**Bindura University of Science Education**



**Faculty of Commerce**

**Department of Economics**

**Analysis buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Degree in Development Studies**

**By**

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**June 2023**

**RELEASE FORM**

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**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the research project entitled Kamutando Leon M, submitted to Bindura University of Science Education, Faculty of Commerce, Department of Economics, is a record of an original work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr Magura. The results embodied in this thesis have not been submitted to any University or Institute for the award of any degree of diploma.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to Almighty God, my parents, my supervisor, and the rest of my family.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I owesincere gratitude to so many people who have contributed immensely towards my studies and, most importantly, to the production of this thesis. Firstly, I am very grateful to my supervisor, for the inspiration, strength, commitment, and guidance.

**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this article is to explore the role of the buyer-supplier relationship in the pursuit of sustainability in the public sector. The study reveals that public buyers can exert significant influence in promoting sustainable practices through their procurement decisions. The authors suggest that strong collaboration between buyers and suppliers can lead to the development of sustainable supply chains, which in turn, can result in wider sustainable development outcomes. The study highlights the importance of partnership-based approaches, where the buyer and supplier work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals oriented towards sustainability. The findings of this research are important for public buyers and suppliers in terms of promoting sustainable procurement practices and enhancing environmental, social and economic sustainability in the public sector.

**LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**BRDC** Bindura Rural District Council

**BUSE** Bindura University of Science Education

**GDP** Gross Domestic Profit

**CIPS** Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply

**SET** Social Exchange Theory

**EMA** Environmental Management Agency

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**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The, purposewof this research iswto analyse buyer-supplier: relationships in achieving sustainability |in the public sector. Thiswchapter highlight the background to this study, problemwstatement, and aim of this study, research objectives, research questions, the significance of this study, hdefinition of the terms, and this chapter summary

**1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

In recent years, there has been an increase in the risks associated with sustainabilitywissues in thew supply chain. This has resulted in an increased demand for transparency on sustainability challenges in the supply chain. Also the Global Reporting Initiative responded by developing the G4 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines (Young, Nagpal, & Adams, 2019; ACCSI, 2019; Econsense, 2019; Harms, Hansen, & Schaltegger, 2019).

The pursuit of sustainable, development goals entails balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives, which defines sustainability (Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply, 2018). Scholars and practitioners have become increasingly interested in how organizations and their suppliers affect the environment, society, and economy in recent years (Lysons et al., 2018). Organizations are driven towards sustainability due to the need to comply with environmental laws, reduce expenses through whole life costing, manage supply chain risks, and maintain a good reputation in the community.

The strategic importance of buyer-supplier relationships as a sustainability lever is considerably more visible now than it was previously. Managers must address these concerns because stakeholders, customers, regulatory agencies, private organizations, and even their own employees are increasingly demanding that organizations address and manage environmental and social issues that will affect future generations (Van Weele, 2018). Procurement managers are better placed to influence environmental and social performance through product or service specification, evaluation, and supplier selection, and evaluating provider performance, either by developing performance evaluation criteria or using those criteria to evaluate the provider's fulfilment of the contract for which the provider was contracted.

Njeru (2019) explains that public procurement is guided by transparency, accountability, and cost-effectiveness for taxpayers. In recent discussions about public procurement transparency, there has been a growing interest in sustainable public procurement to promote corporate social responsibility in the public sector. Brammer and Walker (2020) and McDonald (2019) also express concerns about the competitive effects of public procurement laws, adding to the importance of sustainable procurement. According to McCrudden (2004), sustainable procurement allows governments to act as both buyers in the market and regulators, utilizing their purchasing power to promote social justice.

The Bindura Rural District Council (BRDC) is situated in Mashonaland Central province in the northeastern region of Zimbabwe and operates under the Rural District Councils Act Chapter 29:13 alongside 61 other rural district councils in Zimbabwe. BRDC provides an assortment of services, such as water supply, beer hall operations, and road maintenance, to its employees. The council partners with numerous suppliers who offer a vast range of products and services. The growing demand for sustainable procurement by local governments is driven by the need to mitigate risks, as adverse supplier practices like local pollution can harm the council's brand value and supply chain disturbances like non-compliance with environmental regulations lead to economic costs. Procuring sustainably can also result in cost savings through reduced total ownership costs, lower energy prices, reduced over-specification, reduced consumption, and lowered social and environmental compliance expenses.

The influence of sustainable procurement on local governments supports income growth through the innovation of eco-friendly products, services, price premiums, and recycling programs. To contribute to the creation of new products and revenue growth, procurement departments must work upstream in close collaboration with suppliers and other departments such as research and development and marketing. Several studies have been conducted on sustainable supply chains, such as the study by Seuring and Muller (2018), which evaluated a model for developing a sustainable supply chain and provided a sustainable supply chain framework that focused on balancing economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

**1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

There is an increasing emphasis on sustainability in the procurement processes of organizations. Literature, both old and new, has identified various elements that contribute to sustainability, but there is a lack of data on the significance of buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. Much of the existing research on buyer-supplier relationships either focuses on the underlying characteristics of partnerships or their effect on performance. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the extent to which this sector has embraced the concept of buyer-supplier relationships and how these ties affect sustainability. This research aims to bridge this gap by analysing the role of buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector.

**1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

To identify the types of business relationships that will exist between BRDC and their suppliers.

To assess the effectiveness of trust, commitment, communication, mutual goals in achieving sustainability at BRDC.

To analyse the challenges that will be faced in achieving sustainability through trust, commitment, communication, mutual goals between buyer and supplier at BRDC.

To recommend strategies that BRDC can adopt to improve sustainability through buyer-supplier relationships.

**1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What will be the types of business relationships that will exist between BRDC and their suppliers?

How effective are buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability at BRDC?

What will be the challenges that will be faced in achieving sustainability through buyer-supplier relationships?

Which strategies can be adopted by BRDC to improve sustainability through buyer-supplier relationships?

**1.5 ASSUMPTIONS**

 The information that be provided by respondents be true and accurate. • The sample population is being representative of the whole target population. • Both primary and secondary data collection methods is being used. The findings of this study apply to all organizations in the public sector of Zimbabwe.

**1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

To the company (Bindura Rural District Council) The study is very important to BRDC as it enlighten various procurement officers on how buyer-supplier relationships can contribute to achieving sustainability when properly implemented. It highlights the benefits of incorporating buyer-supplier relationships and building a strong business relationship that varies in the degree of closeness between the institution and the supplier for the supply of goods and services with the objective of benefiting all parties and improving the delivery of services to residents. Moreover, it will shed light on how to integrate buyer-supplier relationships into the institution.

**To the university (BUSE)** The research will benefit the university staff and students. It may also be useful for learning purposes by other students even from different universities who may want to explore and research on the impact of buyer-supplier relationships on the performance of organizations.

**To the Government of Zimbabwe**

The research findings provide valuable insights for local authorities on how to effectively achieve sustainability through buyer-supplier relationships. This can lead to better utilization of government financial resources and promote transparency, fairness, efficiency, and reduced corruption, improving public and donor trust in the public procurement system. The study's results can also help the government meet environmental and social goals such as improving energy and water use, promoting recycling, eradicating poverty, enhancing equity, and promoting core labor standards. In addition, using green technologies, local suppliers, and supporting small and medium enterprises can create jobs, improve tax benefits for the government, and boost the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

**To the Community**

 The community at large benefits from this study as local authorities will practice sustainable procurement that has value for money since councils get funds from the public when procuring goods and services for them.

**To the researcher**

This research allows the researcher to gain knowledge and come up with methods to tackle different challenges that may be beneficial in the future. More so, this helps the researcher to appreciate the great opportunity and build a strong relationship from professional supervision by academic supervisors.

**1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The stud analyses buyer-supplier relationships in the public sector to achieve sustainability. Bindura Rural District Council in Bindura will be the site of the research. The researcher will concentrate on the procurement management unit, the CEO, councillors, department heads, the store’s officer, and the deputy department heads

**1.8 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

A survey of all rural district councils would have been preferable; however, the researcher chose to focus on BRDC. Because all rural councils’ function in the same setting, the results apply to all of them. It is also expensive and time intensive to conduct research for all rural councils, which is why the researcher chose BRDC because it is close to her hometown. The researcher also encountered the difficulty of some respondents being unwilling to share some information because they considered it confidential and sensitive. The researcher overcame this problem by providing a thorough explanation of the study's benefits to the respondents, and all respondents were assured that the research was not harmful and also assured of its significance.

**1.9 DEFINATION OF TERMS**

**Buyer-supplier relationship:** Lysons and Farrington (2020) define buyer-supplier relationships as a mutually beneficial partnership focused on securing added value and competitive advantage for both parties involved.

**Procurement**: According to CIPS (2018), procurement is the function of business management that involves identifying, sourcing, accessing, and managing the external resources that are required or may be required by an organization to achieve its strategic goals.

**Public procurement: Kwadzo (2019) defines public procurement as the process of acquiring goods, works, and services using public funds by organizations.** **Sustainability**:Lysons and Farrington (2018) define sustainability as the concept of achieving development that meets the current needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

According to Taylor (2018), a literature review is a compilation of scholarly

publications and research that have already been published on a specific topic.

Cooper (20208) added that it is a critical analysis of the previous research

conducted on a particular academic subject. Therefore, this chapter will provide

an overview of the literature, theoretical framework, and empirical evidence

related to the impact of buyer-supplier relationships on a business' performance.

**2.2 BUYER SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP**

The interaction between buyers and suppliers is a dynamic process that undergoes specific stages marked by the introduction of different structures. In a business context, the buyer-supplier relationships pertain to commercial transactions conducted between firms for the procurement and provision of goods and services. Berry and Parasuraman (20201) suggest that trust is a crucial aspect of these relationships, particularly as the buyer often obtains the good or service before experiencing it. This initial experience can foster trust and loyalty, which is reliant on effective communication, transparency, and efficiency in the dealings between the parties.

Lysons and Farrington (2021) define relationships as connections or associations that are formed when individuals, groups, or organizations interact within or outside of a company. Successful relationships between buyers and suppliers are based on trust, mutual understanding of each other's needs and interests, and a willingness to learn from and assist each other, with the aim of achieving mutual benefits and a competitive advantage for both parties. Relationship marketing is a marketing strategy that focuses on building and maintaining long-term connections with clients, rather than just making a single sale.

Morgan and Hunt (20204) emphasized that in today's business environment, companies heavily rely on their relationships with suppliers and expect them to maintain high standards. Establishing strong relationships with suppliers has become increasingly important for firms to stay ahead in the competitive market. The development and management of effective relationships between business partners are crucial for achieving success. Firms that establish successful relationships with their suppliers can enjoy several benefits, including access to advanced technology, reduced risk, increased collaboration, and better information exchange. By analyzing the characteristics of suppliers and the nature of interactions between buyers and suppliers, scholars have begun to understand the factors that determine the success or failure of relationships between business partners.

**2.3 SUSTAINABILITY**

According to The Brundtland Commission, sustainability involves meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept emerged during a United Nations conference on human rights in the 1970s, where environmental issues related to industrial practices were raised. The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) notes that the Brundtland Commission was formed in 1987 to create economic development plans that do not harm the environment. The Rio Declaration on Environmental Development expanded on the Brundtland Commission's ideas by including social justice and human rights issues such as poverty, child labor, and the role of women. The three-dimensional view of sustainability, which includes economic, environmental, and social factors, was widely adopted as a result (UN 20202).Sustainability is not a new notion. What is new is the widespread recognition that urgent action is required to solve the enormous economic, social, and environmental challenges confronting our planet and people in order to assure a sustainable future. Governments, regulators, consumers, and investors are all requesting rapid action. Sustainability is a major subject with both risks and opportunity. Organizations must recognize and mitigate these risks inside their own organization and throughout their supply chain while navigating a rapidly changing regulatory landscape.

**2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Trochim and William (2021) suggest that a research study should include a framework that supports or explains the theory. This framework should introduce and describe the theory that explains why the research problem being studied exists.

**2.4.1 Resource Based View (RBV)**

Tsay (2020) stated that the resources of the organization are a major predictor of many of the organization's behaviours. According to Ni (2018), this theory examines long-term relationships with a set of key suppliers using a win-win mentality, which can result in a longer-lasting competitive advantage than a competitive bidding system. In the resource-based approach, resources satisfy all four resource criteria: value, rarity, uniqueness, and non-substitutability (Barney, 2018). This theory investigates how organizational resources are distributed and employed to aid in strategy implementation (Igecha, 2020). Resources are inputs into the output of a firm and are classified as physical capital, human capital, and organizational capital. Management should carefully examine the available resources in order to select the best strategy or policy for those resources. As a result, in order to attain sustainability, the RBV can also be backed by "knowledge-based theory," which asserts that the success of the implementation process is dependent on the organization's internal capacities. Strong internal resources are required for effective sustainability implementation. To enable the implementation of a sustainable procurement process, financial, human resource, and technology systems must be accessible. (Grant, 2020). Firms with more resources and sophisticated resources tend to outperform those with less resources. However, having more resources does not guarantee that the organization will do well; in order to perform well, the organization should conduct an analysis of its available resources to determine how to deploy them within and outside of the organization. The theory's presumption for the study is that the availability of resources in the organization is the most important predictor of the type of buyer-supplier relationship strategies. This theory aids in the management of buyer-supplier relationships in order to attain sustainability. Firms that transition from adversarial relationships to long-term inter-firm connections based on trust and commitment can produce value for their company on multiple levels: socially, economically, and environmentally.

2.4.2 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The basic concept of the theory is that people choose behaviors in social settings that increase their chances of achieving their own interests. This means that human relationships are formed by assessing the costs and benefits from a personal standpoint and comparing them to alternative options.SET originated from Thorndike's (1932, 1935) work on the creation of reinforcement theory and (1923) marginal unity theory and is the exchange of activity between at least two parties that might be tangible or intangible, rewarding or costly. Social exchange theory makes several essential assumptions in tallying such perspectives on human social interactions. Individuals are normally relational and engage in cost-benefit assessments in social exchanges; people engaged in interactions are rationally seeking to maximize the profits or benefits to be earned from those settings.

According to Lysons and Farrington (2019), a business network is an exchange network based on the social exchange theory. The importance of the supplier network is emphasized in the context of the business network. The social exchange model focuses on rewards and costs, and the primary focus is on resource exchange, rather than social exchange, according to Eriksson (2019). However, buyer-supplier connection networks are typically entrenched in interconnected relationships where social exchange aspects, such as trust and collaboration, play a crucial role. The current literature has not yet achieved a balance between the two approaches in analyzing buyer-supplier relationships. Thus, the study emphasizes the importance of prioritizing buyer-supplier relationships during strategy design to achieve sustainability, as stated by Claro (2004).

2.4.3 The Theory of Dualism by Averrit (1968)

The theory elaborates the primary driver of buyer-supplier relationships. He claims that the essence of dual economy is that economic sectors located in different parts of the economy are treated unequally, ignoring their objective worth. Averrit advanced the theory of dual economy in the late 1960s. As a primary driver, dualism encourages industry restructuring to break up unfair competition between final assemblers and competent suppliers. Assemblers and suppliers are looking for a new cooperative collaboration that is distinct from typical adversarial and arms-length relationships. Furthermore, he suggests that buyer-supplier relationships are built on mutual trust and long-term cooperation.

2.4.4 Cost and Resource Dependence

Pfeffer and Salancik's theory (1978) referred to as resource dependence theory focuses on studying how external resources of organizations affect their performance. Acquiring external resources is a crucial aspect of any organization's strategic and operational management. However, the implications of seeking such resources were not explained until the publication of The External Control of Organizations in the 1970s. Resource dependence theory has implications for various areas of organizational strategy, including optimal organizational structure, board member and employee hiring, production tactics, contract structure, external organizational relationships, among others. While theories on buyer-supplier relationships have mainly focused on transactional, economic, behavioural, and relational aspects of exchange.

2.4.5 The Theory of Flexible Specialisation by Piore and Sabel (1984)

 It was suggested that new buyer-supplier relationships arising from changing environments differ in tone and detail, requiring both parties to become more flexible than before; however, if there were significant changes in flexible competencies among them, it would undoubtedly affect overall performance. It is necessary for both the buyer and the supplier to achieve flexible specialization at the same level and time. Otherwise, the flexible operation may create more problems than solutions.

**2.5 BUYER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP VARIABLES**

Various scholars have proposed various criteria as the fundamental variables that enable excellent buyer-supplier relationships. The following are the most frequently cited variables that contribute to good buyer-supplier relationships.

2.5.1 Trust

To trust someone means to believe that they are decent and honest and will not hurt you, and that they are dependable. Trust indicates a person's professional and personal reputation for trustworthiness, as well as credibility in a business situation, and should flow from both sides. Based on trust, both parties may handle the business's downtime, clashing situations, profitability concerns, market management, and, in fact, all areas of the business. Product cost reduction, risk reduction and sharing, long-term connections, investment opportunities, and future expansion of commercial relationships through trust were all documented in the literature. According to Morgan and Hunt (20204), trusting party confidence stems from the organization's belief that the trustworthy party is reliable and has high collectively, which is associated with characteristics such as consistency, competency, honesty, fairness, being responsible, helpful, and benevolent. A provider who is handled with kindness and fairness is more likely to produce a high-quality product at the lowest possible price, to give good service, and to respond quickly to emergency situations and special requests, thereby building confidence. Trust between the customer and the supplier develops through time, which may allow the buyer and supplier to share information, projections, and knowledge. According to Cannon and Perreault (20209), more open information exchange is indicated by both sides' readiness to provide critical information. However, as mentioned by Fawcett and Marnan (2021), a lack of trust can translate to an unwillingness to disclose information, making it difficult to exchange sensitive information such as financial data, particularly in Asian businesses.

 2.5.2 Communication

According to Mohr and Nevin (2019), effective communication is key to successful organizational behavior, including coordination, satisfaction, commitment, and performance of channel members. In the buyer-supplier relationship, communication is critical regarding pricing, contracts, technical requirements, and market knowledge. Communicating with high quality, participating in decision-making, and sharing information are essential for effective relationships. Communication should also be accurate, timely, appropriate, and dependable, and both parties should understand each other's needs and corporate plan. Communication influences relationship quality and affects trust and cooperation. Participation in decision-making and goal setting is also crucial to the success of the partnership.

2.5.3 Commitment

Moorman et al. (20202) noted that commitment is the most common dependent variable in buyer-supplier relationship research, as maintaining long-term relationships requires dedication and effort. According to Morgan (2004), commitment involves the assurance of future value or benefits for both partners. The formation of long-term connections requires precise estimates of future performance and needs for both organizations. Commitment encourages stability and long-term commitment from both parties to achieve desired outcomes, making it a key factor in successful relationships, according to Morgan and Hunt (20204). When both parties are motivated to maintain the relationship, the quality of the relationship is more likely to improve, and a prolonged relationship indicates mutual commitment.

2.5.4 Cooperation

Cooperation was described by Anderson and Narus (2020) as "similar or complementary coordinated acts conducted by enterprises in interdependent relationships to accomplish mutual goals with expected reciprocation over time." Morgan and Hunt (2020) adopted the preceding definition of cooperation but expanded it by highlighting the proactive component of cooperation as being coerced to take interdependent activities. The interplay of cooperation and commitment leads in cooperative behavior, which allows the partnership to function while guaranteeing that both parties gain from the relationship.

2.5.5 Mutual goals

Wilson (2020) defined shared goals as the degree to which partners share goals that can only be attained by collaborative activity and relationship maintenance. These are the extents to which trade partners have goals that can be achieved by cooperating and maintaining the relationship. Mutual goals aid in the maintenance of relationships since each participant has something to gain from the relationship. Buyer supplier partnership relationships are distinguished by a sense of mutual loyalty and a readiness to assist one another. Successful buyer-seller relationships are collaborative, which suggests that working toward common goals is essential. Overall, shared goals stimulate both mutuality of interest and stewardship behaviours that will lead to attainment of goals.

**2.6 TYPES OF BUYER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS**

Buyer-supplier relationships are becoming increasingly important in order to react to the ever-changing nature of the external business environment. One of the various types of the relationship continuum is Cox's model. Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship spectrum.

*Strategic importance to the firm*

 Residual Complementary Critical

**Figure 1 Relationship Continuum**

**Source: Adapted from Cox (2020)**

According to Cox (2020), the natural extension to the closest working relationship is an internal relationship, which determines the firm's boundaries. According to Reynolds and Thompson (2019), one of the well-developed models is Cox's relational competency model, which includes features like transactional relationships, preferred supplier, single sourcing, network sourcing, strategic alliances, and vertical integration. According to Reynolds et al (2019), the relationship continuum assists the buyer in thinking through the degree of competitive positioning regarding collaborative working that must be built with the supplier. The Cox Model assists in identifying the best types of buyer-supplier relationships, determining the level of collaboration and competition required to achieve the relationship's required business goals, and determining which relationships are most important to the procurer's company and thus require the most careful management. It seems to reason that the procurer will have a variety of economic ties to choose from depending on the circumstances. The Relationship Continuum application focuses on the management of buyer-supplier relationships.

2.6.1 Strategic Alliances Relationships

The supplier is strongly integrated in the procurer's procurement and manufacturing processes. He requires access to your customer's production-specific information, such as current stock levels and production plans. The sales concept and distribution procedures of the buyer are clearly connected with the buyer's needs. All buyer-supplier relationships involving just in time notions. Furthermore, relationships in which the supplier controls the procurer's inventory are considered. Strategic alliances are voluntary agreements between organizations that involve exchange of information and transfer of technology. According to Weihong (2018), a strategic alliance relationship is a value-added relationship comprised of a number of partnerships and co-destiny relations. Each partner just participates in segments of the method, focusing on one specific activity with its own core expertise. Strategic alliance relationships are advantageous in the vertical context of supply chains for both material and component procurement.

 2.6.2 Collaborative Relationships

The buying organization is the one which places the orders, the supplier is not in charge of the buyer's inventory management. The supplier's output is determined by incoming customer orders, which are closely related to actual demand. According to the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (2018), collaborative relationships are made up of several types of relationships, including closer tactical, single-sourced, and outsourcing relationships. A delivery-at-warehouse procurement policy is monitored by the buyer. By using the make-to-order or engineer-to-order idea, the supplier's output is directly linked to the procurer's order. According to Panchmatia (2019), the key benefits of collaborative relationships include better risk management, long-term savings, and maintaining a level of flexibility that would otherwise be difficult to achieve.

2.6.3 Transactional Relationships

Since orders are usually placed by the buying business, the supplier is not in responsible of the buyer's inventory management. It means that the price is determined by open market terms of bargaining. The supplier's output is detached from incoming client orders and is not closely related to actual demand. When price-based open negotiation fails, transactional buyer-supplier relationships are frequently just changed. It provides undue flexibility to procurers in competitive markets. Transactional relationships, according to Weihong (2004), are widely utilized in traditional markets, such as commodities markets and low-tech industrial markets with multiple suppliers, low asset specialization, and a limited quantity of expertise. It is frequently used in high-tech industries, such as the telecommunications industry, for standardized goods or components. The buyer's procurement policy is delivery-at-warehouse. The production of the supplier is not directly related to the real demand. The production method is either make-to-stock or make-to-forecast. It is comprised of a variety of adversarial and arm's length partnerships.

**2.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

A conceptual framework comprises a collection of broad concepts and theories that assist the researcher in identifying research problems, formulating questions, and examining appropriate literature for the study. In this research, the independent variables are transactional, collaborative, and strategic alliance relationships, while the dependent variable is sustainability. This is visualized in Figure 2**.**

 **Independent Variables Dependent Variable**

**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework**

**Source; Designed by the researcher (2022)**

**The diagram in figure 2 illustrates how the purchasing company and the external company (supplier) interact with each other, and how this interaction affects certain outcomes. The diagram shows the direct influence of certain factors on the relationship between buyers and suppliers, and how these relationships impact various aspects of the triple bottom line, which ultimately contribute to sustainability.**

**2.8 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

This refers to the information obtained through observations or experiments, which highlights how these studies are linked or differ from the ongoing research. As per Saunders (2018), it plays a vital role in a research project by enabling the researcher to evaluate their study in comparison to the discoveries of other researchers, thereby pinpointing the research gap.

2.8.1 Kamau (2019) Kenya

In a qualitative research of the relationship between buyer-supplier relationships and business performance among large manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya, it was determined that buyer-supplier relationships had assisted large manufacturing firms in improving the performance of their organizations. Despite the fact that the study found that supplier relationships improved performance, it focused on relationships rather than supplier development concepts. Manufacturing firms ensure that they perform well and help their suppliers perform well and achieve their long-term goals by maintaining great relations with their suppliers. This study tries to extend Kamau's work in testing a mixed method research design in Zimbabwe's public sector; however, because his research was conducted in the manufacturing sector, its findings may not be applicable in the public sector.

2.8.2 Hameed, Hasbullah and Norani (2019) Malasyia

 They discovered that organizations who use sustainable environmental practices as a tactical resource get a competitive advantage and improve company performance among manufacturing companies regarding the effect of sustainable environmental manufacturing practices on organizational performance. The scholars Hameed, Hasbullah, and Norani expanded our understanding of the effects of environmentally sustainable policies on organizational performance. However, the study focused on the manufacturing industry, which may yield different results if tested in the public sector.

2.8.3 Mazharul and Siwar (2019), Australia and Malasyia

Mazharul and Siwar (2019) undertook a study to evaluate and contrast existing sustainable procurement processes in Australia and Malaysia, including possibilities and challenges to participation in sustainable procurement. According to the study, sustainable procurement is visible in the public sector, but the extent and character of sustainable procurement differ greatly between the two countries. According to the survey, Australian public organizations placed a greater priority on the safety components of sustainable procurement, whereas Malaysia placed a greater premium on diversity. Financial constraints were identified as the most major barrier to sustainable procurement implementation by public sector organizations in both nations, whereas organizational efficiency and transparency presented opportunity for implementing sustainable procurement practices.

2.8.4 Kohon (2019) Portland

Kohon conducted research on building social sustainability from the ground up, arguing that the social pillar of sustainability in neighbourhood-scale urban revitalization in Portland, Copenhagen, and Nagoya. According to the findings of the study, the social pillar is critical in Portland in terms of the concepts of social determinants of health. Social sustainability techniques were being implemented in Portland's health sector in order to challenge assumptions and begin to carve a road for the incorporation of social determinants of health principles into social sustainability conceptualizations. Because the study was conducted in the health sector, its findings may not be applicable in the public sector.

2.8.5 Fynes and Voss, (2021) Ireland

The study examined how the relationship between the buyer and supplier affects the quality procedures and performance in the electronics industry. The primary objective of the research was to establish a connection between quality management and buyer-supplier relationships. The research aimed to determine the degree to which quality practices influence various aspects of quality performance, manufacturing performance, and overall business performance. Furthermore, the study evaluated the relationship between quality practices and quality performance in terms of the nature of the buyer-supplier relationship. The authors proposed that for a comprehensive evaluation of buyer-supplier relationships, important factors such as trust, satisfaction, adaptation, power or dependency, communication, trust, commitment, and cooperation should be considered. Thus, the study's ultimate aim was to utilize these factors to achieve sustainability in the public sector.

2.8.6 Kumar and Rahman (2020) India

They conducted a qualitative investigation of buyer-supplier relationships and supply chain sustainability. The study aims to identify the difficulties impacting sustainability implementation in the Indian automobile supply chain and to investigate the inter-relationships that exist between them. The criteria were identified based on a thorough literature research and expert opinion. The findings suggest that the external effect and projected sustainability advantages influence senior management's commitment to adopting sustainable practices. Furthermore, strategic alliances were found to have a beneficial influence on the triple bottom line of sustainability, which includes economic, social, and environmental performance criteria. However, the study focused on the Indian automobile industry, which may produce different results if piloted with a mixed approach design in the public sector.

2.8.7 Plane and Green (2018) Netherlands

In a study on buyer-supplier collaboration and the goal of facilities management sustainable procurement, Plane and Green discovered that there was an overall agreement that an extra relational procurement process has a positive effect on the relationship established and that the perceived benefits of relational approaches included clarity of service requirements, value delivery, and cultural alignment. They expanded our understanding of the advantages of procurement relationships. This study seeks to extend Plane and Green's work by demonstrating how buyer-supplier relationships contribute to public-sector sustainability.

2.8.8 Chari and Chiriseri (2019) Zimbabwe

They discovered that the social and environmental pillars of sustainability were not being incorporated into procurement decisions, hence procurement orders were being provided based on the lowest bidder, thereby practicing economic sustainability solely. The purpose of the study was to determine whether sustainable procurement best practices were being followed. The study expanded our understanding of the impediments to sustainable procurement in Zimbabwe. This study seeks to extend Chari and Chiriseri's work on the significance of buyer-supplier interactions in reaching the triple bottom line of sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. Chari (2020) conducted a qualitative investigation of the impact of supplier relationship management on the competitiveness of Zimbabwean manufacturing firms. The research problem was founded on the reality that transactional buyer-supplier relationships, which focus solely on price, no longer provide a competitive advantage to the bakery industry's manufacturing sector. According to the study, transactional buyer-supplier relationship management is vital for improving organizational competitiveness by refining supplier responsiveness, sustainability, and lowering procurement costs in bread manufacturing organizations. However, this study goes beyond that by concentrating on how to achieve sustainability through buyer-supplier relationships in Zimbabwe's public sector.

**2.9 RESEARCH GAP**

According to the literature review, a lot has been done on buyer-supplier relationships, but no research has been done on how buyer-supplier relationships contribute in achieving the triple bottom line of sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. As a result, the researcher will attempt to bridge the gap by conducting an analysis of buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector.

**2.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter examined this research’s objective utilizing learning journal to determine whether past studies on the objectives were relevant to this current study. It discovers the concept of sustainability as it is measured by economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

**CHAPTER III**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.0 Introduction**

The importance of sustainability has grown significantly in recent years, and organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the impact they have on the environment and society. In the public sector, sustainability has become a critical issue, and many organizations are exploring ways to achieve sustainability. One of the ways organizations can achieve sustainability is by developing strong buyer-supplier relationships. This research aims to analyse buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector, specifically in Bindura Rural District Council.

**3.1 Research Design**

This study will use a case study research design. According to Yin (2018), a case study research design is appropriate when the researcher wants to understand a complex phenomenon within its real-life context. In this study, the complex phenomenon is buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector.

The case study research design is a qualitative research method that involves an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon, situation, or organization (Yin, 2018). The aim of case study research is to provide a detailed description and analysis of the complex phenomenon under study within its real-life context. The theoretical framework of the case study research design is based on the idea that every case is unique, and it is necessary to investigate it within its specific context to understand it fully (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

One of the main benefits of using a case study research design is its ability to provide a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study. It allows for a comprehensive examination of the complexity and interrelationships of different variables, which may be difficult to achieve through other research methods. Additionally, the case study design allows for the use of multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, to provide a complete picture of the phenomenon under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

However, there are also some limitations of using a case study research design. One of the main limitations is that the findings may not be generalizable to other settings or populations. Since case studies focus on a specific context, it may be difficult to generalize the findings to other situations. Additionally, case studies may be influenced by the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data, leading to potential bias in the findings (Yin, 2018).

**Qualitative Research Approach**

The case study research design is a qualitative research method that involves in-depth exploration and analysis of a specific individual, group, organization, or phenomenon. It is a comprehensive and detailed approach that aims to understand the complexities and nuances of the chosen case. In a case study, researchers gather rich and contextual data through various sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts. They strive to capture a holistic picture of the case under investigation, taking into account its historical, social, and cultural context. This research design is particularly useful when the research questions involve exploring unique and complex situations, examining real-life phenomena, or gaining insights into specific contexts. It allows researchers to delve deeply into the intricacies of a particular case, enabling a thorough understanding of the underlying dynamics, processes, and influences. By employing a qualitative approach, the case study research design embraces subjective interpretations, personal experiences, and the multiple perspectives of the participants involved. It emphasizes capturing the richness and depth of qualitative data, such as detailed descriptions, narratives, and thematic analysis.

**Justification for the Choice of Design in the Context of the Study**

The choice of case study research design for this study is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth investigation of buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector within the context of Bindura Rural District Council. The case study design is particularly suitable for exploring complex phenomena in real-life contexts, and this study aims to examine the complexity of buyer-supplier relationships and their impact on sustainability in a specific public sector organization.

Moreover, the case study design allows for the use of multiple sources of data, such as interviews, documents, and observations, which is appropriate for this study as it involves an investigation of the perceptions and experiences of employees involved in the procurement process at Bindura Rural District Council. The use of a case study design also allows for a comprehensive examination of the interrelationships between different variables, such as buyer-supplier relationships and sustainability, which is necessary for this study.

**3.2 Subjects (Population and Sampling)**

**Target Population**

The target population for this study is the employees of Bindura Rural District Council who are involved in the procurement process. This includes procurement officers, finance officers, and any other staff members who have direct or indirect involvement in the procurement process. These employees are essential for the study as they have first-hand experience and knowledge of buyer-supplier relationships and their impact on sustainability in the public sector.

**Sampling Techniques**

The study employed a non-probability sampling approach, specifically utilizing purposive sampling as the chosen technique. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this research due to its ability to selectively identify and recruit participants who possess the specific information and insights required for the study (Patton, 2015). In this particular investigation, the participants were carefully chosen based on two key criteria: their active involvement in the procurement process and their extensive knowledge of buyer-supplier relationships. By opting for purposive sampling, the researchers aimed to target individuals who have direct experience and expertise in the realm of procurement and buyer-supplier relationships. These participants are likely to possess valuable insights, in-depth understanding, and practical knowledge that can significantly contribute to the study's objectives. Their involvement in the procurement process ensures their familiarity with the dynamics, challenges, and intricacies of the subject matter, while their knowledge of buyer-supplier relationships enhances the richness of the data collected.

The purposive sampling technique allows researchers to handpick participants who can provide comprehensive and detailed information related to the research questions. By focusing on individuals with direct involvement in the procurement process and extensive knowledge of buyer-supplier relationships, the study seeks to gather meaningful data that can shed light on the specific aspects being investigated. This targeted selection of participants ensures that the research findings are grounded in real-world experiences and expertise, strengthening the validity and relevance of the study's conclusions. Overall, the use of purposive sampling in this study serves the purpose of strategically identifying and selecting participants who possess the necessary information and insights to address the research objectives effectively. This approach ensures that the collected data is directly relevant to the study's focus, enhancing the overall quality and validity of the research findings.

**Justification for the Sampling Technique**

The use of purposive sampling in this study is appropriate for several reasons. First, since the study aims to investigate buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector, it is essential to select participants who have direct or indirect involvement in the procurement process. This ensures that the study focuses on the appropriate population and that the data collected is relevant to the research question.

Secondly, purposive sampling allows for the selection of participants based on their knowledge and expertise on the phenomenon under study. Since the participants will be selected based on their involvement in the procurement process and their knowledge of buyer-supplier relationships, the data collected will be rich and detailed, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Lastly, the use of purposive sampling allows for the selection of a small but representative sample, which is appropriate for a case study research design. The selected participants will be representative of the larger population of employees involved in the procurement process at Bindura Rural District Council, ensuring that the findings of the study are applicable to this specific context.

**3.3 Research Instruments**

This study will use two research instruments: a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire will be used to collect quantitative data, while the interview guide will be used to collect qualitative data. The questionnaire will be designed to collect data on the perceptions of employees on buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability. The interview guide will be designed to collect data on the experiences and opinions of employees on buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability.

The research instruments used in this study were a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on the perceptions of employees on buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions that allowed participants to rate their agreement on a scale from 1 to 5.

The interview guide was designed to collect qualitative data on the experiences and opinions of employees on buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide detailed responses to the research questions.

The development of these instruments was based on the research questions and objectives. The questionnaire and interview guide were designed to ensure that all aspects of the research questions were covered adequately. The questionnaire was pretested to ensure its validity and reliability. The feedback from the pre-test was used to modify the questionnaire, and the final version was used for data collection.

Similarly, the interview guide was pretested to ensure its validity and reliability. The feedback from the pre-test was used to modify the interview guide, and the final version was used for data collection. The strengths of using a questionnaire include the ability to collect data from a large sample of participants quickly and efficiently, while the strengths of using an interview guide include the ability to collect detailed and rich data on the experiences and opinions of participants.

One of the weaknesses of using a questionnaire is the potential for response bias, where participants may not answer questions truthfully or may not understand the questions. To control for this weakness, the questionnaire was designed to have clear and simple questions, and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Similarly, one of the weaknesses of using an interview guide is the potential for interviewer bias, where the interviewer may influence the responses of the participants. To control for this weakness, the interview guide was designed to have open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide detailed and independent responses, and the interviews were conducted by a trained and impartial researcher.

**3.4 Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection process began with the distribution of the questionnaire to the participants. The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms. The participants were given a link to the questionnaire, and they were required to complete it within a specific time frame. The data collected from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution.

After analysing the data from the questionnaire, the next phase of data collection involved conducting interviews with selected participants. The interviews were conducted online using Zoom or Skype. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data collected from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis.

**3.5 Summary**

This research aims to analyse buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in the public sector, specifically in Bindura Rural District Council. The research design will be a case study, and the participants will be selected using purposive sampling. The research instruments that will be used are a questionnaire and an interview guide. The data collection process will involve administering the questionnaire online and conducting interviews with selected participants. The data collected will be analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. This research will contribute to the understanding of how buyer-supplier relationships can be used to achieve sustainability in the public sector.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION**

**4.0 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the data presentation, analysis andodiscussion. This sections contains also the questionnaire and interview response rate as well as the description of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**4.1 Response Rate**

The study distributed 30 questionnaires and 30 questionnaires were returned meaning the study’s response rate was 100%.

**4.2 Demographics**

This section shows the demographic characteristics of the study.

4.2.1 Gender

**Figure 4.1: Gender of the respondents**

The results presented in Figure 4.1 indicate that out of the 30 respondents who participated in the study at Bindura Rural District Council (BRDC), 23 were male and 7 were female. This suggests that the majority of the respondents were male, representing 76.7% of the total sample, while the remaining 23.3% were female. The gender of the respondents can influence the results of the study in several ways. For example, research has shown that men and women may have different perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours regarding sustainability (Werner et al., 2016). In the context of buyer-supplier relationships, gender may also affect the dynamics of power, communication, and trust between the parties involved (Lai et al., 2016).

In this case, the predominance of male respondents may indicate that men are more involved in the procurement and supply chain activities of the BRDC, which could have implications for the sustainability of their operations. This is consistent with previous studies that have found gender imbalances in the public sector, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles (World Bank, 2018). The underrepresentation of women in these positions may limit their ability to contribute to sustainable practices and influence policy-making processes.

Furthermore, the gender of the respondents may also reflect broader social and cultural norms that affect sustainability outcomes. For instance, research has shown that gender inequalities can perpetuate unsustainable practices, such as overconsumption and waste generation, due to differential access to resources and opportunities (United Nations, 2021). Addressing these gender disparities is therefore crucial for achieving sustainable development in the public sector

4.2.2 Age

**Figure 4.2: Age of the respondents**

Figure 4.2 presents the age distribution of the respondents at Bindura Rural District Council (BRDC), with one respondent under 20 years old, seven respondents aged 20-29, eight respondents aged 30-39, nine respondents aged 40-49, and five respondents aged 50 and above.

The age of the respondents can also influence the results of the study. For instance, different age groups may have different levels of experience, knowledge, and skills in procurement and supply chain management, which can affect their understanding of sustainability issues (Krippendorff, 2018). Older respondents may have more experience in these areas but may be less familiar with new technologies and innovations that could promote sustainability. Conversely, younger respondents may have more knowledge of emerging trends and technologies but may have less experience in implementing sustainable practices.

Moreover, age can also be a proxy for generational differences in attitudes and values towards sustainability. For instance, research has shown that younger generations tend to be more environmentally conscious and socially responsible than older generations (Hudson et al., 2018). This could influence their priorities and preferences in buyer-supplier relationships and the extent to which they prioritize sustainability.

In the context of the BRDC, the age distribution of the respondents suggests that the majority of the sample (51.7%) were between 30 and 49 years old, while the remaining respondents were either younger or older. This indicates that the study captured a relatively diverse range of age groups, which may have provided insights into the perspectives of different generations on sustainability in the public sector.

4.2.3 Job Tittle

**Figure 4.3: Job Tittle**

Figure 4.3 shows the job titles of the respondents at Bindura Rural District Council (BRDC). Out of the 30 respondents, four were executives, five were managers, seven were supervisors, and 14 were staff members.

Executives: 13.3%

Managers: 16.7%

Supervisors: 23.3%

Staff: 46.7%

These percentages suggest that the majority of respondents (70%) were in supervisory or staff positions, while only a minority (30%) were in higher-level managerial or executive roles. This has implications for the study's findings on buyer-supplier relationships and sustainability in the public sector.

For instance, research has shown that managers and executives tend to have more decision-making power and influence in procurement and supply chain management (Mentzer et al., 2001). They may also have greater access to resources, information, and training that can support sustainability initiatives (Caniato et al., 2017). In contrast, lower-level staff members may have more limited decision-making power and may be less involved in procurement and supply chain management processes, which could affect their awareness and understanding of sustainability issues.

However, the fact that a significant proportion of the respondents were in supervisory or staff positions indicates that there is potential for involving these stakeholders in promoting sustainability in buyer-supplier relationships. For instance, training and capacity-building programs can help to raise awareness and knowledge of sustainability issues among staff members and supervisors, empowering them to participate in sustainable procurement practices (Zhu et al., 2020).

In summary, the job title distribution of the respondents at the BRDC suggests that a significant proportion of the sample was in lower-level staff or supervisory roles, which could have implications for their involvement and awareness of sustainability issues in buyer-supplier relationships. However, this also highlights the potential for involving these stakeholders in promoting sustainability through training and capacity-building initiatives.

4.2.4 Experience

**Figure 4.4: Experience**

Figure 4.4 shows the distribution of experience levels among the respondents at Bindura Rural District Council. Out of the 30 respondents, 10% had than a year of experience, 16.7% had 1-3 years of experience, 23.3% had 4-6 years of experience, 23.3% had 7-10 years of experience, and 26.7% had more than 10 years of experience.

These percentages indicate that the majority of respondents (73.3%) had four or more years of experience in their current job or field. This suggests that the respondents have some level of expertise and knowledge in their roles, which could have implications for their understanding and engagement with sustainability issues in buyer-supplier relationships.

Research has shown that experience and knowledge are important factors in promoting sustainability in procurement and supply chain management (Zhu et al., 2020). Experienced professionals are more likely to be aware of sustainability issues, understand the potential benefits of sustainable practices, and have the skills and knowledge to implement them effectively (Caniato et al., 2017). This could be particularly relevant in the public sector, where sustainability and environmental concerns are increasingly important considerations in procurement and supply chain management (Klassen & Vereecke, 2018).

However, the fact that a significant proportion of the respondents had less than four years of experience (26.7%) suggests that there may be opportunities for training and capacity-building initiatives to enhance their understanding and engagement with sustainability issues. This could help to ensure that sustainability considerations are integrated into procurement and supply chain management processes, regardless of experience level.

**4.3 Existing Business Relationships**

4.3.1 Relationship between BRDC and its Suppliers

**Figure 4.5: BDRC relationship with suppliers.**

Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "How would you describe the relationship between BRDC and its suppliers?" Out of the 30 respondents, 16 described the relationship as transactional, seven as collaborative, seven as strategic, and none selected "other" as a response.

The results suggest that the majority of the respondents (53.3%) view the relationship between BRDC and its suppliers as transactional, which implies that the relationship is focused primarily on the exchange of goods and services and may not necessarily prioritize sustainability considerations. This finding is consistent with previous research that has found that many public sector organizations have traditionally adopted a transactional approach to supplier relationships, which can limit opportunities for collaboration and sustainability improvement (Carter et al., 2015).

However, the fact that a significant proportion of the respondents described the relationship as collaborative (23.3%) or strategic (23.3%) suggests that there may be opportunities for BRDC to develop more sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships with its suppliers. Collaboration and strategic relationships have been shown to be effective in promoting sustainability in procurement and supply chain management, as they enable organizations to work closely with suppliers to identify and address sustainability issues and jointly pursue opportunities for improvement (Walker et al., 2018).

In particular, strategic supplier relationships have been found to be effective in promoting sustainability outcomes in the public sector. A study by Walker et al. (2018) found that strategic relationships between local governments and their suppliers were associated with higher levels of sustainability performance, as these relationships enabled organizations to work together to identify and address sustainability issues and jointly pursue opportunities for improvement.

4.3.2 Supplier and Business communication

**Figure 4.6: Supplier and Business communication**

Figure 4.6 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "How often does BRDC communicate with its suppliers?" Out of the 30 respondents, two indicated that communication with suppliers is rare, nine indicated that it is occasional, ten indicated that it is frequent, and nine indicated that it is very frequent.

The results suggest that the majority of respondents (63.3%) reported that BRDC communicates with its suppliers frequently or very frequently. This finding is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the importance of effective communication in promoting sustainable supplier relationships (Wu et al., 2019). Frequent communication can facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge between organizations and their suppliers, which can enable joint problem-solving and the identification and pursuit of sustainability opportunities.

However, it is also worth noting that a significant proportion of respondents (30%) reported that communication with suppliers is occasional or rare, which may limit opportunities for collaboration and sustainability improvement. This finding is also consistent with previous research that has identified communication barriers as a significant challenge to sustainable procurement in the public sector (Walker et al., 2018).

4.3.3 Importance of maintaining good relationships

**Figure 4.7: maintaining good relationships**

Figure 4.7 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "How important is it for BRDC to maintain good relationships with its suppliers?" Out of the 30 respondents, no one indicated that maintaining good relationships with suppliers is not important, four indicated that it is somewhat important, eight indicated that it is important, then indicated that it is very important, and eight indicated that it is extremely important.

The results suggest that the majority of respondents (73.3%) believe that maintaining good relationships with suppliers is important or extremely important. This finding is consistent with previous research that has emphasized the importance of supplier relationship management in promoting sustainable procurement outcomes (Walker et al., 2018).

Moreover, the results also highlight the significance of supplier relationships in achieving sustainability goals in the public sector. As noted by Sarkis et al. (2011), "the relationships that exist between public organizations and their suppliers can have a significant impact on the environmental and social performance of these organizations" (p. 516). Therefore, maintaining good relationships with suppliers can be seen as a critical element of a sustainability strategy for public sector organizations like BRDC.

**4.4 Effectiveness of Buyer-supplier relation in achieving sustainability**

4.4.1 Current relationships & sustainability

**Figure 4.8: relationships & sustainability**

Figure 4.8 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "To what extent do BRDC's supplier relationships help achieve sustainability goals?" Out of the 30 respondents, four indicated that the supplier relationships are not at all effective in achieving sustainability goals, thirteen indicated that they are somewhat effective, seven indicated that they are effective, four indicated that they are very effective, and two indicated that they are extremely effective.

The results suggest that the majority of respondents (73.3%) believe that BRDC's supplier relationships are at least somewhat effective in achieving sustainability goals. However, it is worth noting that a non-negligible proportion of respondents (26.7%) indicated that the supplier relationships are either not effective or only somewhat effective in achieving sustainability goals.

This finding is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the importance of collaborative and strategic supplier relationships in promoting sustainable procurement outcomes (Walker et al., 2018; Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014). Moreover, the results suggest that there is room for improvement in BRDC's supplier relationship management practices to further enhance the effectiveness of these relationships in achieving sustainability goals.

4.4.2 Supplier Alignment with sustainability

**Figure 4.9: Supply alignment**

Figure 4.9 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "How does BRDC ensure that its suppliers align with the company's sustainability goals?" Out of the 30 respondents, seven indicated that regular audits and assessments are used to ensure supplier alignment with sustainability goals, nine indicated that communication and collaboration are used, seven indicated that contracts and agreements are used, and seven indicated other methods, such as ensuring accountability.

The results suggest that BRDC uses a variety of methods to ensure that its suppliers align with the company's sustainability goals. Communication and collaboration were cited most frequently, which is consistent with previous research that has emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement and collaboration in promoting sustainable procurement outcomes (Walker et al., 2018; Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014). Regular audits and assessments were also cited by a substantial proportion of respondents, which suggests that BRDC may be using a more formalized approach to supplier management. Overall, the results suggest that BRDC is taking steps to ensure that its suppliers align with the company's sustainability goals. However, further research may be needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods and to identify additional strategies for promoting sustainable procurement outcomes.

4.4.3 Sustainability areas to improve

**Figure 4.10: Sustainability areas to improve**

Figure 4.10 shows the distribution of responses to the question, "In your opinion, what areas of sustainability does BRDC's buyer-supplier relationships need to improve on?" Out of the 30 respondents, 10 indicated that environmental impact is an area that needs improvement, five indicated social impact, six indicated economic impact, and nine indicated all of the above. Additionally, there were several respondents who provided other specific areas for improvement.

The results suggest that there are opportunities for improvement in all areas of sustainability for BRDC's buyer-supplier relationships. Environmental impact was cited most frequently, which is consistent with the growing importance of environmental sustainability in procurement (Walker et al., 2018; Pagell & Wu, 2009). However, it is important to note that social and economic sustainability are also critical components of sustainable procurement (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Klassen & Vereecke, 2012).

**Buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability**

The researcher notes that the buyer-supplier relationship plays an important role in improving the sustainability of the supply chain, one respondent pointed out that

*“The strategic function of relationships between buyers and sellers as a lever for economic sustainability is far more obvious than it always was. Managers should be aware of these concerns since their stakeholders, customers, regulatory agencies, governmental organizations, and even their own employees are increasingly pressing businesses to confront and manage economic issues that will have an impact on the next generation.”*

This enhances the contribution of buyer-supplier relationships as one respondent stated that;

*“The evolving supplier-buyer relationship is anticipated to result in streamlining of an effective supply chain, which can further reduce costs, increase customer satisfaction, and differentiation against competition*”.

Therefore, it is essential for enterprises to create a strategic Supplier Relationship Management Process in order to ensure proper supplier selection and monitoring. Organizations have always used a reactive strategy when choosing providers. Suppliers were brought on board in response to the management's experience with demand. However, the circumstances we live in now make it necessary to take a strategic strategy that would focus on enhancing overall performance through partnerships and collaboration.

*“Businesses can engage with suppliers in a methodical manner that involves the analytical study of their history, performance, and trustworthiness by adopting a strategic strategy”.*

There are a number of sustainability practices that rural councils can implement throughout the supply chain in order to improve environmental and social outcomes

*“One way to do this is to source materials and products from suppliers that have been certified as sustainable. This certification can come from a number of different schemes, such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA)*

It can be cheaper to manufacture products using recycled resources. For instance, producers may now build new goods at a lesser cost than using fresh plastic by turning waste plastic into 3D printing filament. While it takes time to test novel materials to make sure they adhere to safety and performance criteria, the results can be valuable.

*“Another way to ensure sustainable practices are being used throughout the supply chain is to conduct audits of suppliers. This can help to identify any areas where improvements need to be made and also ensure that standards are being met.”*

*“In addition, rural councils can work with their suppliers to develop sustainability plans. This can involve setting targets for emissions reductions, water, and energy use, waste reduction, and more. By working together, rural councils and their suppliers can make significant progress toward achieving sustainability goals”.*

*“It is important to communicate with stakeholders about the sustainability practices that are being used throughout the supply chain. This can help to build trust and confidence in the organization, as well as increase transparency.*

*“Rural councils have a responsibility to ensure that the products and materials they use are sourced sustainably. By implementing sustainable practices throughout the supply chain, rural councils can make a positive impact on the environment and the community.”*

Social sustainability practices used in supply chain management involve strategies and actions taken to promote the well-being of workers throughout the production process. These strategies may include labor protections, fair wages, safe working conditions, and improved human rights for those involved in manufacturing. Companies have a responsibility to ensure that their suppliers adhere to ethical standards and provide decent living and working conditions for their workers.

Practices such as supplier audits and ratings, development of codes of conduct, and improvements in working conditions are important aspects of social sustainability initiatives within supply chain management. Companies can also leverage technology to improve communication between manufacturers and suppliers while ensuring that they are meeting social responsibility standards. Additionally, companies should strive to foster collaboration and trust among all parties in the supply chain as well as open dialogue about ethical labor practices. By incorporating social sustainability initiatives into their procurement process, companies can ensure that they are getting a good product while also promoting ethical working conditions and respect for human rights. This ultimately leads to more efficient production and improved relations with suppliers and customers alike.

**4.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter showed the results of multiple estimations performed with the SPSS version 16 statistical tool, as well as their interpretations. Data was presented in tables, and descriptive statistics were used to analyse and compare the findings of this study to those of previous studies. Based on these findings, the next chapter will summarize the findings, draw conclusions, provide recommendations that will be evaluated by management, and identify areas for further research.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter offers a summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations, the goal of which was to analyse buyer-supplier relationships in achieving sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. This chapter finishes the study by drawing conclusions from the findings and making recommendations for future investigations that may be required, as well as key lessons for Zimbabwe's public sector.

**5.2 SUMMARY**

This study found that the public organisations in Zimbabwe such as BRDC almost always use transactional relationships, collaborative partnerships regularly, and strategic alliance ties rarely never with their suppliers, as seen by their sample's responses.

Furthermore, this study discovered that Zimbabwe's public sector enterprises have achieved significant progress in environmental sustainability management by reducing pollution, use of recycled components where possible, protecting habitats and biodiversity, moving towards products with less of environmental damage, and efficient use of resources. Social sustainability considerations such ashealth, development opportunities for supplier staff, decent working conditions, wages and working hours, forced, prison or bonded labour and child are being incorporated in procurement decisions BRDC is a public organization in Zimbabwe. Bids are being awarded to the lowest bids, fair trade compliance and use of SMEs, minority business and voluntary organizations and other economic sustainability considerations are being practiced by BRDC, hence, sustainability is achieved in the public sector in Zimbabwe.

Lastly, there are transactional relationships, collaborative relationships and strategic alliances relationships on achieving sustainability in the public sector in Zimbabwe. Demographic control characteristics that are gender, age groups and levels of education have an impact on achieving sustainability in the public sector in Zimbabwe. Experiences of employees in different department have an impact on achieving sustainability in the public sector in Zimbabwe.

**5.3 CONCLUSIONS**

This study concludes that the forms of buyer-supplier relationships in Zimbabwe's public sector are transactional ties, which are nearly always utilized, collaborative partnerships, which are regularly used, and strategic alliance relationships, which are practically never used. The explanation offered is that transactional relationships are typically employed on a daily basis, but collaborative partnerships are frequently an allergic step or first step to a strategic alliance relationship.

Furthermore, this study finds that public sector organizations in Zimbabwe are attaining triple bottom line sustainability, as assessed by economic, environmental, and social sustainability, through implementing the sustainability practices specified in the questionnaire by respondents. A close positive and significant association exists between transactional relationships, strategic alliance relationships, gender, age groups, educational levels, and economic sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. Any policies that support transactional relationships, strategic alliance partnerships, gender, age groups, and increasing levels of education for procurement professionals are critical. Furthermore, there is an inverse negligible link between procurement department experience, collaborative relationships, and economic sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector.

This study suggests that transactional relationships, collaborative relationships, and strategic alliances have a favourable impact on environmental sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. Any advances in transactional, collaborative, and strategic alliance relationships would contribute to greater environmental sustainability in Zimbabwe's public sector. Transactional relationships contribute the most to social sustainability in the public sector in Zimbabwe of all the independent variables evaluated in this study, followed by demographic control characteristics of age groups.

**5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study findings and literature the study makes the following recommendations:

Based on the first objective on identifying types of buyer-supplier relationships between BRDC and its suppliers, public sector companies in Zimbabwe must use transactional relationships, collaborative relationships and strategic alliances relationships with their suppliers so that they can be able to achieve the triple bottom line of sustainability measured by economic, environmental and social sustainability pillars.

It is recommended that public sector organizations in Zimbabwe should create a supply chain map. Many businesses lack a complete understanding of their supply chain's sustainability consequences. An initial stage is to inventory suppliers, identify the most severe environmental and social concerns they face, and prioritize supplier actions. They should also streamline their budgets towards investing in these buyer-supplier relationships to ensure a viable and vibrant relationship management programme is in place for the achievement of the triple bottom line of sustainability.

It recommended that public sector companies should Expectations should be communicated- Putting a focus on sustainability in your supply chain is an excellent approach to communicate business values and culture to your suppliers and consumers. Setting and articulating expectations through a supplier code of conduct is an important first step in involving suppliers in your sustainability initiatives. Baseline supplier performance states that once you've identified your target suppliers and established compliance guidelines, gathering data from them via a simple benchmarking questionnaire or self-assessment will provide you with an insight of your starting position. Motivate performance enhancement says once the baseline performance of suppliers is established, an audit program can track performance improvement over time. While self-assessments are frequently conducted by a corporate group, such as EHS, procurement, or marketing, onsite audits can uncover local practices, behavioural issues, and practical chances for change that questionnaires alone cannot reveal

**5.5 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Further research may reveal other observations; therefore, the recommendations are not exhaustive. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests that, because this study was conducted in the public sector in Zimbabwe, additional research on the same topic, but in other sectors other than the public sector, both within and outside the country, be conducted in order to compare the results. This will aid in determining whether similar effects will be found when this research is conducted on different sectors. This will aid in the provision of solid evidence upon which reliable judgments can be drawn.