



Advancing Green Public Procurement in South Africa

Challenges, opportunities,
and strategic pathways

IISD REPORT

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Advancing Green Public Procurement in South Africa: Challenges, opportunities, and strategic pathways

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Written by Sharmila Erizaputri and Ronja Bechauf

Photo: Vera Shestak/iStock

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Head Office

111 Lombard Avenue, Suite 325
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3B 0T4

Tel: +1 (204) 958-7700

Website: iisd.org

X: [@IISD_news](#)



Executive Summary

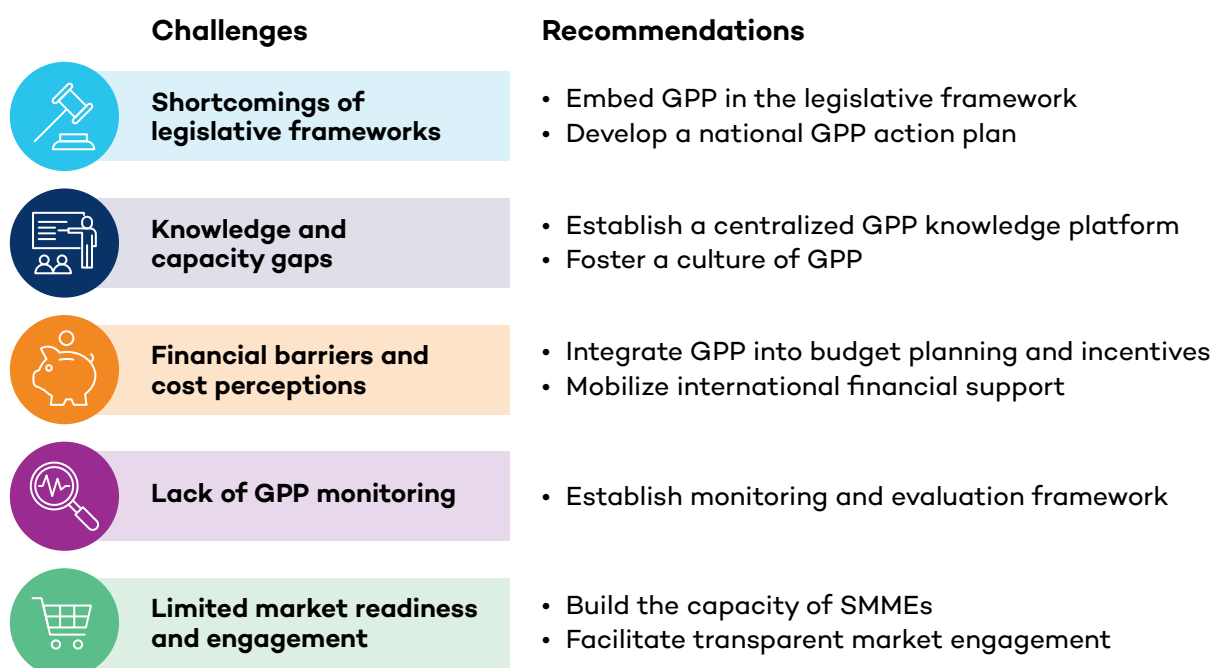
In South Africa, public procurement accounted for about 15% of GDP in 2021 (Simone & Balasundharam, 2023), presenting a significant opportunity to leverage this purchasing power for sustainable development. As shown by governments worldwide, public procurement can reduce environmental impacts and support markets in shifting to sustainable practices by incorporating environmental considerations into the purchasing of goods, services, and infrastructure.

Although South Africa does not have specific legislation for green public procurement (GPP), existing regulations allow procurers to integrate environmental considerations into procurement practices. The new Public Procurement Act (2024) marks a notable shift in this area, enabling procurers to implement measures that promote sustainable development.

Several procurers and policy-makers are pioneering GPP initiatives at provincial and municipal levels. The Western Cape Government and the City of Cape Town’s initiatives demonstrate GPP’s feasibility in South Africa, showing tangible environmental benefits, for instance, through reduced water use, energy consumption, and waste generation.

Despite this progress, significant challenges remain. Procurement practitioners often lack the expertise and resources for implementing GPP. The adoption of GPP faces additional hurdles including regulatory gaps, financial constraints, and perception of high costs. In addition, small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) face difficulties in meeting sustainability requirements. South Africa also lacks a robust monitoring system for GPP, which makes it difficult to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

Figure ES1. Challenges and recommendations for advancing GPP in South Africa



Source: Authors’ diagram.



To overcome these challenges, the report identifies five priority areas for intervention (see Figure ES1). Firstly, it recommends strengthening the legislative and policy framework by embedding GPP into national policies and developing a clear national action plan. Secondly, South Africa should invest in enhancing the skills of procurement stakeholders by creating a centralized knowledge platform and scaling up GPP training programs for procurement professionals.

Thirdly, financial challenges can be addressed by integrating GPP into budget planning, creating stronger incentives for GPP, and exploring international funding opportunities. The fourth recommendation is to develop a comprehensive GPP monitoring system that supports evidence-based decision making and continuous improvement and contributes to SPP reporting at the global level, including tracking progress toward United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12.7.1. Lastly, to make sure that companies can meet the increasingly stringent environmental criteria, South Africa should implement measures such as transparent market engagement and tailored capacity building for suppliers, especially SMMEs.



Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction and Purpose of the Study	1
2.0 Research Methodology	3
3.0 South Africa’s Priorities for Green and Sustainable Public Procurement	4
4.0 Legal and Governance Framework for GPP	6
4.1 The Legal Framework for GPP.....	6
4.2 Key Stakeholders for GPP.....	9
5.0 GPP Practices in South Africa	14
5.1 Overview of GPP Initiatives	14
5.2 Available Tools for GPP.....	15
6.0 Challenges and Recommendations for Scaling Up GPP	19
6.1 Shortcomings of Legislative Frameworks	19
6.2 Knowledge and Capacity Gaps	20
6.3 Financial Barriers and Cost Perceptions.....	21
6.4 Lack of GPP Monitoring.....	23
6.5 Limited Market Readiness and Engagement.....	24
7.0 Conclusion	26
References	28
Appendix A. Interview Guide	34



List of Figures

Figure ES1. Challenges and recommendations for advancing GPP in South Africa.....	iii
Figure 1. Key stakeholders for GPP.....	9
Figure 2. The map of influence and interest of key stakeholders	13
Figure 3. Challenges and recommendations for advancing GPP in South Africa	26

List of Tables

Table 1. South Africa’s SPP Legal framework.....	7
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List of Boxes

Box 1. Note on terminology.....	1
Box 2. Case studies: Long-term savings and environmental benefits through GPP	16
Box 3. Case study: EDGE-certified Belhar Gardens as a sustainable housing solution.....	18



Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGSA	Auditor-General of South Africa
CSO	civil society organization
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries & Environment
DEA&DP	Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning
EDGE	Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies
GLCN	Global Lead City Network on Sustainable Procurement
GPP	green public procurement
GBCSA	Green Building Council of South Africa
HPS	high-pressure sodium
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LCC	life-cycle costing
LED	light-emitting diode
MDBs	multilateral development banks
MFMA	Municipal Financial Management Act
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCC	Presidential Climate Commission
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PPPFA	Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act
SMMEs	small, medium, and micro enterprises
SOEs	state-owned enterprises
SPP	sustainable public procurement
TCO	total cost of ownership
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCG	Western Cape Government



1.0 Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Public procurement holds great transformative power in the face of global challenges, such as climate change and economic development. Representing a significant portion of national expenditures—averaging 12% of GDP in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and up to 30% in developing nations public procurement wields immense influence over market dynamics (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], n.d.). In addition, public procurement causes direct environmental impacts. Procurement activities are estimated to account for approximately 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions, underscoring the critical need for greening public procurement (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Against this backdrop, green public procurement (GPP) and sustainable public procurement (SPP) are key tools to align government spending with sustainability goals. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), GPP involves procuring goods, services, and works in a manner that minimizes environmental harm while achieving value for money on a whole life-cycle basis. SPP extends this concept by incorporating environmental, social, and economic considerations, aligning procurement with all three pillars of sustainable development (UNEP, 2017).

SPP and GPP are gaining momentum both globally and in South Africa, where public procurement accounted for approximately 15% of the country's GDP in 2021 (Simone & Balasundharam, 2023). With such substantial purchasing power, the public sector in South Africa holds great potential to influence market behaviour and drive sustainability practices.

Implementing GPP offers the opportunity to reduce pressing environmental challenges across the country. In many parts of the country, people and businesses are struggling with water scarcity, unreliable power supply, and high levels of pollution. In addition, South Africa's unique ecosystems are degrading due to human influences and climate change, threatening critical biodiversity and natural processes on which people and the economy depend (Presidential Climate Commission [PCC], 2024). Public procurers can help alleviate these problems in many ways. For example, they can choose buildings and appliances that require less water and energy, buy goods and services without toxic content and that have no negative impacts on biodiversity, and take measures to reduce waste.

Box 1. Note on terminology

While this brief primarily focuses on GPP, which emphasizes environmental aspects, SPP is the term more commonly used in the South African context—such as at the provincial level in the Western Cape. Governments and procurement authorities often prioritize social and economic development objectives over environmental considerations, leading them to adopt the broader term SPP. This report highlights environmentally focused GPP efforts in South Africa while acknowledging that these initiatives often fall under the wider SPP framework and are referred to as SPP in the local context.

Source: Authors.



Scaling up GPP offers multiple benefits beyond environmental protection. These include stimulating innovation in green technologies, creating new jobs in sustainable industries, improving resource efficiency, and reducing long-term operational costs for government institutions (World Economic Forum, 2022). Furthermore, GPP can help position South Africa as a leader in sustainable development in Africa while contributing to its national environmental commitments and development objectives.

This brief examines the current landscape of GPP in South Africa, with a focus on analyzing existing initiatives, identifying key stakeholders, exploring available tools, and highlighting the challenges and opportunities within the system. By delving into these aspects, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations for strengthening GPP practices.



2.0 Research Methodology

This report is based on a desk review of academic literature, policy documents, and studies on GPP in South Africa and similar contexts. Additionally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the following stakeholders:

- Western Cape Government
- The City of Cape Town
- The City of Tshwane
- Professor Geo Quinot, African Procurement Law Unit
- Africa GreenCo

The interviews aimed to understand the current state of GPP implementation in South Africa, explore challenges in adopting sustainable procurement practices, and identify potential strategies for improvement. The discussions also examined South Africa's climate commitments and the feasibility of adapting international best practices to the South African context. A list of interview questions is included in Appendix A.



3.0 South Africa's Priorities for Green and Sustainable Public Procurement

As Africa's largest economy, South Africa grapples with complex environmental and socio-economic challenges that are deeply intertwined. The country is heavily dependent on its natural resources, including agriculture, water, and energy production—sectors that are particularly sensitive to shifts in weather patterns. South Africa's climatic context, which includes semi-arid and Mediterranean climates alongside other climatic zones, further amplifies its vulnerability to these changes (PCC, 2024).

People and ecosystems in the country face pressing environmental issues, including widespread air and water pollution, inadequate waste management systems, and accelerating biodiversity loss, while simultaneously experiencing an increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and heat waves due to climate change (PCC, 2024). These environmental challenges exacerbate the country's socio-economic burdens, particularly the persistent triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality (PCC, 2024).

In response to these challenges, South Africa has committed to environmental action. Its updated nationally determined contribution in 2021 reflects public support and policy commitments for addressing climate change and driving a just transition (Government of South Africa, 2021). Notably, in its Low-Emission Development Strategy, South Africa has established the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, signalling a commitment to sustainable development and decarbonization (Government of South Africa, 2021).

In the context of procurement policy, the South African government has recognized SPP as a strategic policy tool to address its development challenges and achieve broader sustainability objectives (Bolton, 2006; Iurascu, 2024). While GPP remains a niche concept in South Africa, environmental criteria play a role in public procurement decisions, particularly through mandatory environmental impact assessments for larger development projects, which became mandatory around 1998 (Department of Environmental Affairs [DEA], 2013; Kidd et al., 2018). However, research highlights limited evidence on the extent to which environmental impact assessments have delivered sustainable outcomes (Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, 2019).

At the national level, GPP implementation is also occurring through sectoral initiatives, with notable progress in the transportation sector. For instance, the Department of Transport is spearheading efforts to establish GPP guidelines for its vehicle fleets, incorporating life-cycle costing principles as part of its value-for-money assessment framework (Klaaren, 2023b).

Despite these GPP initiatives that aim to reduce environmental impacts, the country's procurement efforts predominantly focus on economic and social considerations, particularly through preferential procurement policies shaped by the country's post-apartheid transformation agenda and industrial development policies (OECD, 2024b; Stoffel et al., 2019). This includes promoting inclusive growth and addressing inequalities, particularly through the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA). The PPPFA provides



a framework for allocating preference points to historically disadvantaged individuals—such as black-owned enterprises, women, and people with disabilities. In addition, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment program aims to increase economic participation for Black South Africans (OECD, 2024b).

The procurement landscape has also seen recent initiatives emphasizing gender equality. For instance, the South African government in 2020 introduced a target of 40% of public sector procurement to be allocated to women-owned businesses (Commission for Gender Equality, 2022). The Commission for Gender Equality (2022) also emphasized the potential of procurement policies to promote fairness, diversify supply chains, and include gender equity clauses in tender evaluations.

The focus on socio-economic transformation is further reflected in the National Development Plan 2030, which prioritizes stimulating domestic industries and transforming business ownership patterns (OECD, 2024b). Environmental factors remain notably absent from procurement considerations in the Development Plan. Despite South Africa's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 12.7, which promotes SPP practices, the country lacks a comprehensive policy framework that coherently integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects of procurement (OECD, 2024b).

Nevertheless, promising developments at the local and regional levels show potential pathways for strengthening GPP across the country. Several provinces have established concrete commitments and strategic frameworks for greener purchasing practices:

- The Western Cape Government (WCG) has integrated SPP into its Climate Change Response Strategy Implementation Plan to promote low-carbon and socially responsible procurement practices (WCG, 2022).
- The WCG has integrated sustainable public procurement into its Western Cape Environmental Implementation Plan 4th Edition 2020–2025 (WCG, 2020) to promote the implementation and monitoring and evaluation of SPP implementation across the province.
- Gauteng Province's 2020 Climate Change Response Strategy demonstrates a clear understanding of green procurement, particularly emphasizing life-cycle approaches in infrastructure procurement (Klaaren, 2023a).
- Similarly, the Limpopo Provincial Government has recognized and prioritized green procurement as a key policy tool in advancing its Green Economy objectives (Limpopo Provincial Government, 2013). However, specific progress or updates on the implementation of GPP in recent years remain unclear.

At the municipal level, both Johannesburg and the City of Cape Town have developed dedicated green procurement action plans—Johannesburg through its Climate Action Plan's commitment to developing a Green Procurement Policy, and Cape Town through its Environmental Strategy, which outlines specific operational and capital project implementation measures (Klaaren, 2023a). In addition, the City of Tshwane adopted its Sustainable Public Procurement Strategy in 2017. It outlines three key objectives, one of which focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable procurement practices (Global Lead City Network on Sustainable Procurement [GLCN], n.d.).



4.0 Legal and Governance Framework for GPP

4.1 The Legal Framework for GPP

South Africa does not yet have dedicated legislation for GPP and SPP (OECD, 2024b). However, its legal and policy framework includes several laws and regulations that can be interpreted to support environmental considerations in public procurement (Bolton, 2008; Turley & Perera, 2014).

The procurement system is governed by several key pieces of legislation, starting with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which establishes fundamental principles for public procurement. Section 217 of the Constitution provides the framework for procurement, enabling the government to use procurement as a policy tool to achieve social and economic objectives. Additionally, Section 24 enshrines the right of all South Africans to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being, mandating the government to adopt reasonable legislative and other measures to protect the environment for present and future generations.

The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) (1998) was enacted to give effect to Section 24 of the Constitution. NEMA sets out national environmental principles that guide the actions of all organs of state, including those that significantly impact the environment. While it does not explicitly refer to procurement, NEMA's principles apply to procurement processes involving state actions that could affect the environment (Breytenbach, 2023).

Despite these overarching principles, South Africa's procurement legislation remains fragmented, with various acts regulating procurement at different levels of government (Iurascu, 2024). The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) covers procurement at national and provincial levels, while the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) governs local municipalities. The PPPFA primarily focuses on social equity but can be interpreted to include environmental considerations, aligning with the Constitution's mandate for environmental protection (Turley & Perera, 2014).

In South Africa, every level of government is responsible for procuring goods, services, and works in accordance with its mandate while adhering to the applicable policies at the national, provincial, and local levels. This allows municipalities and provincial departments to adopt more sustainable procurement practices, taking into account the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the goods, services, and works they acquire.

South Africa recently introduced the Public Procurement Act 2024 to reform its procurement system. It marks a significant step toward streamlining South Africa's fragmented procurement legislation. Signed into law on July 23, 2024, the Act consolidates existing frameworks and aims to promote fairness, transparency, and efficiency in procurement processes. While its provisions are not yet in force, the Act includes notable mentions of sustainability, stating (p. 36): "A procuring institution may, in accordance with prescribed conditions, provide



for measures to advance sustainable development in procurement.” This provision enables procurers to consider sustainable development goals within their procurement processes. However, this new Act currently lacks specific guidance on how environmental measures can be applied in procurement.

Table 1. South Africa’s SPP Legal framework

Legislative framework	Description	Link to document
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)	The Constitution governs public procurement, mandating fairness, equity, transparency, competitiveness, and cost-effectiveness while allowing preferential policies to benefit historically disadvantaged persons. Section 24 mentions the right to a healthy environment and mandates measures for ecologically sustainable development.	https://www.justice.gov.za/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf
NEMA (1998)	NEMA establishes a framework for cooperative environmental governance, emphasizing sustainable development and the integration of environmental considerations into decision-making processes. NEMA also outlines principles that highlight the importance of anticipating and preventing negative environmental impacts and, where prevention is not possible, minimizing and remedying such impacts.	https://www.dffe.gov.za/sites/default/files/documents/legislation/NEMA-National-Environmental-Management-Act-107-1998-G-19519.pdf
PFMA (1999)	The PFMA establishes a regulatory framework for procurement at the national and provincial levels, as well as state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This framework provides entities with autonomy in budget spending, enabling them to incorporate environmental and social considerations into their procurement decisions (Perera et al., 2007).	https://www.treasury.gov.za/legislation/pfma/PFMA%201999%20as%20amended%20March%202017.pdfv



Legislative framework	Description	Link to document
MFMA (2003)	MFMA establishes a regulatory framework for supply chain management and procurement within municipalities and municipal entities. The Act requires each municipality to develop and implement its own supply chain management policy. This framework also specifically requires that bids are assessed based on best value for money. This requirement encourages discussions about the difference between immediate purchase costs versus total life-cycle costs, aligning with sustainable procurement policy objectives (Turley & Pereira, 2014).	https://mfma.treasury.gov.za/MFMA/Legislation/Local%20Government%20-%20Municipal%20Finance%20Management%20Act/Municipal%20Finance%20Management%20Act%20(No.%2056%20of%202003).pdf
PPPFA (2000)	While primarily focused on advancing social policies, the PPPFA can also be interpreted to include environmental preservation as a factor in line with Section 24 of the Constitution. Section 2(1)(d) of the PPPFA states that public entities may include environmental policy goals in their preferential procurement decisions, alongside social considerations (Bolton, 2008, p. 37; Breytenbach, 2023).	https://www.treasury.gov.za/legislation/acts/2000/a05-00.pdf
Public Procurement Act (2024)	The Public Procurement Act of 2024 unifies South Africa's fragmented procurement laws, emphasizing fairness, transparency, and efficiency. It includes provisions to promote sustainability but is not yet in force.	https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/Acts/2024/Act_No_28_of_2024_Public_Procurement_Act.pdf

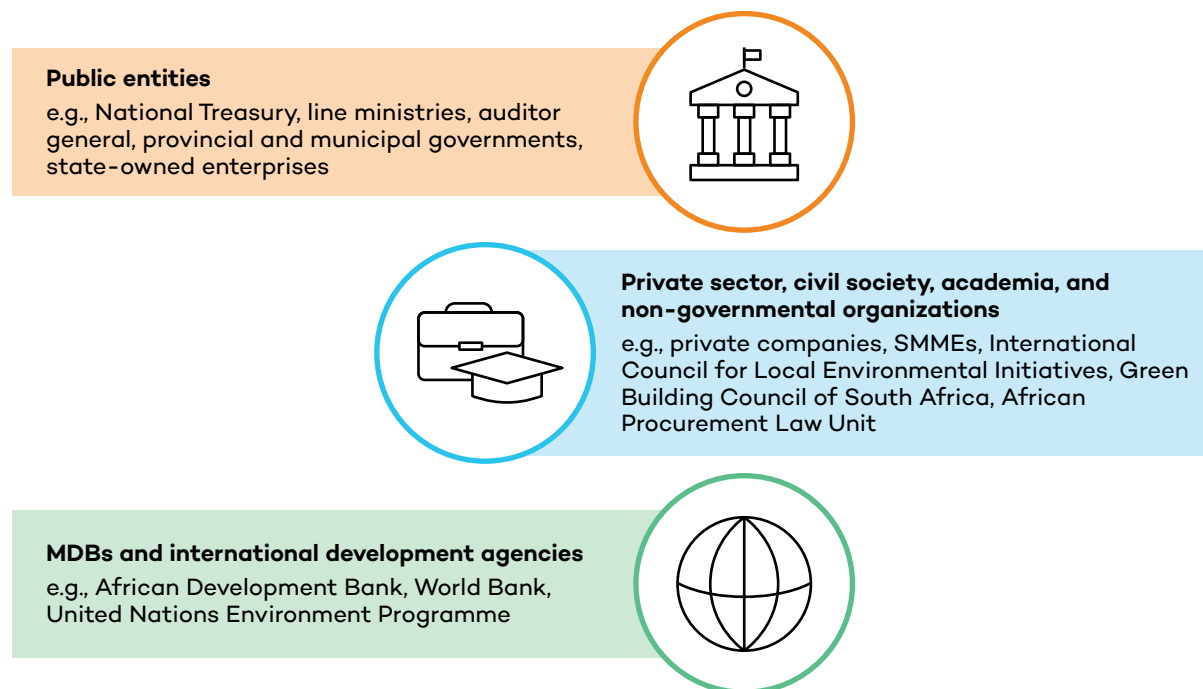
Source: Authors.



4.2 Key Stakeholders for GPP

The implementation of GPP in South Africa involves a complex network of stakeholders, each playing crucial roles in shaping policies and driving sustainable practices (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Key stakeholders for GPP



Source: Authors' diagram.

Public Entities

In South Africa, the governance framework for public procurement places shared responsibility across national, provincial, and local governments. At the national level, the National Treasury and its Office of the Chief Procurement Officer are key to the public procurement and financial management framework. The Treasury ensures sound financial management across all government levels under the PFMA and MFMA. The Office of the Chief Procurement Officer, established in 2013, oversees procurement policies and modernizes the supply chain system to ensure fairness, transparency, and cost-effectiveness (OECD, 2024b).

Also at the national level, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition leads South Africa's economic development, industrial growth, and international trade efforts. It supports sustainable procurement through initiatives like the National Cleaner Production Centre South Africa, which encourages resource-efficient production practices and helps businesses minimize energy, water, and material use (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, n.d.). These efforts are important to help the market prepare for tenders with environmental requirements.



South Africa's Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE) promotes green procurement through initiatives like the circular economy guideline within the waste sector, which identifies opportunities for circular practices throughout the materials value chain (Iurascu, 2024). The guideline suggests integrating circular economy principles into procurement law through preferred supplier lists and building procurement department capabilities around total cost of ownership and material circularity (Iurascu, 2024).

The Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) is another key stakeholder for GPP. It wields significant influence by auditing the financial management of government entities across all levels. Through this oversight role, the AGSA is tasked to ensure the effective and appropriate use of public funds. Notably, as highlighted by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) Africa (2019b), AGSA can leverage its authority by publicly commending institutions that demonstrate innovation in procurement practices. Procurers often report concerns that practising GPP will lead to auditing issues. If AGSA promoted GPP, this would create more legal certainty for procurers and encourage them to prioritize sustainability and implement GPP.

At the provincial and municipal levels, public entities such as provincial treasuries and various line departments play a vital role in localizing national policies, implementing sustainability initiatives, and aligning procurement processes with GPP objectives. Departments focused on the environment, infrastructure, health, trade, industry, and transportation are particularly important for advancing GPP.

In addition to government bodies, SOEs like Eskom and Transnet play a role in public procurement. Together with local and provincial governments, they collectively account for a substantial 76% of public procurement expenditure (Simone & Balasundharam, 2023). Given their large procurement budgets and critical functions in electricity and logistics, these SOEs are often mentioned as key stakeholders in advancing GPP. For example, Eskom, in collaboration with the World Bank, is implementing the Just Energy Transition Project, which focuses on transitioning South Africa's energy sector toward renewable energy while fostering socio-economic development and reducing carbon emissions (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, Transnet is advancing sustainability through its Green Freight Strategy, which provides a roadmap for transitioning to climate-friendly and sustainable freight operations.

Private Sector

The private sector plays a critical role in public procurement, with companies and individuals competing for government contracts to provide goods, works, and services. In South Africa, approximately 83% of these suppliers are small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and exempted micro enterprises—businesses with an annual turnover of less than ZAR 10 million (approximately USD 530,000), with at least 51% black ownership and management (OECD, 2024b). However, many of these enterprises have limited awareness of GPP. Interviewed experts indicate that while some SMMEs engage in sustainable practices, they often lack formal certifications to validate their environmental compliance.

Despite these challenges, several private sector players are already demonstrating their contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and



Production). While not directly involved in government contracts, these examples highlight the progress achieved in integrating sustainable practices into supply chains. The Global Compact Network South Africa (2024) has compiled examples of innovative and sustainable business practices, such as NUDE Foods, which promotes zero-waste shopping by offering eco-friendly food options produced through regenerative farming and ethical practices. Similarly, the company Ensekta transforms waste into resources, fostering economic growth, environmental protection, and healthier food options through collaboration and strategic partnerships (Global Compact Network South Africa, 2024).

Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are instrumental in promoting and advocating for sustainable practices in South Africa. These organizations help integrate sustainability into public procurement and facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity-building efforts.

For instance, the Africa office of ICLEI has been a key actor in advancing SPP through implementation programs like the SmartProcurement Programme. Since 2018, this program has contributed to the implementation of the Western Cape Green Economy Strategy by supporting provincial and local governments in the Western Cape in incorporating sustainable procurement into policy and practice (ICLEI Africa, 2018). At the global level, ICLEI coordinates the GLCN, a group of leading cities committed to advancing sustainable procurement. The GLCN facilitates the exchange of best practices and strategies among cities, including South African cities like Cape Town and Tshwane. However, activity on the GLCN platform appears to have been reduced over the past 2 years.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development has also contributed to advancing SPP in South Africa through its project on Mainstreaming Sustainable Public Procurement. This initiative, which was implemented from 2016 to 2018, introduced product service systems in the Western Cape as a specific tool to implement SPP (International Institute for Sustainable Development, n.d.).

Another notable civil society organization is the Green Building Council of South Africa (GBCSA). Established in 2007, GBCSA is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting sustainable building practices within South Africa's property and construction sectors. As a member of the World Green Building Council, GBCSA launched the Green Star SA rating system for sustainable buildings in 2008 (Tramontin et al., 2014). Since then, GBCSA has expanded its suite of certifications, which collectively exceed 1,000 certified projects. These certifications include Green Star SA, Net Zero, and other tools, contributing to significant reductions in CO₂ emissions and fostering sustainability across the built environment. In 2023, GBCSA also introduced the Green Star New Build V2 tool, reflecting updated global standards for sustainable building practices (GBCSA, 2023).



Academia

Academia plays a pivotal role in advancing SPP and GPP in South Africa. Academic research has been instrumental in keeping policy-makers informed and helping them develop evidence-based frameworks for GPP. One prominent example is the African Procurement Law Unit at Stellenbosch University, which promotes research and training in public procurement regulation across the African continent while fostering networks within Africa and internationally. The African Procurement Law Unit contributes to research on SPP and GPP, including a recent publication exploring the potential for GPP within South African procurement law (Breytenbach, 2023; Stellenbosch University, 2024).

Another example is the collaboration between the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Johannesburg on the Gauteng Green Public Procurement Guidelines Project (2024–2025). This partnership, in cooperation with the Gauteng Department of Environment, developed sustainable procurement guidelines for the province (University of the Witwatersrand, 2024).

Additionally, the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply South Africa, as a professional body advancing procurement excellence, plays an important role in sustainable procurement. It offers a member-exclusive SPP guide to support practitioners in integrating sustainability into procurement practices (Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply, n.d.).

International Development Agencies and Multilateral Development Banks

International development agencies and multilateral development banks (MDBs) play a pivotal role in advancing GPP in South Africa and globally (Erizaputri & Bechauf, 2024). These organizations provide financial resources, technical expertise, and policy support to strengthen procurement systems. For instance, the African Development Bank and the World Bank, in collaboration with the OECD and South Africa's National Treasury, launched the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems in 2024. This tool has been effective in identifying systemic gaps in SPP practices and providing actionable recommendations for improvement (OECD, 2024b).

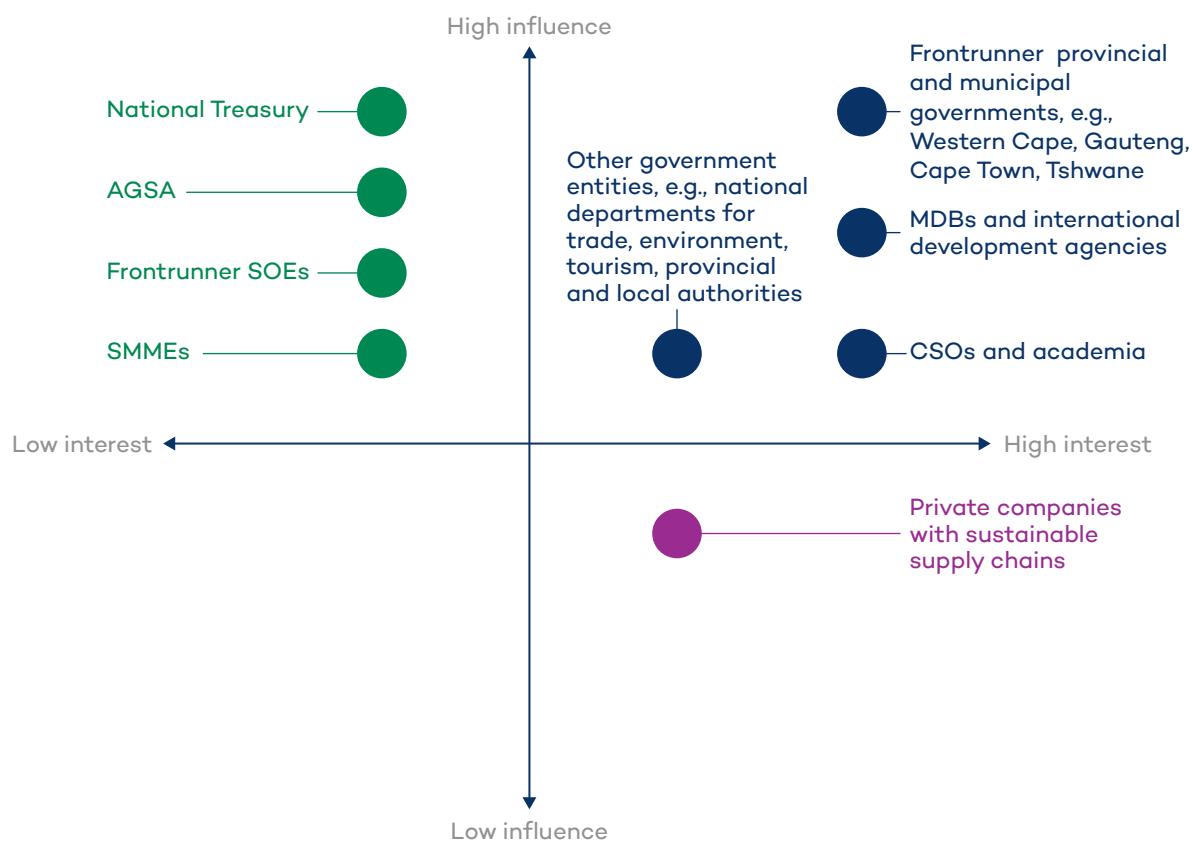
As another example, the DFFE, partnered with UNEP, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, and other stakeholders to produce a green economy policy document in 2021. This document emphasizes SPP as a critical component of a green economy transition and advocates for mandatory SPP requirements across all levels of government (DFFE, 2021).

Mapping Influence and Interest of Key Stakeholders in South Africa

Figure 2 maps the key actors in South Africa's GPP landscape based on their levels of influence and interest related to GPP. The matrix employs a four-quadrant approach to visually represent the role of various stakeholders, from government entities and SOEs to private sector players and CSOs.



Figure 2. The map of influence and interest of key stakeholders



Source: Authors' diagram.

In the high-interest quadrants, frontrunner provincial and municipal governments (such as Western Cape, Gauteng, Cape Town, and Tshwane) show both high influence and high interest for GPP. Similarly positioned are MDBs and international development agencies, along with CSOs and academia, all of which actively support and promote sustainable procurement initiatives.

Other government entities, including national departments for trade, environment, tourism, and various provincial and local authorities, occupy the middle ground in terms of both influence and interest. Private companies with sustainable supply chains demonstrate high interest but lower influence in shaping procurement policies and practices.

The high-influence quadrants show key institutional stakeholders. The National Treasury and AGSA demonstrate high influence but lower interest, as their primary focus is on financial oversight and regulation. While also in the high-influence quadrant, frontrunner SOEs and SMMEs fall into the low-interest category, indicating their substantial role in procurement but potentially lower engagement with GPP. This widespread lower interest among key stakeholders presents a significant challenge for advancing sustainable procurement practices in South Africa.



5.0 GPP Practices in South Africa

5.1 Overview of GPP Initiatives

South Africa's public sector shows a growing awareness of and commitment to GPP (Ngubane, 2024). GPP initiatives mostly develop in lower levels of government, with significant progress achieved through provincial and municipal approaches over the past decade (Klaaren, 2023a). As previously discussed, several local governments have shown leadership through concrete commitments and action plans for implementing GPP, and a number have put GPP into practice:

- The City of Cape Town has implemented innovative practices, including reusing asphalt in roadworks, greening Public Transport Interchanges with solar photovoltaic installations and energy-efficient technologies, as well as reusing construction waste at the Coastal Park Landfill site to develop a waste recovery facility (City of Cape Town, 2023).
- The City of Tshwane encouraged procurers to systematically include green requirements in all tenders by incorporating them as pass/fail minimum criteria and integrating energy efficiency standards for municipal buildings (One Planet Network, 2021).
- The Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development made substantial progress in greening both new and upgraded buildings by incorporating life-cycle assessments and costing into their planning and design to achieve higher energy performance standards as part of the 2020 Gauteng Climate Change Response Strategy (Klaaren, 2023a).
- The WCG Department of Human Settlements identified the need for sustainable housing developments and launched a guideline for the use of sustainable building technologies within subsidized housing projects in the province (WCG Department of Human Settlements, 2019).
- The WCG Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) highlighted that SPP plays a crucial role in addressing the risk profiles of municipal infrastructure and asset management. This includes mitigating operational risks and reducing the likelihood of infrastructure or asset failures. Given the increasing challenges posed by climate change, SPP is particularly valuable for the Western Cape Province, as it aligns with financial sustainability and infrastructure resilience requirements (DEA&DP, 2021). DEA&DP offers an implementation manual for SPP in infrastructure and asset management (WCG DEA&DP, 2021). Additionally, in 2024, WCG DEA&DP joined the One Planet Network to co-lead their SPP Programme (One Planet Network, n.d.).

Provincial governments have also developed a range of guidelines, training programs and networking opportunities to strengthen the capacities for GPP. For instance, the WCG has developed an SPP training and implementation manual to support municipal officials in applying the total cost of ownership (TCO) accounting methodology (WCG, 2021b). From 2018 to 2021, the WCG DEA&DP implemented training across multiple municipalities to strengthen the implementation of SPP at the municipal level.



Similarly, Gauteng province finalized its Green Public Procurement Guideline in March 2024 to provide a framework for integrating sustainability into public procurement processes (Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Rural Development & Environment & University of Johannesburg PEETS, 2024). Gauteng has also hosted workshops on provincial procurement status, legal processes, and case studies of GPP implementation in the construction of South Africa's two newest universities—Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley and University of Mpumalanga in Nelspruit (Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 2024).

Procurement stakeholders, academia, and NGOs have also established partnerships and events for knowledge exchange. For instance, metropolitan municipalities have formed strategic partnerships with the South African Local Government Association and ICLEI Africa to establish the Procura+ Africa Network, creating a platform for promoting and implementing SPP practices (ICLEI Africa, 2019a). South Africa also hosts the annual Sustainability Summit Africa, bringing together sustainability and procurement experts to establish the business case and develop a strategic roadmap for SPP (Smart Procurement, n.d.).

Quantitative insights into GPP initiatives in South Africa are rare because GPP is not systematically monitored. On a small scale, the WCG monitors SPP as part of its Environmental Implementation Plan (2020–2025) through three key indicators: capacity-building activities, alignment of procurement with economic policy pillars, and municipal integration of SPP in procurement policies. Reporting is led by the DEA&DP with support from the provincial treasury and local government (WCG, 2022). The WCG has also piloted the development of indicators for measuring gender inclusion in its procurement spending in the DEA&DP. The WCG has been working on a monitoring system for gender-responsive procurement since 2022, and it is showing positive results for scaling the framework at the provincial level. Quantitative insights into GPP initiatives in South Africa are rare because GPP is not systematically monitored. On a small scale, the WCG monitors SPP as part of its Environmental Implementation Plan (2020–2025) through three key indicators: capacity-building activities, alignment of procurement with economic policy pillars, and municipal integration of SPP in procurement policies. Reporting is led by the DEA&DP with support from the provincial treasury and local government (WCG, 2022). The WCG has also piloted within one department—the DEA&DP—the development of indicators for measuring gender inclusion in its procurement spending in the DEA&DP. The WCG has been working on a monitoring system for gender-responsive procurement since 2022, and it is showing positive results for scaling the framework at the provincial level.

5.2 Available Tools for GPP

Existing GPP practices in South Africa show the potential for integrating environmental criteria in procurement, with opportunities for sustainability considerations at various stages of the procurement process (Bolton, 2008; Breytenbach, 2023). Procurers have access to several established tools and mechanisms, such as life-cycle costing methodologies and green labelling schemes and certifications. These tools provide systematic frameworks for demanding and enhancing environmental performance.



Total Cost of Ownership and Life-Cycle Costing

TCO refers to the comprehensive costs of a good, service, or infrastructure that accrue to the procuring authority, including acquisition, maintenance, operation, and disposal costs (WCG, 2015). Similarly, life-cycle costing (LCC) evaluates the costs over the entire life cycle and can integrate environmental externalities. Typically, LCC encompasses material, energy, financial costs, and social/environmental impacts throughout a product's value chain. In GPP, these methods are helpful because they show the potential long-term savings from purchasing sustainable solutions that may have higher upfront costs but lower operational and maintenance costs as well as a longer lifetime.

In the South African context, implementing TCO presents challenges within public finance frameworks such as the Public Finances Management Act and Municipal Finances Management Act, which traditionally emphasize acquisition costs over operational expenses (WCG, 2015). Despite these challenges, TCO and LCC methods have been applied in several cases. For instance, TCO was utilized in the Preekstoel Biofiltration Water Treatment Park in Overstrand Municipality and the Energy Services Contract for the Provincial Property Portfolio in the Western Cape Province, while LCC was applied in the City of Tshwane's street lighting projects (ICLEI Africa, 2019c).

Box 2. Case studies: Long-term savings and environmental benefits through GPP

Case study 1: Life-cycle cost analysis in City of Tshwane street lighting

In 2017, the City of Tshwane compared the life-cycle costs of light-emitting diode (LED) and high-pressure sodium (HPS) streetlamp bulbs, demonstrating how eco-friendly alternatives can be more cost-effective in the long term. While LED bulbs had a higher initial cost of ZAR 3,481 compared to HPS at ZAR 1,214, the future HPS bulbs consumed ZAR 6,824 energy in the future compared to much lower energy costs of ZAR 2,063 for the LEDs. This significant variation in operating costs, even before considering disposal expenses, demonstrates how procurement decisions based solely on initial costs can be economically shortsighted and miss opportunities for reducing environmental impacts.

Case study 2: Energy services contract in WCG property portfolio

The Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works introduced an energy services contract to improve energy efficiency and cut costs in government buildings. Under a shared savings model, the service provider installed energy-saving technologies and shared the operational costs saved with the department.

The process began with audits to identify efficiency opportunities, followed by detailed assessments to prioritize projects with the highest savings potential. TCO was used to assess upfront investments and payback periods, ensuring that efficiency upgrades were financially viable. The initiative delivers significant sustainability benefits, including increased energy efficiency, reduced operational costs, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Sources: Breytenbach, 2023; ICLEI Africa, 2019c.



Green Labels and Certifications

Green labels and environmental certifications are vital tools for advancing GPP. They enable procurers to verify that suppliers meet high environmental and social standards. In addition, these certifications help ensure that sustainability credentials are transparent and trustworthy. In South Africa, several green labels and certifications have been integrated into GPP practices. However, these credentials are not widespread among South African companies. One interview suggested that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 and eco-labels are mostly used by larger firms that are active on global markets. Overall, there are about 1,100 certificates of the ISO 14001 environmental management system, spanning over 2,000 sites (ISO, 2023)

ISO 14001 has been applied in South African GPP practices, as demonstrated by the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality's "Green Certificate" program. Under this initiative, suppliers who possess ISO 14001 certification or an equivalent automatically qualify for the Green Certificate. The purpose of this program is to integrate sustainable practices into the municipality's supply chain and promote environmental responsibility among suppliers (Turley & Perera, 2014). However, the direct impact of the program, or whether it has stimulated a broader uptake of ISO 14001, remains unclear.

Procurers also use building and energy efficiency standards for GPP. For instance, the City of Tshwane has committed to applying SANS 204, a standard setting energy efficiency requirement for buildings, to all new and refurbished municipal buildings (GLCN, 2021a). Similarly, Cape Town incorporates additional standards, including the Green Star rating by the GBCSA and Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies (EDGE) certification, both of which promote green building and sustainable construction practices (GLCN, 2021b; City of Cape Town, 2023). In the Western Cape, the Department of Transport and Public Works requires all new government accommodations to meet a minimum 4-Star Green Star certification (WCG, 2015). Notably, progress continues, with projects such as the Khayelitsha Shared Services Centre achieving a 5-Star Green Star Design Rating (WCG, 2021a).

In other sectors, progress is also being made in integrating green standards into procurement. For example, between 2021 and 2023, the WCG DEA&DP collaborated with the South African Bureau of Standards to address the need for standardization in green chemicals. Insights from the stakeholders indicate that this initiative enabled government departments, particularly in the health sector, to procure environmentally less harmful chemicals under stricter health control protocols. As a result, the SANS 1604 standard for Biologically Enhanced Cleaning and Degreasing Products was adopted in 2024.

Additionally, based on expert interviews, sectors like timber have developed specific environmental standards, but these initiatives remain largely ad hoc and not widespread across the broader market. Other examples of environmental certifications in South Africa include the Honey Badger-Friendly label, the Carbon Standard, and the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative, which have partnerships with retail chains (Hasanbeigi et al., 2019). However, the role of these certifications in public procurement processes remains unclear.



Box 3. Case study: EDGE-certified Belhar Gardens as a sustainable housing solution

The Belhar Gardens rental estate addresses South Africa's dual challenge of inadequate housing and sustainability by integrating GPP principles. With 629 units, it is one of the first social housing projects in the country to achieve EDGE certification, requiring less energy, water, and embodied energy in materials.

Procurement requirements for the project emphasized resource-efficient technologies such as energy-efficient heat pumps and water-saving devices to minimize environmental impact. As a result, the estate consumes 30% less water and energy than traditional housing, reducing costs for tenants while lowering carbon emissions. Features like green spaces and recreational facilities further enhance residents' quality of life. Belhar Gardens demonstrates how sustainable procurement can deliver affordable, environmentally friendly housing, serving as a replicable model for future projects.

Source: City of Cape Town, 2023.



6.0 Challenges and Recommendations for Scaling Up GPP

Despite South Africa's progress in implementing GPP initiatives, several challenges persist that hinder its full adoption and mainstreaming. These challenges span various domains, including legislative gaps, knowledge and capacity constraints, financial barriers, limited monitoring systems, and market readiness issues. Addressing these barriers requires a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to ensure that GPP is effectively integrated into public procurement practices. This section explores key challenges to scaling up GPP in South Africa, providing recommendations to overcome these obstacles.

6.1 Shortcomings of Legislative Frameworks

The lack of dedicated legislative and regulatory frameworks for sustainable procurement is a key obstacle to GPP implementation in South Africa. As the OECD (2024b) highlights, the country lacks a unified policy that integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects in line with national priorities. The new Public Procurement Act briefly mentions sustainability, but only in passing, without providing specific guidance or mandates for GPP (Quinot, 2024). This regulatory gap leaves supply chain management professionals without clear guidance and incentives, hindering their ability to integrate green procurement into their daily practices.

The strong emphasis on social and economic objectives in national procurement regulations presents an additional challenge for integrating environmental considerations. Policies such as local content requirements and SMME promotion are central to procurement frameworks and often play a dominant role in bid evaluations. According to interviewed experts, procurement decisions in South Africa frequently prioritize social development goals and cost efficiency, which can result in environmental criteria receiving lower weighting.

Recommendation 1: Embed GPP into the legislative framework

South Africa's new Public Procurement Act presents an opportunity to introduce stronger support for GPP by explicitly incorporating environmental criteria into procurement laws and processes. By embedding sustainability principles into this act, South Africa can establish a clear legal basis for GPP, ensuring that environmental considerations are consistently applied in procurement decisions.

To further support this, the government could play an active role by setting ambitious sustainability targets and aligning procurement policies to achieve these objectives. This should include clear guidelines, detailed environmental criteria, and standardized evaluation methods, such as LCC or TCO assessments, to simplify implementation and promote sustainable decision making. Standardized templates and practical "how-to" guides can further address these challenges, enabling procuring entities to apply these practices consistently across procurement activities.



If incorporating GPP into the new act proves challenging, alternative legal measures or supplementary regulations could provide the necessary framework. A stronger legal foundation will enable procuring entities to integrate sustainability seamlessly and consistently across all procurement activities.

Recommendation 2: Develop a national GPP action plan

South Africa should consider developing a comprehensive national GPP action plan with a strong focus on green and low-carbon procurement. This plan should be designed through a multistakeholder process, drawing on insights and best practices from existing initiatives at the provincial and city levels while also showing leadership from the national level. A robust action plan should establish clear, measurable targets for GPP adoption across government entities. To create strong incentives for GPP and foster swift uptake, the plan could gradually make GPP mandatory, starting with priority product categories.

For instance, Lithuania's Green Public Procurement Plan 2021–2025 demonstrates the transformative potential of a well-structured strategy. While only a few procurements included green criteria in 2021, this rapidly increased to over 90% in 2023 due to ambitious goals set in the plan. The plan also mandates contracting authorities to update their internal policies to align with national GPP objectives, driving market transformation and fostering innovation in sustainable goods and services (Ministry of Environment, Republic of Lithuania, 2021; OECD, 2024a).

6.2 Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

A fundamental barrier to GPP implementation in South Africa is the widespread lack of capacity, skills, and knowledge across procurement stakeholders. As Breytenbach (2023) notes, many professionals are not aware of the importance of protecting the environment and how public procurement can be leveraged for achieving environmental objectives. This challenge is compounded by limited understanding of LCC and other technical aspects of GPP. As a consequence, organizations often prioritize short-term needs over more sustainable, longer-term purchasing policies (Bolton, 2016).

Interviewed experts noted that these capacity gaps are particularly evident at the operational level, where supply chain managers are often overwhelmed with compliance-related tasks and have little capacity to actively promote or enforce GPP initiatives. Similarly, while project managers may have general procurement expertise, they face challenges in integrating green and social criteria into procurement processes without adequate training and support. This lack of capacity creates a bottleneck for implementing GPP.

The situation is further complicated by what experts describe as a “fear of the auditor.” Without sufficient knowledge of GPP frameworks and clear guidance from the Auditor-General, government officials become highly risk-averse in an environment of heightened anti-corruption scrutiny. As a result, they tend to avoid procurement approaches that deviate from conventional practices. This knowledge gap, combined with audits that focus on conventional compliance, can stifle innovation and the uptake of green procurement (ICLEI Africa, 2019).



Recommendation 1: Establish a centralized GPP knowledge platform

South Africa should develop a comprehensive knowledge platform that consolidates procurement guidelines, training resources, and practical tools for GPP. This central hub should provide step-by-step guidance for integrating GPP across diverse procurement categories, including specifications for environmental standards and certifications while drawing lessons from authorities that already champion GPP.

Existing tools, such as eco-labels for products and organizations or project-level certifications like the CO₂ Performance Ladder¹ (the Ladder), which offers a practical framework for systematic carbon reduction, can be featured to help procurers leverage proven solutions and best practices. The Ladder has proven to be an effective GPP tool: For instance, its pilot project in Belgium demonstrated that it requires minimal enforcement efforts and does not demand extensive technical knowledge of carbon reduction, making it accessible and easy to implement for contracting authorities (SKAO, 2024).

South Korea offers a valuable example for such a knowledge hub. Its online platform and e-procurement tools provide training on GPP implementation, emphasizing both environmental and economic benefits while offering practical guidance for contracting authorities (La Cascia et al., 2021).

Recommendation 2: Foster a culture of GPP

Scaling up GPP does not just require certain skills among procurers, but a wider change of culture toward sustainability among the involved stakeholders, including technical experts, supply chain managers, budget planners, auditors, and policy-makers. To shift mindsets toward sustainability, South Africa should consider a comprehensive stakeholder engagement program and communication campaign.

As part of this, the central knowledge platform could provide practical training and peer learning opportunities to equip procurement professionals with the tools and expertise needed to implement GPP effectively. Fostering cross-regional collaboration and knowledge exchange between municipalities is an effective mechanism for building capacity and driving innovation (ICLEI Africa, 2019b). To further encourage the uptake of GPP, awards could recognize and celebrate excellence in the field, creating positive incentives for innovation and GPP.

6.3 Financial Barriers and Cost Perceptions

Financial constraints and cost perceptions hinder the implementation of GPP in South Africa. A major concern is the so-called green premium—the perception that environmentally friendly products and services carry higher upfront costs, which often creates resistance to their adoption. In our interviews, experts highlighted that efforts

¹ For more information, see the official CO₂ Performance Ladder website: <https://www.co2performanceladder.com/>



to integrate sustainability into procurement have faced pushback due to the financial constraints and perceived costs of GPP.

This issue is compounded by the broader challenge of limited state funds, which often force procurement teams to prioritize immediate, short-term needs over more sustainable, long-term investment strategies (Bolton, 2016). In addition, tenders in South Africa are typically evaluated based on the lowest purchase price, not LCC or TCO. This narrow focus at the award stage neglects potential long-term savings from GPP, perpetuating the perception that green options are prohibitively expensive (Mutenda, 2018).

Interviewed experts further noted that this challenge is complicated by market dynamics, where suppliers are not always able or willing to adapt to current government budget constraints. The limited market availability of sustainable alternatives (such as biodegradable versus plastic single-use items) contributes to higher costs, suggesting that procurement processes should be integrated with broader strategic discussions, for example, on business opportunities from more sustainable practices.

Recommendation 1: Integrate GPP into budget planning and incentives

A fundamental shift in budget planning processes is essential to address the financial constraints hindering GPP implementation. This involves systematically integrating sustainability considerations into the initial stages of budget planning at both national and provincial treasury levels. Government entities should establish dedicated budget lines for green procurement initiatives within their annual financial plans, ensuring sustained funding for sustainable alternatives. Additionally, treasury guidelines should be updated to explicitly allow the incorporation of LCC methodologies in budget proposals, enabling departments to justify higher upfront costs by demonstrating long-term savings. Notably, the South African National Treasury is already taking steps in this direction by working on standardizing templates and discount rates for TCO implementation. This proactive approach to budget integration would help overcome the current tendency to view GPP as an additional financial burden rather than a strategic way of effective government spending.

To drive behavioural change and promote GPP adoption, it could help to create stronger incentives for GPP in the public financial management system. Financial incentives, such as increased budget allocations or performance-based rewards, can motivate departments to meet GPP targets. As an international example, South Korea rewards high-performing local governments with increased budgets and provides performance bonuses to public institutions that excel in GPP implementation (OECD, 2024a).

Recommendation 2: Mobilize international financial support

To complement domestic efforts, governments can seek financial support from MDBs and international organizations. These institutions can provide essential funding for developing and implementing comprehensive SPP action plans, establishing knowledge-sharing platforms, and supporting pilot projects that demonstrate the effectiveness of sustainable procurement practices. Additionally, MDBs could advise on public financial management reforms to



facilitate the integration of GPP into budgeting processes. By leveraging the expertise and resources of MDBs and international organizations, South Africa could accelerate the adoption of GPP, reduce financial barriers, and work toward long-term sustainability outcomes.

6.4 Lack of GPP Monitoring

Governments in South Africa are not systematically monitoring their GPP practices, which hinders evidence-based decision making on the topic. For instance, the WCG (2015) highlights the difficulty in tracking the percentage of spending on sustainable goods and services due to a lack of data and the absence of a clear definition of “green.”

According to experts, procurers often struggle to determine whether a product or service is truly “green” due to the lack of clear rules or standardized evaluation criteria. For some items, such as energy-efficient appliances or water-saving systems, assessing environmental benefits is easier because their performance can be directly measured. However, for products like environmentally friendly cleaning supplies or recycled materials, it is much harder to establish clear qualifications for what constitutes “green.” The novelty of the market further complicates this issue, as suppliers may label their products as “green” without sufficient verification. This lack of maturity in the procurement process creates uncertainty, hindering the effective implementation of GPP. Additionally, different organizations rely on varying rules and certifications, adding to the confusion.

This lack of standardization makes it difficult for governments to track how well their green purchasing policies are working. Without clear and consistent definitions of GPP, it becomes challenging to measure progress and demonstrate the environmental benefits of green public procurement. This inconsistency, coupled with the absence of robust monitoring systems, makes it difficult to track GPP outcomes, demonstrate success, or identify areas that require improvement.

Recommendation 1: Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework would be key for tracking progress and ensuring the effectiveness of GPP initiatives in South Africa. To get a complete picture of GPP, there are three aspects that can be monitored: institutionalization, output, and outcomes (Erizaputri et al., 2024; UNEP, 2016):

1. **Institutionalization** refers to embedding GPP principles into policies, regulations, and standard operating procedures within public procurement systems.
2. **Outputs** are the immediate, measurable results of these efforts, such as the number of green tenders issued or compliance with procurement standards.
3. **Outcomes** focus on the broader, long-term impacts, like environmental improvements, economic growth, and social benefits achieved through GPP implementation.



To build such a comprehensive monitoring framework, South Africa should adopt a phased approach, starting with monitoring the institutionalization of GPP practices before advancing to more complex metrics. Next, South Africa should establish clear metrics and indicators for GPP implementation, such as the number of green tenders issued and the percentage of spending on sustainable goods and services. Standardized reporting templates and digital platforms for centralized data collection can be developed to streamline monitoring processes and enhance transparency.

As monitoring capacity improves, South Africa could gradually start monitoring the broader impacts of GPP, including environmental benefits like carbon emission reductions, economic gains, such as market development for green products, and social outcomes like job creation. Tracking these outcomes can help create public and political support for such efforts by showing the tangible societal benefits.

Collaboration with research institutions will be critical in refining evaluation methods and addressing gaps in current practices. According to stakeholder insights, there are ongoing efforts at both provincial and local levels to document successful SPP/GPP efforts as a way to disseminate best practices and encourage continued adoption. Publishing annual GPP performance reports that highlight these success stories, along with lessons learned and areas for improvement, will enhance accountability and build stakeholder support. These areas for improvement should also inform regular updates of GPP regulations and guidance, ensuring policies remain relevant, effective, and aligned with evolving sustainability goals.

6.5 Limited Market Readiness and Engagement

A significant challenge in advancing GPP in South Africa is the limited ability of potential suppliers to deliver environmentally friendly goods, works, and services in government contracts. SMMEs, which constitute the most potential suppliers, often struggle to meet stringent environmental requirements due to their limited capacity and resources. Many SMMEs operate at a small, informal scale, lacking the sophistication required for environmental labelling or certification processes. While their practices may align with environmentally sustainable principles, interviewed experts indicated that many SMMEs often lack formal recognition or documentation to qualify under GPP frameworks.

While environmental standards are important, interviewed experts emphasize the need to balance GPP requirements with efforts for market inclusion. A key priority is to avoid excluding companies from public procurement through overly stringent certification and labelling requirements, particularly given the government's goal of expanding the SMME economy. The challenge lies in determining reasonable standardization and certification requirements that maintain environmental standards while keeping public contracts accessible to smaller companies.

The practical implications of this challenge are already evident in several cities, according to experts interviewed. Smaller suppliers consistently struggle to meet green procurement demands, particularly for smaller-scale tenders. While the market has adapted to larger tenders over time, gaps remain when it comes to smaller opportunities. Compounding this problem is



the inconsistent demand for green solutions from public procurers, which fails to send a clear signal to businesses that investing in sustainability will pay off.

Recommendation 1: Build the capacity of SMMEs

To address limited market readiness, South Africa should focus on building the capacity of SMMEs through targeted resources and training. This could include explaining the relevance and functioning of GPP and relevant tools for assessing environmental performance. Capacity-building programs should equip businesses with knowledge about sustainable practices and the skills needed to meet environmental requirements.

For example, initiatives like green jobs programs and SMMEs incubators can provide practical training and resources that help businesses develop green practices, enabling them to participate in GPP while contributing to economic growth. Additionally, simplified tools and frameworks should be developed to help SMMEs demonstrate their environmental performance. These assessment frameworks should prioritize pragmatic, user-friendly approaches that limit technical complexity while maintaining credibility.

Recommendation 2: Facilitate transparent market engagement

To align GPP goals with market capabilities, government agencies should engage with the market in a transparent way to set clear expectations about growing sustainability requirements and to better understand what the market can deliver. For example, they can organize supplier fairs, industry forums, and buyer-supplier matchmaking events that foster two-way dialogue. Engaging with the market is essential for identifying supply chain gaps, assessing what the market can deliver, and ensuring that GPP efforts are both ambitious and achievable.

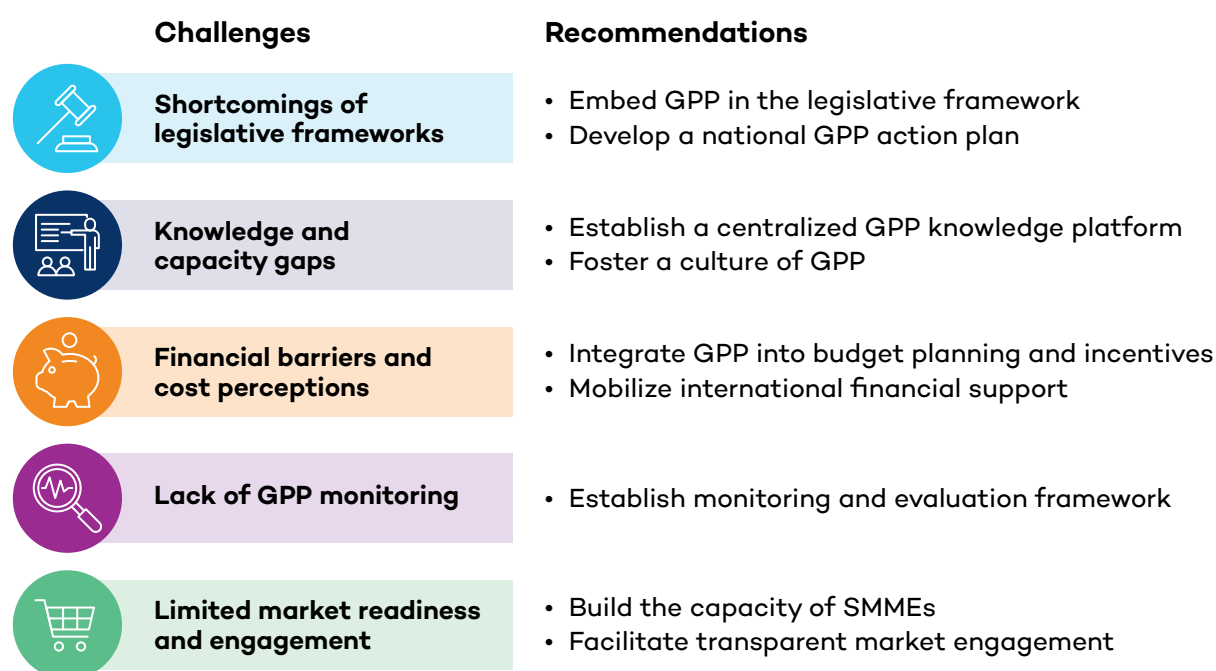


7.0 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that South Africa has made notable progress in implementing GPP and SPP, particularly through provincial and municipal initiatives. Even though procurers, policy-makers, and researchers increasingly recognize the importance of GPP, they face persistent challenges in making it a standard practice.

To address the challenges and mainstream GPP in South Africa, the government should scale up efforts by expanding capacity-building programs, establishing knowledge-sharing platforms, strengthening legislative frameworks, enhancing market readiness and engagement and developing a comprehensive monitoring system (see Figure 6). These recommendations are strongly interconnected, and implementing them in parallel would be vital for success.

Figure 3. Challenges and recommendations for advancing GPP in South Africa



Source: Authors' diagram.

The success of local and regional initiatives, such as the WCG's sustainable infrastructure projects and Cape Town's green procurement practices, demonstrates that it is feasible to implement GPP in the South African context. However, these isolated successes need to be systematically scaled through coordinated policy reforms, capacity building, better public financial management, and initiatives for market development. Moreover, scaling up GPP will depend on collaboration across multiple stakeholders, including government entities of various levels, private sector organizations, civil society groups, and international development partners.

The current regulatory framework presents a missed opportunity and leaves procurers without certainty and incentives for GPP. In times of constrained public budgets, policy-makers should



create an enabling environment for GPP and strategically leverage the power of procurement for sustainable development.

The newly enacted Public Procurement Act 2024 is an opportunity to strengthen the legislative foundation for GPP, though its effectiveness will depend on subsequent regulations and implementation guidelines. Looking ahead, South Africa is well-positioned to balance its unique socio-economic priorities with environmental objectives through procurement. Crucially, public procurers in South Africa can help address many environmental challenges, from water scarcity and pollution to greenhouse gas emissions and waste management, by incorporating green criteria into tenders alongside social requirements.

As South Africa moves toward a greener economy, scaling up GPP presents a transformative opportunity to drive sustainable investments that not only mitigate environmental risks but also create long-term economic and social benefits. With stronger policies, collaborative efforts, and a commitment to continuous improvement, GPP can become a cornerstone of South Africa's sustainability agenda, ensuring that economic development and environmental responsibility go hand in hand.



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Appendix A. Interview Guide

Topic 1. Introductory question

1. Please start by introducing yourself and your involvement/experience with public procurement and/or infrastructure?

Topic 2. Procurement landscape/green public procurement

1. What are current priorities in green and sustainable public procurement in your country/agency?
2. Is green/low-carbon procurement in particular a priority? If so, in what sectors? Any examples?
3. What factors are hindering the implementation of green public procurement?
4. How do you keep track of GPP and carbon savings? Is there a tool or system in place to do this?

Topic 3. Tools

1. We would like to know more about what kind of tools are used for GPP in your country. Which, if any, of the tools listed below are currently used for green public procurement? What about certifications or eco-labels in particular? Do procurers and private companies have experience with using GPP tools?
(Examples include: life-cycle, costing-based tools or calculators, ISO standards, sector/product-specific GPP criteria (either the EU GPP criteria directly or bespoke GPP criteria at the national or subnational level), carbon footprint tools, environmental management systems, eco-labels for specific categories of products or services, Environmental Product Declarations, Environmental Spend Analysis, etc.)
2. Are you aware of the use of low-carbon tools in infrastructure procurement, in particular?
3. Could you please elaborate on the specific stage within the procurement process at which sustainability criteria are incorporated? Additionally, is it possible to assess tenders on the basis of environmental criteria within the award criteria?
4. Do you see demand for new tools among procuring agencies and suppliers?
5. What barriers and success factors do you see for establishing new tools for GPP, such as the CO₂ Performance Ladder?

Topic 4. Stakeholders and way forward

1. Do procuring agencies engage with private sector companies through networking, dialogue, and information-sharing? Are there companies/sectors that are particularly keen on GPP?
2. Could you identify specific areas within GPP where progress has been particularly challenging or slower than anticipated? Furthermore, we are interested in understanding the kind of support or advisory services that would be valuable



in addressing these challenges. Are there specific types of expertise, tools, or collaborations that you believe could make a significant difference in overcoming obstacles and accelerating your GPP efforts?

3. Is there anything else you find relevant to mention?
4. Are you aware of any people involved in GPP that we should talk to?

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Head Office

111 Lombard Avenue, Suite 325
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3B 0T4

Tel: +1 (204) 958-7700

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