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Highlights

Social Procurement
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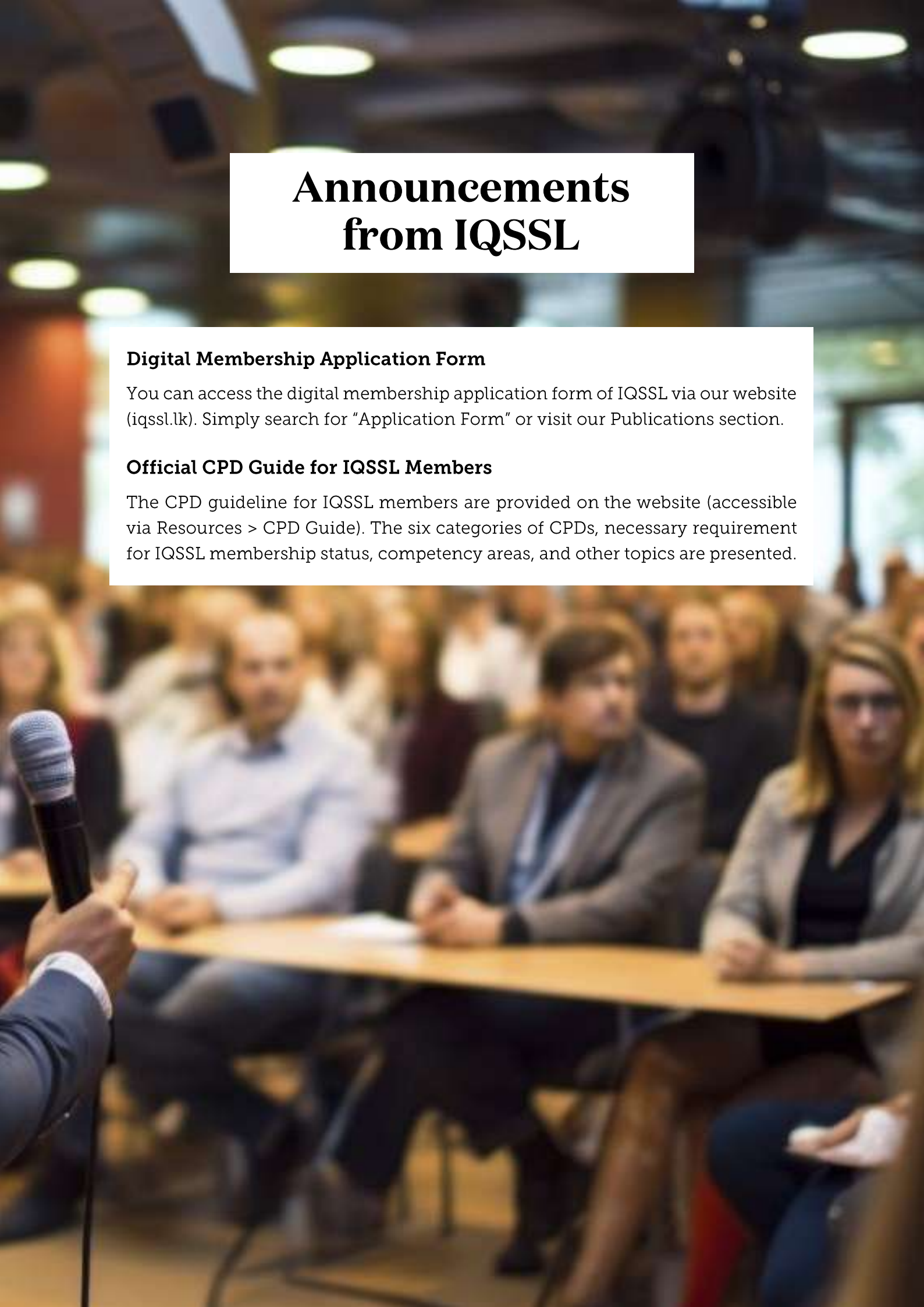
Contents



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Research Article

Social Procurement as a Catalyst for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Construction

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Keywords: Sustainable development, social procurement, economic inclusion, SDG

1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a key consideration for industries worldwide, inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Pedersen, 2018). However, the construction industry continues to lag in this transformation compared to other industries (Lima et al., 2020). This gap poses a challenge, as construction has significant social, economic, and environmental impacts. To address this, social procurement has emerged as a practical and strategic solution over the past years. This concept goes beyond traditional procurement by considering broader social outcomes, economic inclusion, and environmental responsibility apart from cost and technical capability (Willar et al., 2020). As the construction sector seeks to align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, embracing social procurement in project delivery can drive more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes (LePage & Renaerts, 2023). In line with this, this research article evaluates how social procurement contributes to achieving the broader objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The Concept of Social Procurement

When considering the concept of social procurement, it is considered a progressive approach that embeds social objectives into the procurement of goods, services, and works.

At its core, social procurement emphasises the generation of social value through purchasing decisions (Ludlow, 2016). This transforms procurement from a purely transactional function into a strategic mechanism that addresses broader societal challenges such as unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion. Different scholars have provided different perspectives on its scope and purpose. Furneaux and Barraket (2014) defined it as the acquisition of assets and services with the explicit aim of achieving social outcomes, whereas Barraket et al. (2015) viewed it as an approach for creating social value through everyday procurement activity. Furthermore, Loosemore (2016) highlighted its application in supporting employment and training for disadvantaged groups, while Willar et al. (2020) described it as a sustainable procurement method in construction.

Social procurement is characterised by a range of interlinked features that collectively contribute to its social impact. It prioritises the creation of social value and promotes equity, diversity, and inclusivity by targeting disadvantaged or marginalised groups for employment and engagement (Loosemore & Reid, 2018). It promotes community empowerment and resilience by supporting local job creation, skill development, and long-term sustainable employment (Denny-Smith et al., 2020). Furthermore, social procurement often incorporates social value clauses in tender documents and is guided by formal policies that aim to deliver measurable social benefits.

It promotes collaboration between government bodies, private contractors, and social enterprises, allowing cross-sector partnerships that align with broader public policy objectives and corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals (Meltzer et al., 2024). Moreover, it encourages the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), supports local suppliers, and tailors its implementation to the specific needs of the communities involved. Leadership commitment, knowledge sharing, and supply chain engagement are also crucial to its success (Suchowerska et al., 2024). Ultimately, social procurement serves as a context-sensitive, community-focused approach that links procurement decisions to inclusive socioeconomic development and the advancement of sustainable development goals.

3. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs, adopted in 2015 as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, represent a unified global framework to address the world's most pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges (United Nations, 2015). Comprising 17 goals, the SDGs are designed to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, promote inclusive economic growth, and combat climate change while preserving natural ecosystems. Their importance lies in providing a measurable, universally accepted blueprint for sustainable progress that integrates the interests of developed and developing nations. . The SDGs reflect lessons learned from past initiatives such as Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals, and they emphasise multilateralism, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term resilience. In today's context of rising inequality, environmental degradation, and geopolitical instability, the SDGs serve as a critical tool to align national policies, corporate strategies, and community-level actions towards a shared vision of sustainable development. Their successful implementation requires collective responsibility, policy coherence, and sustained commitment from all stakeholders. Social procurement, particularly within the construction industry, offers a practical mechanism to localise and operationalise these global goals by embedding social value into infrastructure delivery and supply chain practices.

4. Contribution of Social Procurement to SDGs

Through the prioritisation of suppliers and practices that align with community needs, social procurement creates measurable outcomes that align with the UN SDGs. This approach shifts the marketplace from purely economic transactions to a model that encourages inclusive, equitable, and sustainable communities. The construction industry's significant economic influence makes it a key player in social procurement. With billions spent annually on infrastructure, governments and private entities can use their purchasing power to address issues like poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (LePage & Renaerts, 2023).

Social procurement addresses labour market challenges in construction, such as worker shortages and lack of diversity (Gidigah et al., 2024). By targeting underrepresented groups including youth, ex-convicts, or immigrants, social procurement creates pathways to employment and skill development. This fills labour gaps and reduces social exclusion and poverty, aligning with SDGs like No Poverty (SDG 1) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8).

Furthermore, incorporating social enterprises into supply chains enhances social procurement's impact. Social enterprises reinvest profits into community-focused missions, such as training or environmental sustainability. By prioritising these suppliers, construction projects amplify social value, supporting SDGs like Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). Environmental sustainability is another key outcome of social procurement. The construction sector contributes significantly to pollution and waste, but social procurement encourages the use of suppliers by prioritising eco-friendly practices (LePage & Renaerts, 2023). This aligns with SDG 13 (Climate Action) by reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Likewise, social procurement links with several SDGs as illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: SDGs that are addressed by social procurement

Table 1: Contribution of social procurement to SDGs
(Source: LePage & Renaerts, 2023)

SDG	How Social Procurement Achieves the SDG
SDG 1: No Poverty	Provides jobs and training for marginalised groups, reducing unemployment and economic hardship.
SDG 2: Zero Hunger	Creates employment opportunities, enabling individuals to afford basic needs like food.
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	Offers stable jobs and support services, improving mental and physical health for workers.
SDG 4: Quality Education	Funds training and apprenticeships, enhancing skills and employability for disadvantaged groups.
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Promotes hiring from diverse groups, including women, in a male-dominated industry.
SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Constructs infrastructure that improves access to clean water and sanitation, enhancing community health and lifestyle.
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Creates inclusive job opportunities and supports economic stability through fair wages.
SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	Encourages innovative procurement practices that prioritise social and environmental outcomes.
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	Targets employment and supplier opportunities for underrepresented and marginalised communities.
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Fosters community development through local hiring and social enterprise partnerships.
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Prioritises suppliers with sustainable practices, reducing waste and environmental impact.
SDG 13: Climate Action	Supports eco-friendly suppliers and practices to mitigate construction's environmental footprint.
SDG 15: Life on Land	Supports suppliers committed to sustainable land use, biodiversity conservation, and avoids deforestation or ecosystem disruption during construction.
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Encourages collaboration between governments, contractors, and communities to achieve social outcomes.

As illustrated in Table 1, social procurement directly contributes to 14 out of the 17 SDGs by embedding social value into procurement decisions. primarily through inclusive employment, equitable economic growth, community empowerment, and sustainable construction practices. Even though social procurement does not directly address SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), it contributes indirectly by encouraging responsible procurement practices. These include sourcing from suppliers who prioritise clean energy use, pollution control, environmental protection, and ethical governance. Such practices, when integrated into procurement strategies, reinforce institutional transparency, environmental responsibility, and long-term sustainability. As such, social procurement acts as a strategic enabler of the SDGs by incorporating social value within procurement decisions (Hartlapp, 2025).

5. Conclusions and Way Forward

Social procurement offers a strategic pathway to integrate social value into construction practices, supporting both direct and indirect achievement of the SDGs. It promotes inclusive employment, ethical supply chains, and community development. By embedding social procurement into standard practices, the construction industry can become a catalyst for achieving SDGs by building more inclusive communities. The way forward involves developing clear policy frameworks, embedding social value criteria in procurement processes, training stakeholders across the supply chain, and strengthening collaboration between government, industry, and social enterprises to maximise long-term social and sustainable outcomes in the construction sector.

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Research Article

Carbon Financing: Where Sustainability Meets Profits

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Keywords: Carbon financing, sustainability, carbon markets, circular economy

1. Introduction

The construction industry accounts for one-third of the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (United Nations Environment Programme, 2023). GHG causes global warming, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and damage to ecosystems, threatening human and natural systems (Upadhyay, 2020). Hence, innovative sustainable practices are being rapidly explored and pursued to mitigate the environmental impacts of the construction industry. Accordingly, various sustainable practices that can mitigate carbon emissions in the construction industry have been identified in the existing literature.

Adoption of low-carbon and renewable materials, lean and agile construction methods, circular economy adoption, green supply chain management and certifications including LEED and BREEAM promote sustainable practices are currently popular sustainable practice. Despite the growing awareness of the environmental benefits of sustainable construction, financial concerns remain a major barrier to its adoption. Addressing this issue, carbon financing is emerging as a popular sustainable method due to both environmental and financial benefits (Chien, 2024).

The term carbon financing was first introduced as the revenue realized by the sale of carbon credits in the Kyoto Protocol (1997).

However, over the years, scholars have explored carbon financing from more defined yet diverse perspectives, crafting a more comprehensive understanding of the concept. According to recent literature, carbon financing can be introduced as an economical and sustainable option to minimise carbon emissions. Carbon finance involves financial mechanisms designed to mitigate climate change by incentivizing carbon emission reductions. It includes trading carbon credits, investing in low-carbon projects, and financing sustainable initiatives. Aligned with global agreements like the Kyoto Protocol, carbon finance places a monetary value on emissions, encouraging businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices while addressing environmental risks.

2. Benefits of Carbon Financing

The construction industry stands to gain considerably from carbon financing, especially in advancing green building practices and reducing environmental impact. Zhou and Li (2019) and Yang and Luo (2020) emphasised the key benefit of global carbon emission reduction, which is vital for construction firms as a solution to improve their brand by engaging in sustainable activities, as well as to align with tightening regulations. Moreover, carbon finance enhances climate resilience, a major concern for infrastructure projects. Furthermore, carbon financing funds sustainable energy initiatives fulfilling the financial needs of sustainable initiatives and addressing the urge of carbon emitters to reduce carbon emissions, which leads the industry towards sustainable building practices (Gu et al., 2022).

The influence of carbon financing towards sustainability creates more green jobs, providing new opportunities in sustainable construction. Additionally, cleaner air and health benefits improve worker safety and public perception which is key for urban development projects. One of the most important and widely recognised benefits of carbon financing is its power to attract new investments and create additional revenue streams for construction firms while supporting sustainability. Investors, especially those focused on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria are increasingly looking to fund companies that demonstrate long-term sustainability (Gu et al., 2022).

Furthermore, when a firm adopts financing tools that reduce carbon emissions including carbon credits and carbon financial derivatives, it shows commitment to decarbonization (Al Mamun et al., 2022).

Additionally, the ability to generate and trade carbon credits creates predictable, performance-linked revenue streams that reduce risk and improve financial stability (Zhang et al., 2023). Carbon financing attracts new investment by aligning construction firms with global sustainability goals and signalling reduced environmental and financial risk to investors.

3. Challenges of Carbon Financing

Although carbon finance holds substantial promise, its implementation is often obstructed by complex and persistent challenges, including a lack of understanding of carbon finance-related concepts as well as insufficient knowledge systems and expertise. This limits the engagement of the potential stakeholders with carbon financing. The scarcity of tailored and innovative carbon-financial tools (Zhou & Li, 2019) and minimal intermediary services from financial institutions make the adoption of carbon financing more challenging, particularly in sectors similar to construction, where innovative financing is required.

Moreover, the weak regulatory environment including outdated trading rules and inconsistent dispute resolution framework of carbon financing has made the carbon financing market unstable for deals. A key challenge highlighted by many scholars, including Wang et al. (2019) and Zhou & Li (2019), is the absence of a unified trading platform for carbon financial derivatives, both at the global and national levels. This fragmentation leads to inefficiencies, inconsistencies in pricing mechanisms, limited market liquidity, and barriers to cross-border participation (Zhou & Li, 2019).

According to ICAP (2024), 36 Emission Trading systems are being governed and performed under different regulatory frameworks making it hard to create collaborations. Without a standardized infrastructure, and harmonized regulations, market participants especially from developing countries face difficulty accessing reliable trading systems, verifying credits, or engaging in seamless transactions. Furthermore, carbon financing has been challenging due to the characteristics of the carbon market including high transaction costs, price volatility, and dominance by advanced economies (Wang et al., 2019).

4. Recommended Strategies

Developing a robust and efficient global carbon finance market requires a diverse and collaborative approach. One of the key steps is enhancing awareness and building professional capacity. Structured educational programs should be implemented for financial institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to deepen their understanding of carbon finance mechanisms (Zhou & Li, 2019). Additionally, delivering public awareness campaigns through workshops, seminars, and media outreach can broaden the engagement and interest of the stakeholders towards carbon financing. A strong and updated legal framework is another vital approach to minimize carbon financing challenges (Liu et al., 2015). Clear legislation, based on successful systems like the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), can ensure stability in carbon markets and encourage carbon finance transactions. Standardized regulations on carbon credit allocation, trading procedures, and dispute resolution can create transparent, predictable market conditions. Standardized regulations on carbon credit allocation, trading procedures, and dispute resolution can create transparent, predictable market conditions.

Furthermore, introducing diversified carbon financial derivatives including carbon futures, options, and swaps can improve market liquidity and attract a wider investor base. These derivatives can support long-term planning, reduce market volatility, and make carbon markets more resilient and appealing, ultimately strengthening global efforts toward decarbonisation. Creating unified and transparent carbon trading platforms is essential for market integration (Zhou & Li, 2019; Liu et al., 2015). Merging fragmented regional markets into one system can facilitate cross-border trading.

Carbon financing creates an opportunity for the construction industry to transform into a much more sustainable version, balancing environmental responsibility with financial viability. Furthermore, by properly handling carbon credits and carbon financial derivatives, firms can not only reduce their carbon footprint but also establish new revenue streams and attract investors. For the construction industry, carbon financing is more than a compliance tool. It is a pathway to building a greener future where sustainability meets profits.

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Ch. QS Duleesha Wijesiri
Chairman - BQSP

Research Article

The Groundwork to Global Goals: The Construction Industry's Role in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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Keywords: Sustainability, socio-economic development, global goals, construction industry practices, SDG

1. Introduction

The construction industry plays a dominant role in the national, social, and economic development of any country (Mahmood et al., 2024). Despite its dominant role in economic growth and social improvement, the construction industry has significant unfavourable impacts, including biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and environmental pollution (Chaudhary & Akhtar, 2024; Omopariola et al., 2024). This highlights the urgent need to integrate sustainable development practices globally, as numerous studies emphasize the critical role of the construction industry in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2023; United Nations Environment Programme, 2022).

2. Sustainable Development Goals

The UN World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland & Khalid, 1987). Among the various sustainable development practices, the SDGs have emerged as a globally recognised framework for achieving sustainability, to address environmental, social, and economic challenges in the built environment (Baloi, 2003).

The SDGs, a set of 17 global objectives with 169 associated targets, were officially adopted during the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 for the period 2016 to 2030 (Servaes, 2017). In essence, the SDGs can be considered as a more advanced and comprehensive framework than the Millennium Development Goals, the most prominent initiative on the global development agenda, which were initially introduced at the Millennium Summit in 2000 for the period 2000 – 2015 (Vandemoortele, 2017). Subsequently, the United Nations introduced the 17 SDGs, representing an ambitious global initiative aimed at advancing development while responding to the growing urgency for sustainable practices within the built environment (Hák et al., 2016).

3. Role of the Construction Industry in Achieving SDGs

The construction industry can be considered a central hub of a country's socio-economic development and is currently undergoing a significant transformation, as traditional approaches are being reimagined and redefined in alignment with sustainable development (Regona et al., 2024). Concurrent with this paradigm shift, the SDGs offer the construction industry a new lens to enhance its extensive social, economic, and environmental contribution towards sustainability (Fei et al., 2021).

Importantly, the land, real estate, and construction sector plays a critical role in driving the achievement of the SDGs, both directly and indirectly, throughout the entire life cycle of residential, commercial, public, and infrastructure projects (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, 2024), as illustrated in Figure 1.

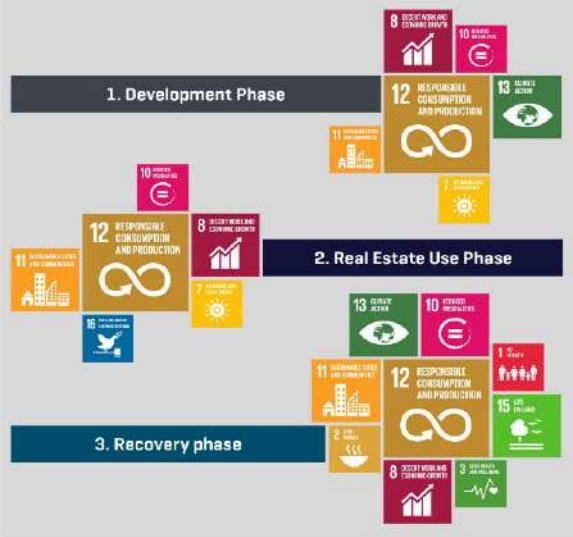

Figure 1 - Contribution of the construction sector to the SDGs across the project life cycle Source: (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, 2024)

Goal 1: No Poverty

The role of the construction industry in achieving SDG 1 includes developing buildings and infrastructure that are affordable, safe, and healthy, while delivering the highest possible value to end users (McCollum et al., 2018). Additionally, providing resilient housing and infrastructure helps mitigate the adverse impacts of natural disasters, thereby improving people's quality of life (Maes et al., 2019).

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

The construction industry plays a vital role in supporting sustainable agriculture by enhancing infrastructure for food production. It promotes the use of building materials that minimise harm to agricultural land (Santika et al., 2019). In areas where fertile land is limited due to urban density, or restricted access, careful planning and building design can help optimise land use for food production at various scales (Barbosa Júnior et al., 2023).

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being

The construction industry contributes to SDG 3 by promoting building designs that support a healthy indoor environment, including adequate natural lighting, proper acoustics, clean air, and minimal exposure to harmful radiation and emissions (Le Blanc, 2015). It also advances healthcare delivery through improved infrastructure and the avoidance of environmentally hazardous materials (Alawneh et al., 2019).

Goal 4: Quality Education

The construction industry supports quality education by developing architecture that fosters a productive and inclusive learning environment (McCollum et al., 2018). It plays a key role in creating affordable, accessible, and safe infrastructure for educational and training facilities, contributing to long-term educational development for all (Maes et al., 2019).

Goal 5: Gender Equality

The construction industry promotes SDG 5 by providing affordable and secure buildings that offer essential services for women, such as health centres, maternity clinics, safe houses, and sanitary facilities (Santika et al., 2019). In addition, the inclusive design of public spaces such as playgrounds, parks, and sports facilities ensures equal access to leisure and physical activities, creating environments that are welcoming and safe for all genders (Mossin et al., 2018).

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

The construction industry contributes to clean water and sanitation by supporting the development of essential infrastructure, including drinking water systems, sewage treatment plants, and filtration facilities (Alawneh et al., 2018).

Moreover, careful selection of construction materials is crucial, ensuring they do not pollute groundwater during extraction, construction, or throughout their lifecycle (Goubran, 2019).

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

The construction industry supports SDG 7 by incorporating renewable energy sources and implementing energy-efficient design strategies that minimise energy consumption in buildings (Santika et al., 2019). Additionally, it plays a key role in expanding and developing energy infrastructure to ensure reliable and sustainable energy access(Wieser et al., 2019).

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The construction sector drives economic growth by creating new business opportunities and expanding employment. By investing in workforce development, the industry enhances skills and promotes sustainable job creation (Maes et al., 2019). Ensuring decent working conditions and robust safety measures on construction and demolition sites supports worker well-being, which is fundamental to achieving sustained economic progress (Alawneh et al., 2018).

9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

The Construction plays a key role in developing digital infrastructure that supports sustainable trade and promotes efficient collaboration (Tjoa & Tjoa, 2016). By exploring the growth of new skills and competencies across all levels of the building industry, it strengthens overall capacity. Additionally, investment in research allows the testing and implementation of innovative tools and technologies, driving industry advancement (McCollum et al., 2018).

Goal 10: Reduced Inequality

Accessibility must be a fundamental consideration in the design of buildings, settlements, and urban areas to ensure equal opportunities for all (Mossin et al., 2018). Embedding social responsibility and inclusiveness throughout the planning, programming, and design stages creates environments that support diverse communities and help reduce inequality (Fei et al., 2021).

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Achieving sustainable cities and communities requires construction practices that prioritise sustainability at every stage. This includes developing energy, communication, and transportation infrastructure that supports efficient and connected urban living (Pedersen & Zwart, 2018). Incorporating resilience and disaster planning into designs helps protect communities from risks, while reducing waste and pollution contributes to a cleaner, healthier environment (Goubran, 2019).

Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production

Responsible consumption and production in construction require efficient resource management guided by the principles of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Recover (the 4Rs). By designing buildings for longevity and ease of maintenance, and by prioritising durability and life-cycle considerations, the industry can significantly reduce material waste and preserve value throughout a building's lifespan(Santika et al., 2019).

Goal 13: Climate Action

Addressing climate change in construction involves adopting innovative design strategies that enhance resilience to extreme weather events such as floods, hurricanes, and heavy rainfall (Wieser et al., 2019). Reducing carbon emissions is also essential, which can be achieved by integrating renewable energy production within buildings and minimising the transportation of building materials (Maes et al., 2019).

Goal 14: Life Below Water

Protecting marine ecosystems requires construction practices that prioritise effective treatment of waste and wastewater to prevent pollutants such as pesticides, nitrogen, and human waste from entering groundwater or oceans. Additionally, all coastal development must strictly adhere to international protection laws to minimise environmental impact (Mossin et al., 2018).

Goal 15: Life on Land

To protect life on land, construction practices need to support sustainable ecosystems by safeguarding flora and fauna. This requires limiting greenfield developments to prevent habitat loss and preserve biodiversity for future generations (Alawneh et al., 2019).

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The construction industry plays a key role in fostering inclusive and safe societies by delivering public buildings and spaces such as libraries, community centres, and safehouses that are secure, accessible, and free from discrimination (Alawneh et al., 2018; McCollum et al., 2018).

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

To achieve SDG 17, the construction industry must strengthen collaboration across sectors by adopting integrated stakeholder management approaches. Designers, planners, and contractors can contribute by sharing knowledge, aligning with research institutions, and co-creating sustainable solutions that support long-term development partnerships (Goubran, 2019).

3. Conclusions

The construction industry, as a foundational pillar of socio-economic development, holds a transformative potential to drive the global sustainability agenda through the realisation of the SDGs.

From poverty alleviation and quality education to climate action and biodiversity preservation, the sector's influence spans across all 17 goals, emphasising its capacity as both an enabler and a beneficiary of sustainable development. Accordingly, integrating the SDGs into the core of construction practices is a strategic imperative for ensuring long-term environmental integrity, social equity, and economic resilience.

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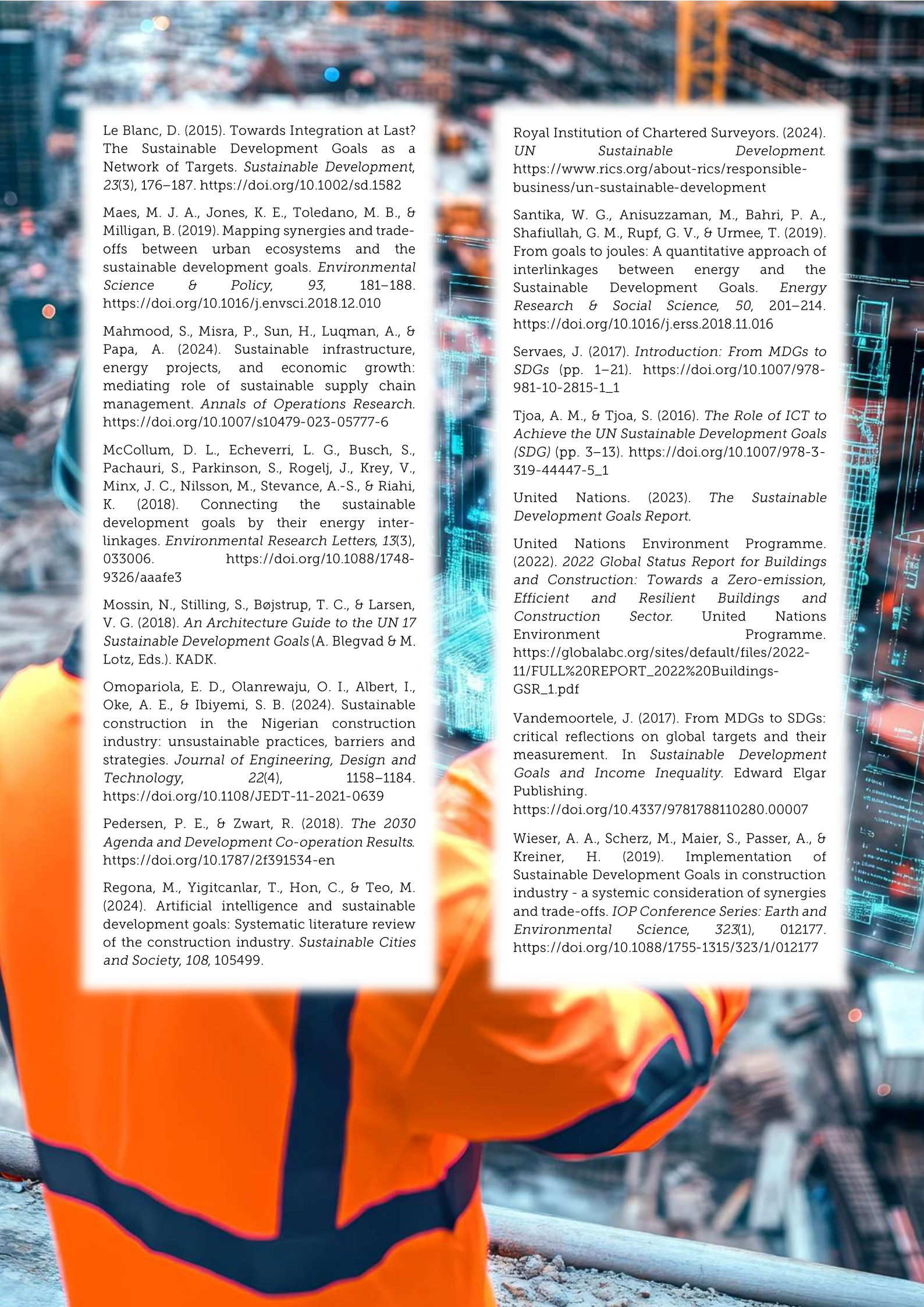

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