



SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT OF FOOD FOR THE HEALTH FACILITIES - THE CASE OF HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATIONS IN UGANDA.

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Introduction

In their Climate Change and Sustainable Food Production, Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, Smith, P., & Gregory, P. (2013) opine that 'one of the greatest challenges we face in the twenty-first century is to sustainably feed nine to ten billion people by 2050 while at the same time reducing environmental impact e.g. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, biodiversity loss, land use change and loss of ecosystem services'. Of the billions of people, 41.6 million is the Uganda's current population and of these, females constitute 51 per cent. There is a notion that 'a healthy mother is a healthy nation'. To this end, food security must be delivered. According to the United Nations definition, 'food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. At the same time as delivering food security, we must also reduce the environmental impact of food production.

Objective of the article

This article discusses the multiple benefits which procurement of sustainable food for public and private not for profit health facilities can bring to various beneficiaries, how it can significantly contribute towards sustainable food systems and healthy diets as a strategy for achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in Uganda and other emerging economies' nations. In the context of this article, food includes agricultural, animal and aquatic supplies. Health facilities refers to public and private not-for-profit hospitals and health cen-

ters where food is provided to the staff and inpatients.

According to the Ministry of Health Web as at 25/01/2022, the number of health facilities (public, private and private not for profit) in Uganda now totals 6,937. Government owns 45.16% (3,133) of health facilities, 14.44% (1,002) are Private and Not for Profit (PNFP) while the remaining 40.29% (2,795) are Private for Profit (PFP) and 0.10% (7) community-owned facilities.

Contextual perspective of the article

The Virgil Roman poet (died on 21 September 19 BC) said, "The greatest wealth is health." The National Health Service in England calculated that 60% of their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions come from supply chain. Health Care Without Harm's recent report on health care's climate footprint identifies that 71% of emissions are primarily derived from the supply chain scope 3. Those emissions occur in the organization's value chain through the goods and services being purchased. Examples of Scope 3 emissions include waste generated in the operation, transportation and distribution of raw materials, business travel, and the use of sold products. They also include emissions from leased assets, investments, and franchises. Typical examples in a health care setting may include light bulbs, laboratory equipment, standby generators, grass cutters, air conditioners, incinerators, computers, printers and scanners; kitchen cookers, ovens, washing and drying machines.

To understand and classify businesses' wide range of climate impacts, the Greenhouse Gas Protocol



(GHG-P) divides emissions into three categories commonly called Scopes. Scope 1 comprises of direct emissions from owned and controlled sources, such as your transport fleet and the GHG produced in your organization or factories. While Scope 2 encompasses indirect emissions from purchased heating, cooling and electricity.

In this regard, hospitals can serve as responsible stewards by cutting down on their own impacts and encouraging suppliers to do the same.

Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) is a key instrument to work towards the achievement of the SDGs, and fits into the collective efforts and multi-sector approaches of the Global Agenda 30 for sustainable development. The heart of sustainable procurement is taking responsibility for the organization's impact on the community. In "How to Wake the Sleeping Giant! (2021) ", UNEP defines SPP as a process whereby organizations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organization but also to society and the economy while minimizing damage to environment.

The United Nations Information Centres and other United Nations agencies and organizations acknowledge that sustainable public food procurement has the potential to impact both food

consumption and food production patterns. It may enhance access to healthy diets for consumers of publicly procured food and promote the development of more sustainable food systems, through its demand and spillover effects.

The EU also recognizes that public procurement of food provides the opportunity to drive local and regional food economies towards more sustainable paths. Both Green Public Procurement (GPP) and SPP are relevant practices in this context. GPP refers to procurement processes primarily meant to address environmental concerns. From the point of view of food procurement, it drives, for example, the inclusion of an organic food supply in the catering for public health care organizations. When social and economic considerations are added, the reference is to SPP. SPP is expected to not only have environmental benefits, but to bring broader benefits to society and the economy.

At the core of the Local and Organic Food (LOF) concepts are values such as "local entrepreneurship, local and organic production, quality, traceability, environmentally friendly production, animal welfare and continuous development". In order to achieve these values, the following should be taken into consideration as part of the procurement sub-objectives-

- 1) the produce should be organically grown, evidenced by certification from competent authorities;
- 2) procurement should be from the local society/ close-by-grown, as this will save on transport costs;
- 3) procurement should allow and even favour the smaller producers to sell their products directly to health facilities to avoid middlemen
- 4) it should be food products, which are resistant (or somewhat resistant) to changes in the weather;
- 5) as far as possible be products, which can grow with limited water use (some food products need less water than others)
- 6) it should be mainly vegetarian food, as meat is more harmful to produce to the climate than vegetables.
- 7) Procurement of animals grazed in pastured systems (planned or rotational grazing of grasses) which tend to be healthier and not need antibiotics to treat disease.

Enabling policy and legal framework

The National Public Sector Procurement Policy, 2019 provides for sustainable procurement as a system that is inclusive of social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability to help Government to minimize damage to the environment, maximize resource efficiency, stimulate innovation, create employment, promote a healthy local economy and have an inclusive society. The policy also advocates for collaborative procurement (an approach for different procuring and disposing entities working together and aggregation of common user items and services with a view of attaining better value for money in the delivery of public services) as one of the strategic tools to harness efficiency and effectiveness through delivering more for less within the procurement system.

Through incorporating these philosophies in the health sector and other agriculture and animal husbandry management policies, the Government of Uganda's key responsible ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) are encouraged to develop a policy which provides the opportunity to drive local and regional food economies towards more sustainable paths.

However, any policy would have to be cognizant of the fact that supply of organic quality foods in the country is structurally limited and the budgets of the health care facilities constrained. Prudence is necessary to ensure a balance between supplying quality food produce within available financial budget.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed the vulnerabilities in our food system. In some instances, there was surplus food supplies leading to very low prices paid to the farmers. In other cases, there was no appropriate transport for food supply due to the lockdown. This resulted in food shortages in some parts of the country and high prices for those that were available. Achieving timely supply of quality food produce in this emergency situation saw challenges within the procurement process. This therefore, calls for a policy which empowers the health care facilities and other MDAs to work with community leaders to innovate, educate, and build regional value chains that support regenerative food systems. As Basil Harvest asserts, this will develop farmers who adopt regenerative farming practices and make their farms more diverse and resilient to social, environmental and economic disturbances. Hence, create a stable supply market. Regenerative agriculture is a system of agricultural practices and principles that support biodiversity, enrich soils, improve watersheds, and increase the capacity of the soil to capture carbon, contributing to the reversal of global warming.

Public and private not for profit facilities have the opportunity to minimize negative impacts resulting from their procurement practices which include food produce and to create positive, lasting impacts for their providers and communities. There is a high opportunity for health care facilities to use their respected voice and purchasing power to support the growth of regenerative agriculture systems and creating a culture that promotes the procurement of sustainable foods which have profound benefits for both human and environmental health. Chef Erin Meyer, Basil's Harvest founder and Executive Director opines that *"By creating a regional supply chain that connects regenerative farms, regional mills, and community-based food systems, hospitals support the creation of more resilient farms and stronger regional food economies, creating healthier communities and connecting hospital patients, staff, and visitors to the origins of their food"*. (<https://basilsharvest.org>).

To operationalize this concept of procuring sustainable food produced through regenerative food systems, a number of policy reforms have to be considered.

Market assessment

The transition has to be gradual and there is need to undertake market engagement activities first in form of pre-procurement meetings with the supply chain actors of the requirements of the health care facilities to understand whether these could be met. The key actors may include, but not limited to local government authorities, individual farmers or SACCOs, packers, operators of storage facilities and distributors. In the Podravje Self-Sufficiency Project, Slovenia, pre-procurement engagement dialogue with all concerned stakeholders, potential producers and processors achieved better matching of demand.

Procurement planning and collaborative procurement

As provided for in section 58 2(a) and (2a) of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act, 2003 (Amended) Act 2021, the procurement activities of several public health institutions within a region may be aggregated where possible both within the procuring and disposal entity (PDE) and between PDEs. This results in higher quantities of each type of foodstuff required to allow for economies of scale positively impacting on negotiations of prices hence, attaining value for money and reduced costs. Use of framework contracts to establish long term public-private sector relationships in the procurement and supply chain processes for food which are sustainable in time is a necessity. According to Sustainable Public Procurement of Food European Union, 2018, the Rome city developed a strategy aimed at steadily increasing food and catering standards while keeping costs contained. The transition to organic and quality food procurement in school canteens was gradual. Initially (2002-2004), it was necessary to understand which organic products could be supplied in sufficient quantity to meet demand. The supply capacity determined the basic requirements indicated in the Standard Bidding Documents (SBDs) in terms of provision of fresh organic fruit and vegetables. If this concept is adopted, long-term vision and attention to procurement-planning of requirements proportionally to the real supply capacity of local producers should not be overlooked. A pre-procurement dialogue therefore, calls for inclusive engagement of all concerned stakehold-

ers throughout the food supply chain for a better matching of demand, response capacity but also their constraints. This in turn creates an opportunity for gradual strengthening of the bidding capacity of the local suppliers.

Solicitation of bids

It is recommended that the procurement process for aggregated products is tendered by one PDE within the region. The SBD may specify in the Statement of Requirements (SoR) the supply of organic and regenerative grown foods. In terms of sustainable packaging and load carriers, it is important to specify in the SBD that the entity can reuse the load carriers. Reusable packaging last longer lifespan than single-use packaging. Reuse of reusable load carriers is only possible if they are returned after transport. This concept aims at reducing costs while minimizing damage to the environment. The SoR may also state that the fresh foods should be preserved in solar-powered cooling systems during storage and distribution as a strategy for conserving energy and reducing GHG emissions. The evaluation and award criteria may introduce innovative award criteria from the beginning. This might call for amending the PPDA evaluation regulations to allow for the use of points for supplies procurements. For example, in the case of the Rome City public procurement of food programme, the price accounted for 51 points out of 100, and other 49 points being given to non-price factors such as prioritizing environmental certification, high quality food products, short food chains, transport distances kept to a minimum, guaranteed freshness criterion for fruit and vegetables, setting a maximum number of days between harvest and intake.

Where collaborative procurement approach is adopted, the following benefits will accrue-

- (i) well-thought-out preparation of tender documents to guide the quality of offers,
- (ii) use of the same type of tender documents to cater for many procuring and disposing entities and hence less time and money spent on the preparation phase;
- (iii) There is less fragmentation of rules for potential providers; and more attention given to timely delivery and quality.

Evaluation of bids

The evaluation process may be composed of multi-disciplined teams from the different participating PDEs within the region to enhance skills development and create ownership of the bid evaluation outcome. The teams may include personnel with technical skills such as agriculture and animal husbandry, agriculture economists, dieticians, supply chain and logistics, procurement, finance and environmentalist, etc.

Contracts and contract management

Due to the fact that the concept is new to most countries, Uganda inclusive, initially there is need as a pilot approach to breakdown the procurement contracts into smaller lots, to institute mechanisms for continuous monitoring of the providers' performance, with daily testing and controls. This will also be supportive to the smaller local farmers and other service providers in the supply chain as they develop stronger capacities. It is also imperative to build dialogue structures to discuss problems, allow feedback, and find shared solutions. From the experiential learning, the procurement process may introduce sequential quality requirements, giving supply chains the necessary time to adjust.

Benefits of sustainable public food procurement for health, social and economic development

Some additional benefits accruing from implementing the above concept include-

- (i) To increase the level of food self-sufficiency in the regions and the country in general;
- (ii) Provision of safe and healthy food (on the basis of specific evaluation criteria and contract quality controls);
- (iii) To increase the use of locally produced food in public institutions;
- (iv) Promotes the development of short food supply chains or local/regional food production systems,
- (v) Creation of new jobs at the farm level contributing towards a decrease of local unemployment (and other social issues associated with unemployment)
- (vi) Farmers who incorporate regenerative practices and principles into the management of their land can improve

their livelihoods through reduced input costs, improved profitability and increased income, while reducing exposure to harmful agricultural chemicals,

- (vii) Regenerative agriculture can help ensure a climate-resilient and food-secure future,
- (viii) Local sustainable public food procurement also has the potential to decrease rural poverty by stimulating the development of markets, providing a regular and reliable source of income for smallholder farmers and helping these farmers overcome barriers that prevent them from enhancing their productivity,
- (ix) The health of the soil in a community is connected to the health of people in their community. As more farmers adopt regenerative farming practices, the benefits to human health, animal welfare, the environment, and farm income can create systemic change. When community institutions such as hospitals, schools, and food banks harness their power and prioritize soil health, the community's overall health improves.
- (x) The Committee on World Food Security and the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, recognized sustainable public food procurement as an instrument for development.

Key success factors

The following key success factors among others, are pre-requisite for effective achievement of sustainable procurement of food for health care facilities - (1) political will to initiate the change and continuity to make it sustainable, (2) good knowledge by the PDEs of the supply side and assessment of its capacity to meet demand, (3) sequential introduction of quality requirements, giving supply chains the necessary time to adjust and (4) In its Public Food Procurement for Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets Vol. 1 2021 Report, FAO observes that the regulatory regime for food procurement must be considered in conjunction with other dimensions of the system. These dimensions include the need to train the staff of PDEs and providers, small scale farmers and their organizations, to help them understand and exploit the opportunities presented by public food procurement initiatives.