainable procurement was either beneficial or detrimental to organisational performance. The study was qualitative and utilised interviews and document analysis. Also, the study was confined to thirty (30) employees of Axcil Fuels. It was found that Axcil Fuels is one of the few retailers in Tanzania that had adopted sustainable procurement practices. It was also found that sustainable procurement was beneficial to organisational performance in that the use of renewable energy lowered operational costs. Furthermore, the retailer observed environmental safeguards such as leakage monitoring and vapour collection therefore experienced mitigated loss due to accidents. Therefore, the study provides insight into how aspects of green procurement may affect organisational performance. However, the study did not venture to evaluate the level of adoption of sustainable development and unlike this study it did not focus specifically on productivity.

Zuva (2013) assessed the impact of differentiation Strategies in the fuel retail sector in Zimbabwe. This study sought to use CMED Fuels experience on commercialisation to assess the current level of differentiation in the sector and to come up with a framework, to guide new companies in the fuel retail sector on how they can grow the business. In the study, fifty six participants drawn from various backgrounds within the transport and fuel retail sector were part of questionnaire survey. Six managers from different Fuel Retail companies were also interviewed using an Interview Guide and sixteen service stations were observed unannounced and observations made without notice, using a check list. Secondary data was used and this included various reports and records from companies within the sector. The study revealed that different companies within the sector are at different levels of infrastructure development, service levels, compliance with legislation and branding. There are still grey areas on which companies can still leverage on. These include the use of technology to link business to suppliers and critical customers like corporate consuming large volumes so that business is done on line. The study again shows that the decentralisation of procurement, transport and logistics and the need to incorporate quality audits, the reports of which should be public information improve business performance. The study recommended that companies in the Fuel Retail Sector should

use various blue ocean strategies to ensure they remain ahead of competition and these include staff development, use of up to date technology to improve operations, investment in assets to improve attractiveness of facilities which should be located on major highways, urban and peri-urban areas. The research recommended further study on the impact of food court facilities at service stations on fuel sales volume.

**Challenges met in Implementation of green procurement in supply chain management:** Chari and Chiriseri (2018) investigated the factors affecting the adoption of sustainable procurement in Zimbabwe. The researchers used questionnaires and interviews on 300 procurement and administration staff to collect data. The study found out that sustainable procurement practices were not being practiced. Purchase orders were being awarded based on the lowest bid and other considerations such as the social and environmental factors were not included in purchasing decisions. The study also found that lack of management support was a limiting factor in the adoption of sustainable procurement. In availability of sustainable products, lack of knowledge about the concept and the perception that sustainable products are expensive also contributed to the challenges affecting the adoption of sustainable procurement. The study recommended that employees should be trained and educated on sustainability practices. Emphasis should be made on the benefits of sustainability and the risks of non-sustainability. Further more incentives should be given to suppliers to encourage them to develop sustainable products. A sustainable procurement policy should also be put in place.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used where the researchers focused on perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of employees working for fuel retailers and representatives of suppliers in Mashonaland central province. The study population consisted of 20 people, that is, 15 employees and 5 representatives of regular suppliers of fuel retailers in Mashonaland central province. The sample size for the study was twelve (12) participants. The researchers were also assisted in checking for the appropriateness of the sample size by the Google sample size calculator with a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 5. In addition, judgment purposive sampling was used to sample participants whose role in relation to the procurement practices of fuel retailing enabled them to provide relevant data in the subject area. As such twelve participants comprising a station manager, procurement officer, human resources officer and four (4) fuel attendants as well as five (5) representatives of regular suppliers of fuel retailers were purposively sampled. On the other hand, twelve (12) in-depth face to face interviews were carried out on one station manager, one procurement officer, one human resources officer and four (4) fuel attendants as well as five (5) representatives of regular suppliers of fuel retailing firms in Bindura. This agrees with Saunders (2014) who asserts that in-depth interviews are qualitative and conducted on participants selected for their first-hand knowledge about a topic of interest. More so, the researchers observed fuel retailers premises to determine observable evidence of the presence or lack thereof, of resources and infrastructure for green policies. The researchers devised an observation checklist from the careful consideration of the research objectives and confirmed the existence of the observation items in the fieldwork (Humphreys, 2013).

## RESULTS

This study found that fuel retailing firms in Mashonaland central province don't have established green procurement policies. Rather, the green procurement measures that have been implemented are borne out of the adherence to safety and health regulations. Therefore, fuel retailers practice green procurement only moderately just as far as their safety and health provisions lend them to green practices. The findings are contrary to the views of Baffour et al (2017) who as shown in literature suggest that policy-led training is vital in helping to prevent incidents and minimising the consequences if they do happen. With regard to transportation and delivery therefore, fuel retailers practice green procurement. This finding is relatable to those of Estherhuizen (2011) who as shown in literature asserts that procurement officers have to insure that the transport methods is the safest with large sized tank lorries that are mounted with double skinned steel often considered the most green. This study found that with regard to fuel storage, fuel retailers have practiced green procurement by procuring and installing the most environmentally safe underground storage. This shows that fuel retailing firms are adhering to what PELG (2018) suggests in literature when they assert that green considerations in storage methods, technology and infrastructure are fundamental. The study also found that fuel retailers moderately implement green procurement. These findings are partially similar to those of Mirza et al (2011) who suggest that green procurement for a fuel station should consider the most environmentally considerate equipment particularly supplies for the fuel system which includes: tanks; pumps; pipework; and tank lorries. The findings are however contrary to the prescriptions of Dolva (2008) who asserts that forecourt infrastructure and equipment should also be procurement with the view to minimise leaks and spillage, vapour concentration and so on by targeting robust surfacing, forecourt islands, green oil separators, compressors, compressor sheds, fire rated walls, insulated control rooms, pipe channels and technology for overfill prevention and vapour recovery. The researchers found too that with regard to utilities and in particular alternative energy, fuel retailers did not implement any green procurement practices. These findings are relatable to those of Baffour et al (2017) who as shown in literature found that even though it makes business sense to go green and adopt green and renewable energies such as solar, most fuel retailers rely on generators often because they are already predisposed to using fuel which they trade in. The researchers found that one strong perception of the impact of green procurement on profitability in fuel retailing firms is that green procurement is costly. This finding is similar to that of Sartorius et al (2018) who as reflected in literature assert that there often is the perception among fuel retailers in Africa that green procurement is unnecessarily costly. The researcher also found that one of the stronger perceptions regarding the impact of green procurement on profitability in fuel retailing firms is that it weakens competitiveness and reduces sales volumes. These findings are similar to those of Sterner (2012) who found that it is the perception of fuel retailers in most of Africa that wise business management dictates that competitiveness demands that the retailer go with the locally available suppliers that can provide the products or services expeditiously. Another finding was that the perception that green procurement is for multinational corporations that have a large market share is very strong in fuel retailing firms. This finding is similar to that of Baffour et al (2017) who found that fuel retailers in Ghana were of the opinion that green

procurement should be required only of multinational corporations such as BP and Shell simply because these gigantic companies had the reach, the logistical acumen and financial backing to be able to implement green procurement without suffering viability wise for prolonged spells of time. The study established that one of the dominant perceptions among employees in fuel retailing firms that green procurement is better suited to the large drilling, wholesale distribution and refinery companies because it is they that can incur the added cost without losing profitability. Furthermore the study found that it is also perceived that the environmental threats posed at drilling, wholesale distribution and refinery stages of the supply chain are much higher than at the retail stage. These findings are similar to the views of Diab (2015) who as shown in literature argues that fuel retailers also argue that because they are at the end of the chain in the business of selling fossil fuel products to consumers anyway, any attempt on their part to be environmentally prudent is contradictory to their entire business model. The researcher determined that it is one of the strong perceptions of participants that green procurement unnecessarily cuts into productive time and therefore could significantly reduce the profits realised per given time period. This finding is similar to that of Sartorius et al (2018) who as illustrated in literature posits that most fuel retailers are of the perception that compliance with environmental standards leads to a reduction of sales volumes by causing delays and denying some services based on environmental principles. The study determined from the responses therefore that despite a generally negative perception of the direct value of green procurement to profitability, the employees in fuel retailing firms generally agree that green procurement may bring about a significant reduction in risk and the losses incurred. These findings are similar to the views of The Human Sciences Research Council (2012) who as illustrated in literature opine that green procurement may be of benefit to the profitability of fuel retail indirectly by minimising losses due to environmental and health and safety risks.

This study also found that a lack of executive support has been a significant challenge in the implementation of green procurement practices in fuel retailing firms. This is similar to the findings of Defra (2016) who as illustrated in literature found that often management support is often lacking particularly among fuel retailers in Africa. The study found too that the negative perception regarding initial cost of green procurement was a leading challenge and hindrance to green procurement in fuel retailing firms. This finding is similar to that of Boomsma (2009) who as shown in literature found that it is often perceived, particularly in Africa that the cost of training and adapting to greener practices is an unnecessary waste of profits because there appears to be no urgency to go green. The study also found that the lack of availability of suppliers of green products and services in the local market is one of the significant challenges to green procurement in fuel retailing firms. This finding is similar to that of Mensah and Ameyaw (2015) who found that limited availability of suppliers in African markets in turn caused a lack of sustainable assets or services which causes firms to not be guided by green procurement ideals but only where they can get what in the fastest time. Another finding is that limited awareness and skills was a major challenge and hindrance to green procurement in fuel retailing companies. These findings are relatable to those of Mensah and Ameyaw (2005) who carried out a research on the challenges of sustainable

procurement in the Ghanaian energy industry and noted that very few people in the procurement department understood sustainable procurement as a concept that encompasses environment, economic and social aspects of sustainability. The study finds that since the management is already reluctant to implement green procurement practices, customers could have provided the needed push. However, this has not been forthcoming. These findings are similar to those of Baffour et al (2017) who as illustrated in literature found that most African customers are oblivious to the power they wield with regards to compelling their retailers to go green and adopt green policies such as green procurement. The study also found that increased stakeholder lobbying is regarded as one of the potent ways with which positive perceptions regarding green procurement may be developed in fuel retailing companies. This finding is similar to that of Baffour et al (2017) who argue that enhanced community awareness would result in stronger lobbying of fuel retailers to adopt widespread green procurement approaches. The study determined that assimilating green policy and procurement education in employee induction training would be one of the significant ways with which to nurture and develop a positive mind-set towards the value of green procurement to profitability and overall organisational performance in fuel retailing firms. These findings are similar to the views of Estherhuizen (2011) who as shown in literature suggests that green procurement training must be afforded every employee upon induction. The study also determined that procuring affordable green products and services from regional markets such as South Africa may nurture positive perceptions regarding the impact of green procurement on profitability. The study determined that this would be achieved by gradually deconstructing the perception that green procurement is costly from the minds of management and employees alike. This finding is similar to that of Roos (2012) who asserts that devoting time to locating affordable green products and services in regional markets will be of immense cost cutting benefit to the fuel retailer. Another finding was that an organisation wide paradigm shift and sensitization to orient employees with a green policy and procurement awareness would help nurture positive perceptions and appreciation of the value that green procurement has on profitability. These findings are similar to those of Baffour et al (2017) who as illustrated in related literature found that in Ghana, fuel retailers required a comprehensive paradigm shift to induct a mind-set appreciative of the value of green procurement to profitability.

## Conclusion

In view of the research findings, it can be concluded that fuel retailing firms operating in Mashonaland central do not have established green procurement policies. Fuel retailing firms did not implement any green procurement practices with regard to alternative energy and they moderately implement green procurement with regard to infrastructure, maintenance and monitoring. However, fuel retailing firms practice green transportation and green fuel storage as they have installed the most environmentally safe underground storage. It can also be concluded that the perception on the impact of green procurement on profitability in fuel retailing firms in Mashonaland central is that implementing green procurement is costly and that it weakens competitiveness and reduces sales volumes. There is also a very strong perception that green procurement is for multinational corporations that have a large market share.

Also there is a strong perception that green procurement unnecessarily cuts into productive time and therefore could significantly reduce the profits realised per given time period. Additionally, it can be concluded that a lack of executive support is a significant challenge in the implementation of green procurement practices in fuel retailing firms. The perception that implementing green procurement is costly is a leading challenge and hindrance to green procurement in fuel retailing firms. Also, lack of availability of suppliers of green products and services in the local market is one of the significant challenges to green procurement in fuel retailing firms. Furthermore, the limited awareness and skills is a challenge and hindrance towards green procurement. Finally, it can be concluded that there is a challenge of lack of customer involvement in coercing or lobbying fuel retailing companies to adopt and implement green procurement practices. Finally, it can be concluded that increased stakeholder lobbying is one of the ways with which positive perceptions regarding green procurement may be developed in fuel retailing firms. Also, assimilating green procurement policies and procurement education in employee induction training would be one of the significant ways with which to nurture and develop a positive mind-set towards the value of green procurement on profitability and overall organisational performance. In addition, procuring affordable green products and services from regional markets such as South Africa may nurture positive perceptions regarding the impact of green procurement on profitability. Finally, it can be concluded that, an organisation wide paradigm shift and sensitization to orient employees with a green policy and procurement awareness would help nurture positive perceptions and appreciation of the value that green procurement has on profitability.

### Recommendation

Therefore, it can be recommended that fuel retailing firms should implement green procurement policies and carry out green procurement training on employees. Fuel retailing firms should also utilise suppliers of green products and services such leakage monitoring devices and vapour collection technology that are found within the Southern African Region particularly South Africa from where import costs are more affordable than attempting to acquire these from further away. Also, infrastructure and equipment maintenance duties must be done in-house by trained personnel to minimise the cost of green procurement measures related to maintenance and monitoring as this would be more affordable than retaining service providers that often charge a retainer fee. In addition, the recruitment of procurement officers should consider green procurement expertise and awareness as a pre-condition so that knowledgeable and skilled procurement officers are hired and can also train other employees on green procurement. More so, EMA and ZERA must tighten regulations to insure a more intimate and elaborate adoption of green policies by fuel retailers as this would benefit the entire country in the long run given the devastating effects of climate change. Lastly, fuel consumers must be encouraged to become more aware and involved in lobbying their retailers to be more environmentally accountable by adopting and implementing green procurement policies and strategies.

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