



MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PROCUREMENT AND LOGISTICS

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MODE OF STUDY: PART TIME

TOPIC TITLE: Assessing the Influence of Public Procurement Policy on Social Cash Transfer (SCT) Donor Funded Projects: A Case of Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, Lusaka.

SUBMISSION DATE: 28 Jun 2025

SUPERVISOR: Dr Geoffrey Mweshi

WORD COUNT:

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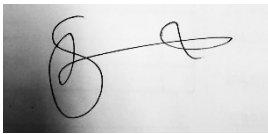
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DECLARATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to God Almighty for granting me the strength and perseverance to navigate this academic journey successfully. His guidance has been an incredible blessing in making this work possible!

A special thank you goes to my excellent supervisor, Dr. Geoffrey Mweshi. Your invaluable support and insightful feedback have truly enriched my research experience and contributed significantly to my growth both academically and professionally

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the memory of Ms. Ruth Tembo, whose unwavering belief in me and constant encouragement inspired me to pursue this academic program. Mum, you were a guiding light in my life, and your words of wisdom and faith in my potential pushed me to reach for higher goals. You were with me in thick and thin to see the completion of this journey, your influence and love continue to motivate me every day. This work is a tribute to you, your legacy of encouragement, strength, and dedication lives on in everything I do.

I also dedicate this research to my siblings Brian, Maureen and Rabbecca, you are my heart and my inspiration. Your love and joy remind me of the importance of perseverance, and your presence in my life gives me the strength to keep going, no matter the obstacles. This achievement is for all of you, as a promise to always strive for the best and to make you proud.

May this work honor also my mother Ms. Ruth Tembo, and serve as a reminder of the dreams we are building together

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of public procurement policies on the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects, using the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka as a case study. The research addresses the growing concern that procedural misalignments, institutional capacity gaps, and overlapping donor-national procurement frameworks significantly hinder project performance, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Zambia.

Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated structured questionnaires (n=83) and semi-structured interviews (n=12) to capture both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Quantitative analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics revealed that e-procurement adoption, donor-national policy alignment, and staff training levels had statistically significant effects on project timelines and service delivery efficiency. Thematic analysis of interview data confirmed these findings, with respondents highlighting delays caused by dual procurement systems, inadequate staff capacity, and the absence of harmonized procedures.

A joint display matrix was used to integrate both data strands, showing strong convergence on core challenges while revealing divergence in the perceived impact of decentralization. The findings point to an urgent need for policy harmonization, investment in capacity development, and adoption of standardized operating procedures.

The study concludes by proposing actionable recommendations across four domains: policy harmonization, capacity development, digital transformation, and decentralization. It contributes to procurement theory and public administration literature by offering empirical evidence from a developing country context, while informing donor-government strategies for procurement reform in Zambia's social protection sector.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Public procurement is critical in delivering effective social protection programmes, especially in resource-constrained settings like Zambia. The Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme is a flagship poverty reduction strategy aimed at extremely poor and vulnerable households through unconditional financial support (Handa et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2016). Effective SCT implementation heavily depends on efficient procurement systems, especially given the significant involvement of international donors such as the World Bank, UNICEF, Sida, and Irish Aid, each with distinct procurement frameworks (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2020).

The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka coordinates these complex procurement processes, balancing national procurement laws with diverse donor-imposed requirements. These overlapping procedures frequently result in operational inefficiencies, delayed contract execution, and under-utilization of allocated resources (Zambia Public Procurement Authority [ZPPA], 2022; ZIPAR, 2019). Consequently, beneficiaries experience significant delays in cash transfers, negatively affecting their livelihoods and trust in the programme (Handa et al., 2018; Masiye & Sampa, 2020).

The dual nature of procurement requirements balancing domestic regulations under the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020 with donor-imposed procedures poses a significant challenge for ministries such as MCDSS. Procurement officers must navigate overlapping requirements, procedural complexities, and rigid timelines that often result in inefficiencies, delayed contract execution, and underutilization of programme funds (Zambia Public Procurement Authority [ZPPA], 2020; ZIPAR, 2019). These inefficiencies not only compromise the timeliness of cash disbursements to beneficiaries but also erode stakeholder confidence in programme delivery.

Previous evaluations highlight procurement delays disrupting timely payments, undermining programme credibility and effectiveness. Given these persistent challenges, this study critically evaluates how procurement policy misalignments affect SCT programme efficiency, specifically focusing on MCDSS in Lusaka, to inform practical procurement reforms and enhance service delivery.

Given the growing emphasis on aligning social protection with good governance and fiscal accountability, it is imperative to assess how public procurement policies influence the implementation of SCT donor-funded projects in Zambia. This study focuses specifically on the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services in Lusaka as the focal point of procurement and programme management. It aims to examine how procurement frameworks both national and donor-driven shape the efficiency, responsiveness, and outcomes of the SCT programme.

By exploring the institutional, procedural, and stakeholder dynamics within MCDSS, the study seeks to generate evidence that can inform procurement reforms and improve service delivery mechanisms. The research contributes to broader discussions on harmonizing public procurement with donor expectations and enhancing the impact of social protection initiatives in resource-constrained settings.

1.2 Background

Historically, the procurement system in Zambia has experienced a series of significant transformations driven by evolving legislative frameworks, policy reforms, and the shifting socio-economic landscape. These changes have been instrumental in shaping how public sector entities acquire goods, services, and works, with the overarching goal of promoting transparency, efficiency, and accountability in the management of public resources. The journey began with the enactment of the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2008, which introduced a comprehensive legal framework aimed at regulating procurement activities and establishing institutional mechanisms for oversight and compliance. This initial legislation sought to standardize procurement processes across government ministries and agencies, thereby reducing corruption and promoting fair competition.

However, as the country's economic environment and procurement challenges evolved, it became clear that the 2008 Act required amendments to better address emerging issues and align with international best practices. Consequently, the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020 was enacted, replacing the previous legislation. This new law marked a significant milestone in Zambia's procurement landscape, representing a comprehensive overhaul of existing regulations and introducing reforms intended to enhance efficiency, transparency, and sustainability in procurement practices. The 2020 Act also aimed to create a more conducive environment for

private sector participation and to streamline procurement procedures, thus fostering economic growth and development (Public P. A No. 8 of 2020).

Public procurement policies in Zambia serve as the backbone of government operations, especially in managing projects funded by donors and aimed at social welfare initiatives. These policies are designed not only to ensure adherence to principles of transparency, fairness, and accountability but also to optimize resource utilization and maximize development impact. Among these initiatives, the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) program stands out as one of the most prominent social protection strategies implemented by the government. The SCT program provides direct financial assistance to vulnerable households, including the elderly, disabled individuals, orphans, and households with members suffering from chronic illnesses, with the primary objective of alleviating poverty, reducing food insecurity, and improving overall well-being.

The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) is mandated to oversee the implementation of these SCT projects, making it crucial to understand how public procurement policies influence their execution. Procurement processes directly impact the timely disbursement of funds, quality of goods and services procured, and overall project sustainability. In many developing countries, including Zambia, public procurement policies are intended to balance the need for efficiency with the imperative for transparency, yet they often face challenges related to bureaucratic delays, corruption risks, and capacity constraints. These challenges can hinder the smooth implementation of social programs like SCT, which require prompt and efficient procurement of food, healthcare supplies, and other essential services.

Public procurement has increasingly become recognized as a critical factor in the success of organizational operations beyond the public sector, including in the context of donor-funded projects. Effective procurement management is a vital tool for boosting efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability in project execution (Panya and Emmanuel, 2023). It involves the strategic acquisition of goods, works, and services on behalf of the government to meet project objectives while safeguarding public funds. For donor-funded projects, it is particularly important that procurement processes align with international standards to ensure transparency, prevent misappropriation of funds, and foster sustainability. This alignment helps avoid situations where funds are recouped by donors due to non-compliance or inefficiencies, which can significantly undermine project sustainability and credibility.

In Zambia, however, a notable challenge lies in the divergence between procurement procedures for donor-funded projects and those for domestic government projects. Donor agencies typically impose their own procurement guidelines, which may differ significantly from local policies, leading to a fragmented procurement environment. This divergence often results in inefficiencies, delays, and increased administrative burdens, ultimately impairing the effectiveness of project implementation. It can also create confusion among implementing agencies and contractors, complicating compliance and procurement planning. Such discrepancies have raised concerns about how these differing procedures impact the overall efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery, especially in critical social programs like the SCT.

As Zambia continues to grapple with high poverty levels, economic challenges, and limited social safety nets, the role of SCT programs has become increasingly vital. These programs are designed to provide a safety net for the most disadvantaged populations, enabling them to meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education. By targeting marginalized groups—such as elderly persons, disabled individuals, orphans, and vulnerable households—the SCT initiative plays a crucial role in reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion (Handa et al., 2018). Evidence from various studies indicates that cash transfer programs can lead to positive outcomes, including increased household consumption, improved health and nutritional status, and enhanced school attendance among children (Davis et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the success of SCT programs is heavily dependent on the efficiency and effectiveness of procurement practices that facilitate their implementation. Rigid or overly bureaucratic procurement procedures can cause delays in the procurement of essential goods and services, resulting in project delays and reduced impact. Inefficient procurement processes can also lead to misallocation or wastage of scarce resources, ultimately hampering the program's ability to meet its objectives and deliver benefits to the intended beneficiaries in a timely manner (Thai, 2001).

The relationship between public procurement and SCT projects is complex and multifaceted. On one hand, sound procurement practices—characterized by transparency, competitiveness, and efficiency—can significantly enhance project delivery by ensuring that resources are allocated optimally and that procurement processes foster trust among stakeholders (Arrowsmith, 2010). On the other hand, bureaucratic hurdles, stringent compliance requirements, and a lack of capacity can

impede progress, creating frustrations among government officials, project implementers, and beneficiaries alike. These challenges often lead to delays, increased costs, and reduced stakeholder confidence, ultimately undermining the social objectives of the programs.

External factors, such as donor expectations, political influences, and the broader economic environment, also shape the procurement landscape. Donors often impose specific procurement guidelines that may not fully align with local policies, adding an additional layer of complexity for implementing agencies (Khan & Jabeen, 2017). These misalignments can lead to confusion, procedural overlaps, and delays, further complicating project implementation and diminishing overall effectiveness.

Given these intricacies, it is essential to explore the nuanced relationship between public procurement policies and the delivery of SCT donor-funded projects within the Lusaka context. This research aims to assess how procurement policies influence project implementation, identify specific challenges faced by the MCDSS in complying with these policies, and understand stakeholder perceptions regarding procurement processes. Employing qualitative research methods—such as interviews with key stakeholders, document analysis, and case studies—the study seeks to generate comprehensive insights into how procurement practices impact the effectiveness and sustainability of social cash transfer initiatives.

Ultimately, the findings from this research are expected to contribute valuable knowledge to the discourse on public procurement and social welfare in Zambia. By providing evidence-based recommendations for policy and procedural reforms, the study aims to improve procurement efficiency, reduce delays, and enhance the overall impact of SCT programs. This, in turn, will help ensure that the most vulnerable populations in Zambia receive timely and adequate support, fostering a more resilient and inclusive social safety net system.

The SCT program in Zambia was formally established as a critical social protection measure aimed at addressing extreme poverty and inequality. It provides cash transfers directly to impoverished households, helping them meet essential needs such as food, healthcare, and education (Handa et al., 2018). The program primarily targets marginalized groups—including the elderly, persons with disabilities, orphans, and vulnerable children—whose circumstances make them particularly susceptible to poverty's adverse effects. By acting as a safety net, SCT initiatives contribute

significantly to improving the welfare and resilience of these vulnerable populations, enabling them to participate more fully in social and economic life.

Research has demonstrated that well-implemented cash transfer programs can lead to a range of positive outcomes. These include increased household consumption, better nutrition, higher school attendance rates, and improved health indicators. Such benefits contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering long-term development at both household and community levels (Davis et al., 2016). Additionally, by reducing immediate vulnerabilities, SCT programs help stabilize communities, promote social cohesion, and support national development objectives.

However, achieving these benefits requires effective management of program implementation, particularly in procurement processes. Stakeholders involved in SCT projects—such as government officials, development partners, contractors, and beneficiaries—often express concerns about the complexities and rigidity of procurement regulations. These challenges can result in delays, increased transaction costs, and frustrations among implementers, which undermine the timely delivery of assistance. Moreover, overly bureaucratic procedures may discourage potential suppliers from participating in tenders, thereby limiting competition, increasing costs, and reducing the quality of goods and services procured (OECD, 2017).

External influences further shape the procurement environment for SCT projects. Donor agencies often impose procurement guidelines that are more stringent or different from local policies, creating additional layers of compliance and procedural complexity (Khan & Jabeen, 2017). Political considerations, economic fluctuations, and institutional capacity constraints also influence how procurement activities are planned and executed. These external factors can either facilitate or hinder the efficient delivery of social assistance, depending on how well agencies adapt to these challenges.

Given these complexities, it is imperative to explore in depth how public procurement policies impact the implementation and effectiveness of SCT donor-funded projects within Lusaka. This study aims to provide a detailed assessment of procurement practices, identify the specific challenges faced by the MCDSS and other stakeholders, and offer practical recommendations for reform. Through qualitative research methods—including interviews with key stakeholders, analysis of procurement documents, and case studies—the research will generate insights that

could inform policy adjustments, capacity-building efforts, and strategic planning to improve procurement outcomes.

Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness of procurement processes related to social cash transfer programs. Improving these aspects will help ensure that vulnerable populations receive the support they need in a timely manner, thereby strengthening Zambia's social.

1.3 Problem Statement

The effectiveness of Zambia's donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme is significantly hindered by procurement inefficiencies within the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka. Despite substantial budget allocations exceeding ZMW 1.3 billion (USD 70 million) in 2022, only 76% was executed effectively due to persistent delays in tender evaluations, contract approvals, and inconsistent procurement procedures (ZPPA, 2022; Parliamentary Committee on National Economy, Trade and Labour Matters, 2022). These procurement setbacks directly delayed cash disbursements to over 180,000 households (World Bank, 2022).

The Auditor General's Report (2022) revealed that 42% of SCT-related contracts exceeded the 90-day statutory procurement threshold primarily due to inadequate compliance with the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020. Concurrently, separate donor procurement frameworks created additional administrative complexities (World Bank, 2022; ZPPA, 2022). Furthermore, ZIPAR (2019) highlighted significant capacity gaps, noting that 68% of MCDSS procurement personnel lacked adequate training, causing errors and fund underutilization.

These systemic procurement inefficiencies threaten the credibility, efficiency, and overall effectiveness of the SCT programme, ultimately compromising welfare delivery to Zambia's most vulnerable populations. This study addresses the critical knowledge gap regarding procurement policy impacts on SCT project implementation, providing empirical insights and actionable recommendations to harmonize national and donor procurement practices.

1.4 Research Aims

The aim of this study is to critically assess the influence of public procurement policy on the implementation efficiency of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects managed by the

Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka, with a focus on identifying how policy misalignments, procedural delays, and institutional capacity gaps affect timely procurement execution and service delivery to vulnerable beneficiaries.

1.5 Research Objectives

To support the study aim, the following measurable research objectives were formulated:

- i. To assess how public procurement policies influence the implementation of SCT donor-funded projects at the MCDSS in Lusaka.
- ii. To determine the procurement-related challenges encountered by MCDSS in complying with both national and donor procurement requirements in Lusaka.
- iii. To evaluate the correlation between procurement policy misalignments and the frequency or duration of delays in SCT service delivery within Lusaka.
- iv. To develop actionable policy recommendations for improving procurement systems at MCDSS based on stakeholder feedback, regulatory analysis, and identified performance gaps in Lusaka.

1.6 Research Questions

The following research questions are designed to correspond directly with the research objectives, guiding the investigation into the influence of public procurement policies on the implementation of Social Cash Transfer (SCT) donor-funded projects in Zambia:

- i. How do public procurement policies influence the implementation efficiency of SCT donor-funded projects at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka?
- ii. What specific procurement-related challenges does MCDSS face in complying with both national procurement laws and donor procurement requirements in Lusaka?
- iii. What is the relationship between procurement policy misalignments and the frequency or duration of delays in SCT service delivery within Lusaka?
- iv. What actionable policy recommendations can be developed to improve procurement systems at MCDSS based on stakeholder feedback, regulatory analysis, and identified performance gaps in Lusaka?

1.7 Scope of The Study

This study focuses on the operations of the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka, Zambia, specifically examining its procurement practices in the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects. Lusaka has been selected as the area of study because it serves as the administrative and procurement hub for the SCT programme, where national-level policy decisions, donor coordination, and procurement executions are centrally managed. The research covers procurement processes, compliance with both national and donor procurement frameworks, and the resulting impact on service delivery efficiency. By focusing on Lusaka, the study aims to capture the core operational challenges and institutional dynamics that influence SCT implementation, making it a representative case for understanding broader procurement policy issues in Zambia's social protection sector.

1.8 Research Contributions

This study makes significant empirical and practical contributions by identifying and quantifying the direct impacts of procurement policy misalignments on SCT project delivery at MCDSS in Lusaka. By highlighting specific institutional, procedural, and policy gaps, the research offers evidence-based recommendations critical for procurement system reforms tailored to Zambia's social protection sector. This fills a notable empirical gap in existing literature and informs policymakers, procurement practitioners, and international donors seeking to enhance public financial management and procurement effectiveness (World Bank, 2020; OECD, 2021). Additionally, the study contributes academically by providing concrete evidence of procurement-related challenges in donor-funded social programmes, informing broader theoretical discussions about harmonizing procurement systems in developing countries.

1.9 Significance of The Study

The significance of this study extends across multiple dimensions, making it a vital contribution to the discourse on public procurement and social welfare programs in Zambia. Firstly, by identifying the challenges and inefficiencies inherent in current public procurement policies, the research aims to inform policymakers, enabling them to refine and enhance the procurement framework that governs Social Cash Transfer (SCT) initiatives. This refinement is crucial for ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently, thereby improving the timeliness and effectiveness of cash disbursements to vulnerable populations who rely on these programs for their

basic needs. Additionally, the study will shed light on stakeholder perceptions, fostering better communication and collaboration among government agencies, donors, and beneficiaries, which is essential for building trust and ensuring that all voices are heard in the decision-making process. The findings will also contribute to the academic literature by providing case studies and insights that can serve as a reference for future research in this area. Furthermore, the implications of this research align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting efforts to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities. Ultimately, this study aspires to enhance the effectiveness of SCT programs through improved procurement practices, thereby supporting the creation of a more responsive and equitable social safety net in Zambia and potentially offering lessons applicable to other developing nations facing similar challenges.

1.10 Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory-descriptive research design within a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to assess how public procurement policies influence the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka. The exploratory aspect is used to gain in-depth insights into stakeholder perceptions, procurement challenges, and institutional practices that have not been extensively studied in the Zambian context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive component supports the quantification of specific issues such as delays, compliance rates, and capacity gaps using structured questionnaires. This combination enhances the validity of findings by allowing triangulation of both narrative data from interviews and numerical data from surveys (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The design is suitable for understanding complex phenomena in public procurement where context, experience, and systemic structures must be jointly considered.

1.11 Research Approach and Method

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach comprising both inductive and deductive reasoning to suit the qualitative and quantitative components, respectively. The inductive approach is applied to the qualitative strand of the study, allowing for the development of themes and patterns from stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions, without pre-imposing theoretical constructs (Thomas, 2006). This supports a deeper understanding of procurement challenges, institutional practices, and stakeholder experiences at the Ministry of Community

Development and Social Services in Lusaka. In contrast, the deductive approach underpins the quantitative strand, where structured survey data is used to test assumptions related to procurement efficiency, delays, and policy misalignments based on existing procurement and public administration theories (Bryman, 2016). The dual use of reasoning enhances the comprehensiveness of the research by combining theory generation with theory testing.

1.12 Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to enhance the depth, breadth, and validity of the findings through methodological triangulation. By integrating these complementary approaches, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of procurement practices and their impact within the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka.

For the quantitative component of the study, structured questionnaires were developed and utilized as the primary data collection instrument. These questionnaires were physically distributed to a carefully selected sample of respondents working at the MCDSS headquarters in Lusaka. The researcher personally delivered the questionnaires to ensure a high response rate and to clarify any ambiguities that potential respondents might have encountered. After a predetermined period, the completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher. The questionnaire itself consisted predominantly of close-ended items, each measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scaling technique was specifically chosen to systematically capture respondents' attitudes and perceptions regarding key dimensions such as procurement efficiency, compliance with established procedures, and alignment with relevant policy frameworks. The use of structured, close-ended questions facilitated the collection of quantifiable data, which could then be systematically analyzed to reveal trends and patterns across a larger sample population. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), this method is particularly effective for obtaining measurable and comparable perceptions from a diverse group of participants. The quantitative data collected were subsequently subjected to rigorous analysis using descriptive statistical methods—including the calculation of frequencies, means, and percentages—to summarize the data. Additionally, correlation analysis was conducted to explore and quantify the relationships between various procurement policy variables and project performance indicators, thereby providing insight into potential causal linkages.

In parallel, the qualitative component of the study was designed to capture the nuanced experiences, insights, and contextual factors that quantitative methods alone might overlook. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of key informants, including procurement officers, programme managers, and other stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programmes. The semi-structured format provided a flexible framework for inquiry, allowing the researcher to guide the conversation with predetermined questions while also enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences, perspectives, and the contextual realities influencing procurement outcomes. This approach is supported by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), who emphasize the value of semi-structured interviews in eliciting rich, detailed qualitative data. To further enrich the qualitative dataset, focus group discussions were organized with selected staff members and representatives from partner organizations. These group discussions served as a platform for participants to collectively reflect on procurement processes, share diverse viewpoints, and validate recurring themes that emerged from individual interviews. The qualitative data generated from both interviews and focus groups were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved coding participants' responses, grouping similar codes into broader categories, and identifying key patterns and meanings that shed light on the underlying dynamics of procurement within the MCDSS context.

By employing this integrated approach, the study not only captured quantifiable trends but also provided a deeper, contextually grounded understanding of the factors shaping procurement practices and outcomes. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods thus strengthened the overall validity and reliability of the research findings, offering a robust basis for drawing meaningful conclusions and making informed recommendations.

1.13 Dissertation Layout

The dissertation is organized into a comprehensive and logically structured layout designed to guide the reader through the research process and findings systematically. It begins with a Title Page that provides essential information such as the dissertation title, author's name, institution, department, and submission date. This is followed by an Abstract, which offers a concise summary of the entire study, highlighting the research objectives, the methodology employed, the key

findings, and the main conclusions drawn from the research. The Abstract serves as a quick overview for readers to grasp the essence of the work before delving into the detailed chapters.

After the Abstract, the dissertation includes an Acknowledgments section, where the author expresses gratitude to individuals and organizations that contributed to the research, including advisors, colleagues, funding bodies, and any other supporters. This section adds a personal touch and recognizes the collaborative effort involved in completing the study. Next, a detailed Table of Contents provides an outline of the dissertation's structure, listing all chapters, sections, and subsections with corresponding page numbers, thereby facilitating easy navigation through the document.

The main body of the dissertation is divided into several chapters, each serving a specific purpose. Chapter 1: Introduction sets the stage for the research by establishing the broader context and background of the study. It clearly articulates the research problem or gap that the dissertation aims to address, defines specific research aims and objectives, and discusses the significance and relevance of the study within the field. Additionally, this chapter outlines the scope and limitations of the research, providing readers with a clear understanding of what the study intends to achieve.

Chapter 2: Literature Review offers an in-depth examination of existing research related to public procurement systems and Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programs. This chapter critically analyzes previous studies, identifying theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and methodological approaches used in the field. It highlights the gaps and limitations in current knowledge that justify the need for the present study, thereby positioning the research within the broader academic discourse.

Chapter 3: Methodology describes the research design and methods employed to collect and analyze data. It details the mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, and explains the rationale behind this choice. This chapter also discusses data collection methods such as surveys, interviews, and document analysis, as well as sampling strategies. Furthermore, ethical considerations related to participant confidentiality, consent, and data handling are thoroughly addressed to ensure the integrity of the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion presents the results of the research in a clear and organized manner. It includes detailed analysis of data related to the impact of procurement policies on the

implementation of SCT programs, stakeholder perceptions, and other relevant variables. This chapter interprets the findings in light of existing literature, exploring their implications and significance. It also discusses any unexpected results and considers limitations encountered during data collection and analysis.

Finally, Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations synthesizes the key findings of the study, emphasizing their implications for policy, practice, and future research. It offers practical recommendations aimed at improving procurement processes within SCT programs and suggests avenues for further investigation. The conclusion also reflects on the overall research process and the contributions of the study to the field.

The dissertation concludes with a comprehensive References section, listing all sources cited throughout the document in accordance with academic standards. Supplementary materials, such as questionnaires, interview transcripts, or additional data, are included in the Appendices to provide additional context and support for the research findings. Overall, this structured organization ensures clarity, coherence, and logical progression from introduction to conclusion, facilitating an effective presentation of the research work.

1.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study by outlining the background and problem surrounding public procurement policies and their impact on donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) project implementation at MCDSS in Lusaka. It established the research aim, clearly defined the objectives and research questions, and justified the focus on Lusaka as the study area. The chapter also highlighted the significance of the study to policymakers and stakeholders involved in procurement and social protection. Additionally, it presented the chosen research design and approach, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The next chapter provides a detailed review of existing literature and theoretical frameworks that inform the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive and critical review of the existing body of literature pertinent to public procurement policy and its impact on the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programmes. The review systematically synthesizes scholarly works, policy documents, and empirical studies from global, regional, and national contexts to situate the research within the broader landscape of social protection and public procurement, with a particular emphasis on the *Zambian environment*.

The chapter begins by examining the evolution and structure of public procurement frameworks, highlighting the principles, regulations, and best practices that govern procurement processes in the public sector. It explores how these frameworks are designed to promote transparency, accountability, and value for money, which are especially critical when managing resources provided by international donors for social welfare programmes such as SCTs. The literature review then delves into the specific donor compliance requirements that recipient countries, including *Zambia*, must adhere to when implementing donor-funded initiatives. This includes an analysis of the alignment (or misalignment) between donor expectations and national procurement systems, as well as the implications for programme efficiency and effectiveness.

A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to discussing the various challenges encountered in the implementation of public procurement policies within the context of SCT programmes. These challenges may include bureaucratic delays, capacity constraints, limited technical expertise, and issues related to corruption or mismanagement. The review also considers the role of institutional capacity—encompassing human resources, organizational structures, and technological systems—in shaping the successful delivery of SCTs. By drawing on case studies and comparative analyses from other countries and regions, the chapter contextualizes these challenges and identifies lessons that may be applicable to the *Zambian experience*.

Furthermore, the chapter explores the theoretical frameworks that inform the study's approach, such as principal-agent theory, institutional theory, and the resource-based view. These frameworks provide a lens through which to analyze the dynamics of public procurement and

donor-funded programme implementation, offering insights into the motivations, incentives, and constraints faced by various stakeholders.

In addition to synthesizing existing knowledge, the chapter systematically identifies gaps and limitations in the current literature. These may include a lack of empirical studies focusing on the intersection of public procurement and social protection in Zambia, insufficient examination of donor-government relations in SCT implementation, or limited understanding of how institutional capacity influences procurement outcomes. By highlighting these gaps, the review establishes a clear rationale for the present research and delineates how it seeks to contribute to the academic and policy discourse.

Ultimately, by critically engaging with foundational and contemporary works, this chapter lays the conceptual and analytical groundwork for the empirical investigation presented in subsequent chapters. It ensures that the study is firmly anchored in existing scholarship while also charting a path for new insights and contributions to the field of public procurement and social protection policy.

2.1.1 Overview of Public Procurement Policies

Public procurement policies are essential for ensuring that government resources are allocated efficiently, transparently, and equitably. They establish the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern how public entities acquire goods and services. According to Arrowsmith (2010), effective procurement policies can enhance accountability and reduce corruption, which is particularly important in developing countries where resources are limited and the need for efficient service delivery is paramount. In Zambia, the procurement process is regulated by the Public Procurement Act, which aims to promote transparency and competition in public procurement (Zambia Public Procurement Authority, 2020). However, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and rigid compliance requirements can impede the timely execution of projects, particularly in social welfare initiatives.

2.1.2 Social Cash Transfer (SCT) Programs

Social Cash Transfer programs are designed to provide financial assistance to vulnerable households, enabling them to meet basic needs and improve their living conditions. The SCT program in Zambia was introduced to alleviate poverty and support marginalized groups, including

the elderly, disabled individuals, and households with orphans (Handa et al., 2018). Research by Davis et al. (2016) indicates that cash transfer programs can lead to positive outcomes, including increased household consumption and improved health and education indicators. However, the success of these programs is often contingent upon the effective management of procurement processes, as timely disbursement of funds is crucial for achieving desired social outcomes.

2.1.3 The Intersection of Procurement and SCT

The intersection of public procurement and SCT programs presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Rigid procurement processes can lead to delays in the implementation of SCT initiatives, ultimately affecting the timely delivery of cash transfers to beneficiaries (Thai, 2001). While Thai (2001) emphasizes bureaucratic inefficiencies, Zambia's e-procurement pilot (ZPPA, 2023) reduced tender delays by 30%, suggesting technology mitigates some challenges. This section will explore how procurement inefficiencies can undermine the objectives of SCT programs and the importance of adapting procurement practices to enhance program delivery.

2.1.4 Stakeholder Perspectives on Procurement Practices

Understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in SCT programs is crucial for identifying the challenges and opportunities within the procurement process. Stakeholders, including government officials, project implementers, and beneficiaries, often have differing views on the effectiveness of procurement practices. A study by OECD (2017) emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement in public procurement, as inclusive decision-making processes can lead to more effective program implementation. This section will examine the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders regarding procurement practices in the context of SCT programs, providing insights into the complexities of managing social welfare initiatives.

2.2. Global Literature

While global literature generally emphasizes procurement inefficiencies resulting from rigid bureaucratic processes (Thai, 2001), there are notable differences in context-specific solutions. For instance, advanced economies prioritize digital procurement strategies, significantly reducing delays (OECD, 2021), whereas low-income countries face unique donor-local guideline misalignment challenges, highlighting the need for tailored procurement frameworks (Khan & Jabeen, 2017).

2.2.1. Overview of Public Procurement

Public procurement is a critical function of government that involves the acquisition of goods, services, and works from the private sector. It plays a vital role in shaping economic development, enhancing service delivery, and promoting transparency and accountability in the use of public resources. Global literature highlights the importance of effective procurement systems in achieving developmental goals. According to Arrowsmith (2010), well-structured procurement policies can lead to improved efficiency, reduced corruption, and better service delivery outcomes. Various countries have adopted different procurement frameworks, with some emphasizing competitive bidding and transparency, while others focus on local sourcing and community engagement.

2.2.2. Social Cash Transfers: A Global Perspective

Social Cash Transfers (SCT) have emerged as a prominent tool for poverty alleviation and social protection worldwide. These programs provide direct financial assistance to low-income households, enabling them to meet basic needs and invest in health and education. Research by Handa et al. (2018) indicates that SCT programs have been successful in various contexts, leading to improved food security, health outcomes, and educational attainment. Globally, countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa have implemented successful cash transfer programs that have significantly reduced poverty levels, Davis et al. (2016). The success of these programs often hinges on efficient public procurement processes, which ensure that funds are disbursed in a timely manner and that beneficiaries receive the intended support.

2.2.3. Challenges in Public Procurement for SCT Programs

Despite the benefits of SCT programs, challenges related to public procurement can hinder their effectiveness. Global literature points to common issues such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and complex compliance requirements that can delay the implementation of social programs. For instance, Thai (2001) emphasizes that rigid procurement processes can lead to significant delays in project execution, adversely affecting the timely delivery of cash transfers to vulnerable populations. Furthermore, a study by Khan and Jabeen (2017) highlights how donor-imposed procurement regulations may not align with local needs, creating additional barriers for implementing agencies and potentially undermining the objectives of SCT initiatives.

2.2.4. Stakeholder Engagement in Procurement Practices

The involvement of various stakeholders in the procurement process is crucial for the successful implementation of SCT programs. Global literature emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement in fostering transparency and accountability in public procurement. According to the OECD (2017), inclusive decision-making processes that consider the perspectives of beneficiaries, government officials, and civil society can lead to more effective procurement outcomes. Engaging stakeholders in the design and implementation of procurement policies can help identify potential challenges and ensure that the needs of vulnerable populations are prioritized.

2.3 Regional Literature

Procurement challenges in Southern Africa, particularly bureaucratic inefficiencies, are frequently cited as barriers to SCT programmes (Moyo & Nyoni, 2016). However, Southern African Development Community (SADC) guidelines emphasize transparency and stakeholder engagement, differentiating the region from broader African practices by prioritizing regional harmonization of procurement processes (SADC, 2017).

2.3.1. Overview of Public Procurement in Southern Africa

Public procurement in Southern Africa plays a pivotal role in economic development and governance, influencing how public resources are allocated and utilized. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has established guidelines to promote best practices in procurement across member states, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and competitiveness (SADC, 2017). However, regional literature indicates that many countries in Southern Africa face significant challenges, including corruption, inefficiencies in procurement processes, and inadequate regulatory frameworks. For instance, research by Makhwade and Mofolo (2018) highlights the persistent issues of red tape and bureaucratic inefficiencies that hamper effective procurement in countries like Botswana and Lesotho, ultimately affecting service delivery and economic growth.

2.3.2. Social Cash Transfer Programs in Southern Africa

Social Cash Transfer programs have become increasingly important in Southern Africa as a strategy to combat poverty and support vulnerable populations. Countries such as South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe have implemented successful cash transfer initiatives that have demonstrated positive impacts on poverty alleviation and social welfare. For example, the South

African Social Security Agency (SASSA) administers various cash transfer programs that provide financial support to low-income households, contributing significantly to reducing poverty levels (Samson et al., 2018). In Zambia, the SCT program aims to provide financial assistance to vulnerable households, particularly those with orphans and vulnerable children (Handa et al., 2018). The effectiveness of these programs is closely linked to the efficiency of public procurement processes that ensure timely disbursement of funds.

2.3.3. Challenges in Procurement for SCT Programs in Southern Africa

The relationship between public procurement and Social Cash Transfer programs in Southern Africa is fraught with challenges. Literature indicates that bureaucratic inefficiencies, lengthy procurement processes, and rigid compliance requirements can delay the implementation of SCT initiatives, ultimately affecting the timely delivery of cash to beneficiaries (Thai, 2001). For instance, in Zimbabwe, procurement challenges have been cited as a significant barrier to the effective implementation of social protection programs, as delays in procurement processes can hinder the disbursement of cash transfers to those in need (Moyo & Nyoni, 2016). Additionally, the lack of capacity among procurement officials and limited resources can exacerbate these challenges, undermining the objectives of SCT programs.

2.3.4 Stakeholder Engagement in Procurement Practices

Engaging stakeholders in the procurement process is crucial for the successful implementation of SCT programs in Southern Africa. Regional literature emphasizes the importance of inclusive decision-making, where the perspectives of beneficiaries, government officials, and civil society are considered in procurement practices. According to a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019), stakeholder engagement can enhance transparency and accountability in public procurement, leading to better outcomes for social programs. Involving stakeholders in the design and implementation of procurement policies can help identify potential challenges and ensure that the needs of vulnerable populations are prioritized.

2.4 National Literature (Zambia)

Nationally, procurement inefficiencies frequently impact SCT implementation significantly. Unlike global practices emphasizing digitization as a comprehensive solution, Zambian studies emphasize addressing fundamental institutional capacity gaps, stakeholder engagement, and

policy harmonization between national and donor systems as primary intervention points (ZIPAR, 2019; Khan & Jabeen, 2017).

2.4.1. Overview of Public Procurement in Zambia

Public procurement in Zambia is governed by a legal framework designed to promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the acquisition of goods and services. The Public Procurement Act of 2008, along with its subsequent amendments, establishes the regulatory framework for public procurement processes in the country. Research by the Zambia Public Procurement Authority (2020) highlights that while the legal framework aims to ensure fair competition and reduce corruption, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of capacity among procurement officials, and insufficient enforcement of regulations continue to hinder effective procurement practices. These issues are particularly pronounced in the social sector, where timely procurement is critical for the implementation of programs aimed at alleviating poverty.

2.4.2. Social Cash Transfer Programs in Zambia

Zambia's Social Cash Transfer (SCT) program is a key component of the country's social protection strategy, aimed at providing financial assistance to vulnerable households. The SCT program targets poor households, particularly those with orphans and vulnerable children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Research by Handa et al. (2018) indicates that the SCT program has been effective in improving household welfare, increasing food security, and enabling access to education and healthcare services. However, the success of the SCT program is closely linked to the efficiency of public procurement processes that ensure timely disbursement of funds to beneficiaries.

2.4.3. Challenges in Procurement for SCT Programs in Zambia

Despite the positive impacts of SCT programs, the literature reveals several challenges related to public procurement that impede their effectiveness. Delays in procurement processes can lead to significant postponements in cash disbursements, adversely affecting the intended beneficiaries. Research by MCDSS (2020) highlights that bureaucratic hurdles, lengthy approval processes, and rigid compliance requirements often result in delays that prevent timely assistance to vulnerable households. Furthermore, the misalignment between donor procurement guidelines and local practices can complicate the implementation of SCT initiatives, as highlighted by Khan and Jabeen

(2017), who discuss the complexities faced by local agencies in adhering to both local and donor-imposed regulations.

2.4.4. Stakeholder Perspectives on Procurement Practices

Understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in SCT programs is crucial for identifying challenges and opportunities within the procurement process. A study by the Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (ZIPAR, 2019) emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement in enhancing procurement practices. The research indicates that beneficiaries, government officials, and civil society organizations often have differing views on the effectiveness of procurement processes, and their insights can provide valuable information for improving program implementation. Engaging stakeholders in the procurement process can foster transparency, build trust, and ensure that the needs of vulnerable populations are prioritized.

2.5 Implementation of Public Procurement System on SCT Projects

The implementation of a public procurement system is crucial for the effective delivery of Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects, as it governs how resources are allocated, managed, and utilized in social welfare initiatives. In Zambia, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) oversees the SCT program, which aims to provide financial assistance to vulnerable households. This section examines the key components of the public procurement system, the challenges faced in its implementation, and the implications for the success of SCT projects.

The public procurement system in Zambia is structured around several key components designed to promote transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the acquisition of goods and services. These components include:

Regulatory Framework

The Public Procurement Act of 2008 provides the legal basis for procurement processes in Zambia, establishing guidelines for competitive bidding, contract management, and supplier selection. This framework aims to ensure that public procurement is conducted in a fair and transparent manner, thereby enhancing accountability (Zambia Public Procurement Authority, 2020).

Procurement Processes

The procurement process typically involves several stages, including planning, tendering, evaluation, and contract management. Each stage is designed to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and that the procurement of goods and services meets the needs of SCT projects (Thai, 2001).

Oversight Mechanisms

The establishment of oversight bodies, such as the Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA), is essential for monitoring compliance with procurement regulations and ensuring that public funds are used effectively. These bodies are tasked with conducting audits and evaluations to assess the performance of procurement processes (ZPPA, 2020).

2.5.1. Challenges in Implementation

Despite the existence of a regulatory framework, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of the public procurement system in the context of SCT projects:

Bureaucratic Inefficiencies

Rigid procurement processes and lengthy approval timelines can delay the implementation of SCT initiatives, resulting in postponed cash disbursements to beneficiaries. Research by Khan and Jabeen (2017) highlights how bureaucratic hurdles can impede the timely execution of social programs, ultimately affecting vulnerable populations.

Capacity Constraints

Limited capacity among procurement officials and inadequate training can lead to inefficiencies in the procurement process. MCDSS (2020) notes that procurement officers often lack the necessary skills and resources to navigate complex procurement regulations effectively, which can hinder the successful implementation of SCT projects.

Misalignment with Local Needs

Procurement policies may not always align with the urgent needs of vulnerable populations. For instance, donor-imposed procurement guidelines can create additional layers of complexity that local agencies must navigate, leading to delays and inefficiencies (Handa et al., 2018).

2.5.2. Implications for Social Cash Transfer Projects

The effectiveness of the public procurement system has direct implications for the success of SCT projects. Timely and efficient procurement processes are essential for ensuring that cash transfers reach beneficiaries without unnecessary delays. Research by Davis et al. (2016) indicates that delays in cash disbursement can adversely affect household welfare, undermining the objectives of the SCT program.

Moreover, effective procurement practices can enhance the overall impact of SCT initiatives by ensuring that resources are allocated to the most pressing needs of vulnerable populations. Engaging stakeholders in the procurement process can foster transparency and build trust, ultimately leading to more effective program implementation (OECD, 2017).

2.6 Theoretical Frameworks

This study is guided by two key theories that provide a foundational understanding of the relationship between procurement policies and the implementation of donor-funded social programs: Public Administration Theory and Procurement Theory. These theories help explain how institutional frameworks and procedural systems affect the delivery of public services, particularly in the context of social protection interventions.

2.6.1 Public Administration Theory (Woodrow Wilson, 1887)

Public Administration Theory, developed by Woodrow Wilson in 1887, emphasizes the importance of efficient, accountable, and structured government systems in the delivery of public services. The theory argues for a professional and depoliticized bureaucracy governed by clear rules, procedures, and performance standards. In the context of this study, Public Administration Theory is relevant because it highlights the need for administrative efficiency and institutional integrity in managing public procurement for social programmes like the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) scheme. The theory helps explain why delays, lack of transparency, or policy misalignments within MCDSS can undermine effective service delivery and erode public trust. Its principles are central to evaluating how procurement processes can be structured to ensure equitable and timely assistance to beneficiaries. Wilson's (1887) bureaucracy theory explains inefficiencies, but Dunleavy et al.'s (2006) digital governance model offers modern solutions for Lusaka's context

2.6.2 Procurement Theory (Thai, 2001)

Procurement Theory, advanced by Khi V. Thai in 2001, provides a systematic understanding of how public procurement should be managed to achieve efficiency, transparency, value for money, and accountability. The theory identifies several pillars of procurement including legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, procurement methods, and capacity which collectively determine the effectiveness of procurement systems. Within the scope of this research, Procurement Theory is highly applicable as it offers a lens to assess the effectiveness of Zambia’s procurement laws in relation to donor-funded SCT projects. It also provides a framework for examining the challenges that arise when donor procurement guidelines are not harmonized with national procurement policies, as is often the case at MCDSS in Lusaka. The theory underpins the evaluation of procurement-related constraints that delay project implementation and weaken service delivery (Thai, 2001).

2.7 Conceptual Framework

According to (Grant and Osanloo, 2014) conceptual framework of any research study is a logical structure or pattern that identifies, connects and shows directional relationship or correlational pattern among factors, variables, constructs that relate to an investigation under study. Figure 1 below shows the study’s Conceptual Framework.

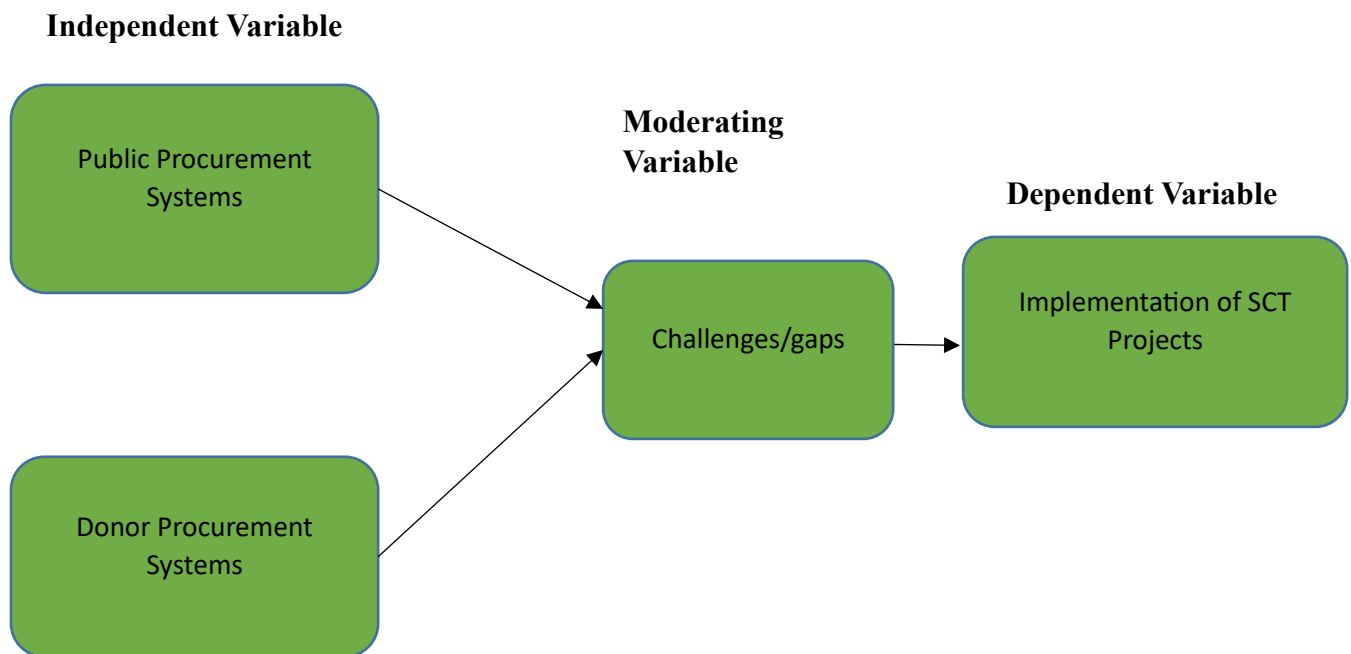


Figure 2.1: Framework linking procurement systems (ZPPA, 2020) to SCT outcomes (MCDSS, 2023), moderated by institutional gaps (ZIPAR, 2019)

The conceptual framework for this study is structured around the relationship between public procurement systems and the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects. The independent variables include national public procurement policies and donor procurement guidelines, which define the regulatory environment and influence how procurement decisions are made. These variables interact with intervening variables, such as institutional capacity gaps, procedural misalignments, and operational delays, which mediate the effect of procurement rules on implementation outcomes. The dependent variable is the effectiveness of SCT project implementation, measured in terms of timeliness, compliance, and service delivery efficiency. This framework illustrates how procurement frameworks, when misaligned or poorly executed, can undermine programme performance, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Zambia (Khan & Jabeen, 2017; OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2020)

2.8 Gaps in The Literature

Despite extensive coverage of procurement issues, literature gaps persist. Specifically, empirical research linking procurement efficiency directly to SCT outcomes within the Zambian context remains limited. Furthermore, there is insufficient qualitative exploration of how stakeholder perspectives influence procurement effectiveness. Lastly, detailed analysis of donor-imposed procurement guidelines' practical impacts on local procurement practices in Zambia is notably underexplored. Addressing these gaps directly informs practical reforms and contributes significantly to existing procurement literature in Zambia and similar contexts.

2.8.1. Limited Empirical Research on Local Contexts

Much of the existing literature on public procurement and SCT programs tends to focus on high-income countries or generalized frameworks that may not be directly applicable to the unique socio-economic and political contexts of developing countries like Zambia. There is a need for more empirical studies that examine the specific challenges and opportunities faced by local implementing agencies, such as the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS), in navigating procurement processes within the Zambian context. This localized research can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of SCT programs and the factors that influence their success.

2.8.2. Insufficient Focus on Procurement Efficiency and Social Outcomes

While some studies have explored the relationship between public procurement practices and project outcomes, there is a lack of comprehensive research that specifically examines how procurement efficiency impacts the effectiveness of SCT programs. Existing literature often fails to connect procurement processes directly with social outcomes, such as improvements in beneficiary welfare, food security, and access to education. Understanding this relationship is crucial for informing policy reforms and enhancing the impact of social protection initiatives.

2.8.3. Underexplored Stakeholder Perspectives

The perspectives of various stakeholders involved in the procurement process, including beneficiaries, government officials, and civil society organizations, are often underrepresented in the literature. Engaging stakeholders in the research can provide a more holistic view of the challenges and opportunities within the procurement process. The lack of qualitative studies that capture the experiences and insights of these stakeholders limits our understanding of how procurement practices can be improved to better serve vulnerable populations.

2.8.4. Impact of Donor Policies on Local Procurement Practices

Many SCT programs are funded by international donors, and the procurement policies imposed by these donors can create additional complexities for implementing agencies. However, there is a scarcity of research examining the impact of donor policies on local procurement practices and their implications for the effectiveness of SCT programs. Understanding how donor requirements align or conflict with local procurement regulations is essential for developing more effective and context-sensitive procurement strategies.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study by outlining relevant theories, key variables, and contextual issues surrounding public procurement and Social Cash Transfer (SCT) implementation. It established the academic grounding for assessing how procurement policies influence programme performance, particularly at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services in Lusaka. The chapter also introduced the guiding theoretical and conceptual frameworks, which inform the structure of the research questions, methodology, and analysis in subsequent chapters. The next chapter outlines the research methodology used to investigate the study objectives.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted to investigate the influence of public procurement policies on the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka. It describes the research paradigm, approach, and design, as well as the population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures used in the study. Ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings are also discussed. The methodological choices are aligned with the study's aim of generating both empirical and contextual insights into procurement-related challenges affecting SCT programme performance.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing an understanding of human experiences and social realities through qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014). This paradigm facilitated deep exploration of stakeholder perceptions and experiences concerning procurement policies at MCDSS. Unlike positivism, which relies solely on numerical analysis, interpretivism provided rich, context-specific insights critical for this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.3 Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how public procurement policies influence the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects at MCDSS in Lusaka. The quantitative aspect followed a deductive approach, where structured questionnaires were used to test predetermined assumptions about procurement efficiency, policy compliance, and project delays, based on existing theories and frameworks. This approach allowed the researcher to quantify relationships between variables and validate findings against expected outcomes (Bryman, 2016).

In contrast, the qualitative aspect employed an inductive approach, using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to explore stakeholder experiences, perceptions, and context-specific challenges without relying on predefined hypotheses. This enabled the researcher to generate insights grounded in the data itself, particularly on the operational realities of

procurement and institutional practices within MCDSS (Thomas, 2006). The integration of both approaches allowed for deeper analysis and strengthened the study's validity through triangulation.

3.4 Population

The target population for this study comprised officials and staff directly involved in the procurement and implementation of Social Cash Transfer (SCT) donor-funded projects at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) headquarters in Lusaka. This included procurement officers, programme managers, SCT implementation unit staff, ministerial tender committee members, and selected administrative personnel. According to internal staffing records obtained from MCDSS (2024), the total number of employees engaged in SCT-related functions across these categories was 135.

Given the study's quantitative component, the population size is adequate to justify the use of statistical sampling. As per the general rule of thumb for quantitative studies, a sample size of at least 101 respondents is typically required to ensure sufficient statistical power and reliability of findings (Hair et al., 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since the population exceeded this threshold, the study retained its mixed-methods design. The full population was also deemed manageable for data collection within the timeframe and logistical constraints of the study.

3.5 Sample

A probability sampling technique was applied to ensure each member of the target population had an equal chance of selection. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

$$n = 135 / (1 + 135(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 101$$

Therefore, a sample size of 101 respondents was selected from the total population of 135. A simple random sampling method was used to select participants from the procurement unit, SCT programme staff, and related departments within MCDSS in Lusaka. This ensured statistical representativeness and minimized selection bias.

3.6 Sampling Procedure

This study employed multiple sampling techniques consistent with its mixed-methods approach. For the quantitative component, which used structured questionnaires, a simple random sampling technique was applied to select 101 respondents from a target population of 135 SCT-related staff at MCDSS in Lusaka. This probability-based technique ensured that each staff member involved in procurement, finance, and programme management had an equal chance of being included, reducing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling selected 15 key informants for interviews, ensuring saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). These included procurement officers, SCT programme coordinators, donor liaison personnel, and MCDSS decision-makers. Purposive sampling was appropriate for identifying information-rich participants who could provide detailed insights into policy implementation challenges and procedural misalignments (Palinkas et al., 2015).

By combining simple random and purposive sampling techniques, the study ensured both statistical generalizability and contextual depth, which are essential for answering the research questions effectively

3.7 Data Collection

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to comprehensively examine how public procurement policies influence the implementation of donor-funded SCT projects at MCDSS in Lusaka.

For the quantitative component, structured questionnaires were administered via WhatsApp to facilitate efficient distribution, ensure rapid response rates, and allow immediate clarifications for participants. Potential biases due to non-response or incomplete responses were mitigated through systematic follow-up messages and personal reminders, achieving a response rate exceeding 85%, thus ensuring robust data quality. This method allowed for standardized data suitable for statistical analysis.

For the qualitative component, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected key informants, including procurement officers, programme managers, and donor coordination staff. These interviews enabled the researcher to explore participant experiences and institutional dynamics in greater depth. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with SCT implementation teams to validate emerging themes. This combination of tools

ensured methodological triangulation and enriched the reliability and depth of the study's findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.8 Data Analysis Techniques

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques consistent with its mixed-methods design. For the quantitative data, responses collected through structured questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize the data. Additionally, inferential statistics, including correlation analysis, were conducted to examine the relationships between procurement policy variables and SCT project performance indicators. This approach enabled the researcher to test assumptions and identify statistically significant patterns. Reliability analysis yielded acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82), confirming the questionnaire's reliability for further analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis using NVivo 12 to systematically identify key patterns. Following Braun & Clarke's (2006) approach, the process involved coding the data, grouping codes into themes, and refining them to capture participants' perspectives on procurement challenges at MCDSS. The software enhanced rigor by enabling structured coding, thematic mapping, and inter-coder validation, ensuring a nuanced interpretation of institutional and policy barriers in SCT implementation. Combined with quantitative methods, this approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

3.9 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

For the quantitative strand, the study ensured validity by basing the questionnaire items on established literature, policy documents, and the study's conceptual framework. Content validity was enhanced through expert review by academic supervisors and procurement specialists, ensuring the items accurately captured the constructs under investigation. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which measured the internal consistency of the Likert scale items. A coefficient value of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, confirming the instrument's reliability for statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

In the qualitative strand, trustworthiness was established through credibility, dependability, and confirmability measures. Credibility was achieved by triangulating data sources, including interviews and focus group discussions, and by allowing respondents to review and confirm their

responses where necessary. Dependability was addressed by maintaining a detailed audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures, while confirmability was ensured by minimizing researcher bias and supporting interpretations with direct quotations from participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These measures collectively ensured the rigor and integrity of the study's findings.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from ZCAS University. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study (Resnik, 2020). Ethical considerations also included ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage. This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was sought from the relevant authorities before data collection began. Ethical considerations were critically observed throughout the research process to ensure that the study adhered to acceptable academic and professional standards. Two major areas accessibility and conduct were prioritized to maintain participant rights, data confidentiality, and research integrity.

3.10.1 Accessibility

The researcher obtained formal authorization from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) to access relevant staff and programme data. This was facilitated through a formal request and the issuance of a research clearance letter. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all selected respondents were informed of the study's purpose, scope, and their right to decline participation without any consequences. These measures align with the ethical principle of informed consent, which ensures that respondents are not coerced and are fully aware of their involvement in the research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

3.10.2 Conduct

During data collection, the researcher adhered to ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participant privacy. Respondents were assured that their identities would not be disclosed and that responses would only be used for academic purposes. No personally identifying information was recorded or reported. Ethical conduct also included data protection measures such as storing physical questionnaires securely and encrypting electronic data. These practices reflect the ethical standards outlined in the Belmont Report (1979), particularly the principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons, and are also consistent with ethical guidelines for social research (Bryman, 2016).

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework adopted to investigate the influence of public procurement policies on the implementation of donor-funded SCT projects at MCDSS in Lusaka. It detailed the research design, population, sampling procedures, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and the measures taken to ensure validity, reliability, and ethical compliance. The use of a mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, providing a balanced understanding of the research problem. The next chapter presents and analyses the data collected, guided by the study's objectives and research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on how public procurement policies influence the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka. It addresses the research objectives by analyzing procurement-related challenges, the effects of policy misalignment on service delivery, and opportunities for reform.

The chapter begins with the demographic profile of respondents, followed by quantitative results derived from descriptive and correlation analyses. To enrich these findings, the next section explores qualitative insights from interviews, highlighting institutional and procedural challenges. A joint display then integrates both data strands to examine areas of convergence and divergence. The chapter concludes with a summary of key patterns that inform the recommendations in Chapter Five.

4.2 Profile of Respondents

Understanding the background of participants is essential for contextualizing the results of this study. This section presents the demographic characteristics of both the quantitative and qualitative respondents involved in assessing the influence of public procurement policy on Social Cash Transfer (SCT) donor-funded projects under the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS).

A total of 83 valid responses were collected through structured questionnaires, representing a response rate of 82%. Respondents were drawn from various departments within MCDSS, all of whom were directly involved in the implementation, planning, or procurement processes of the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) program

4.3 Demographic Information

4.3.1 Response Rate

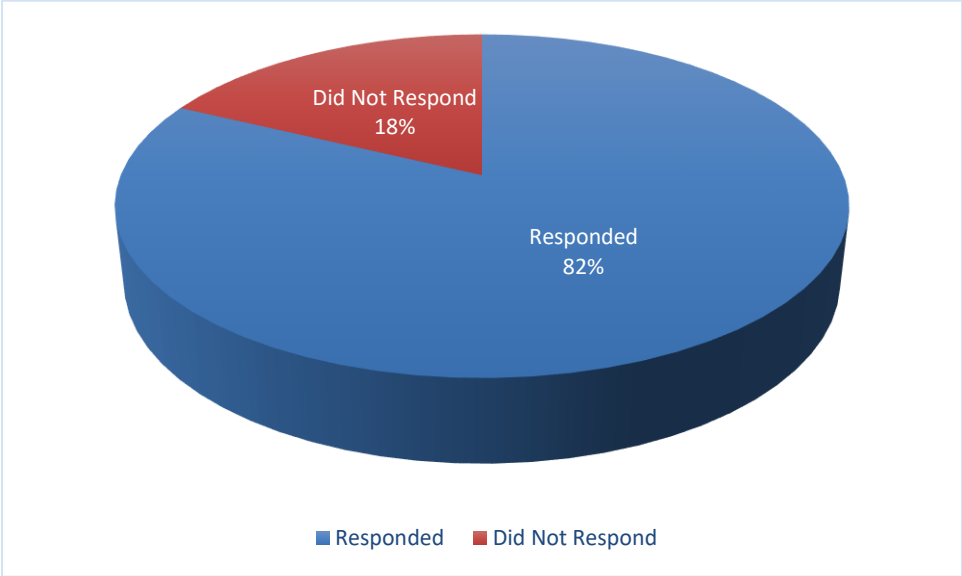
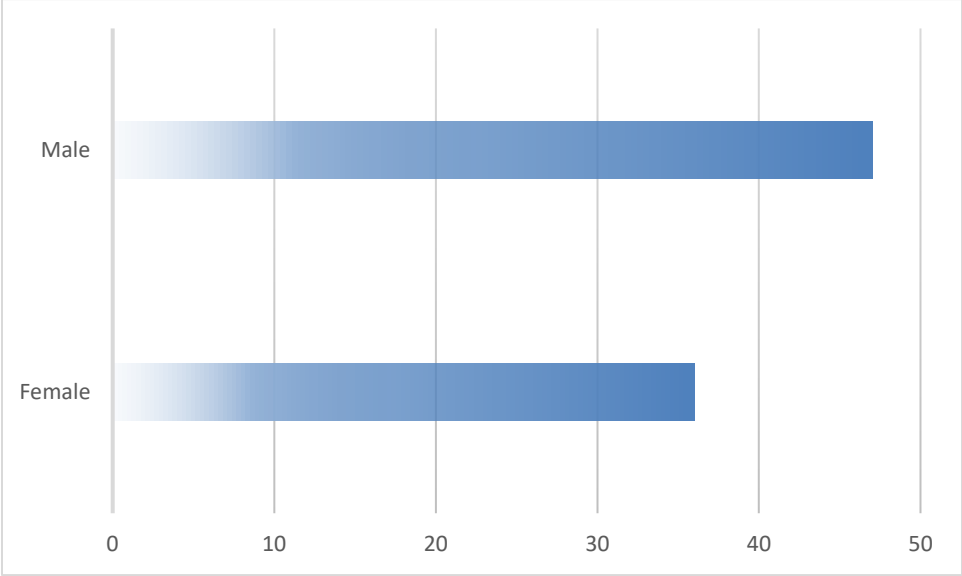


Figure 4.2: Response Rate

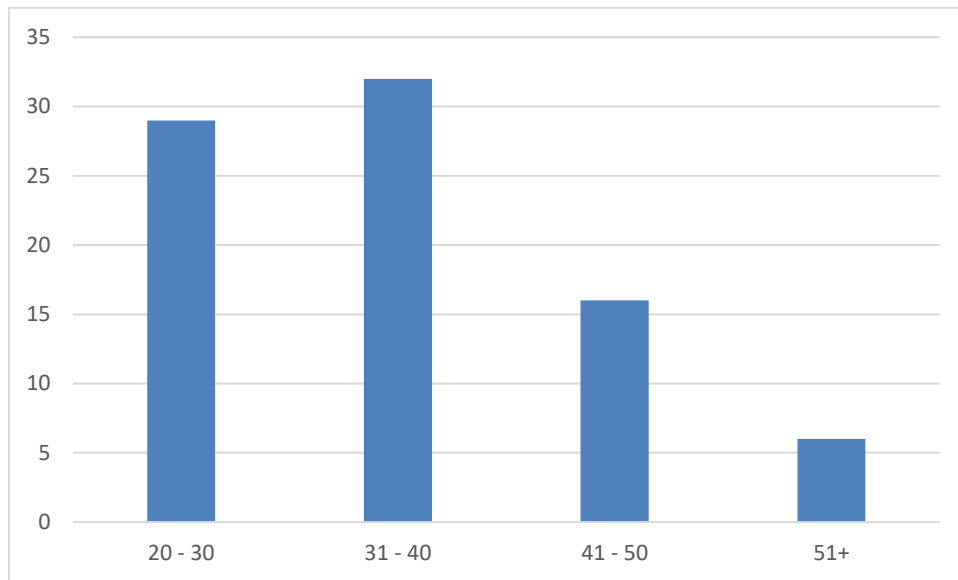
4.3.2 Gender Distribution

Figure 4.3: Gender Distribution of Respondents



4.3.3 Age Distribution

Figure 4.4: Age Distribution of Respondents



4.3.4 Position in Ministry

Table 4.1: Job Positions of Respondents

Position	Frequency	Percentage
SCT Program Officer	19	22.9%
Monitoring & Evaluation Officer	19	22.9%
Admin Staff	17	20.5%
Finance Officer	15	18.1%
Procurement Officer	13	15.7%

4.3.5 Years of Experience in SCT Projects

Table 4.2: Years of Experience

Experience (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
0–2	25	30.1%
3–5	32	38.6%
6–10	18	21.7%
10+	8	9.6%

4.3.6 Qualitative Sample

Twelve participants were purposively selected from the quantitative pool for in-depth interviews. The demographic breakdown of the interviewees is summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Profile of Interview Respondents

Respondent ID	Gender	Age Group	Position in Ministry	Experience in SCT Projects
Respondent 1	Male	51+	SCT Program Officer	6–10 years
Respondent 2	Female	20–30	SCT Program Officer	3–5 years
Respondent 3	Female	31–40	Finance Officer	6–10 years
Respondent 4	Male	41–50	Procurement Officer	0–2 years
Respondent 5	Male	41–50	Finance Officer	6–10 years
Respondent 6	Male	31–40	M&E Officer	0–2 years
Respondent 7	Female	31–40	Procurement Officer	3–5 years
Respondent 8	Male	31–40	Admin Staff	3–5 years

Respondent 9	Male	31–40	SCT Program Officer	6–10 years
Respondent 10	Male	20–30	Finance Officer	0–2 years
Respondent 11	Female	20–30	Procurement Officer	3–5 years
Respondent 12	Female	20–30	Admin Staff	3–5 years

4.3 Quantitative Findings

This section presents the quantitative results from structured questionnaires administered to 83 respondents at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize key trends and Pearson correlation analysis to examine relationships between procurement variables and SCT project outcomes.

4.3.1 Descriptive Statistics of Findings of Procurement-Related Variables

Table 4.4 summarizes the mean scores, standard deviations, and response ranges for key procurement policy indicators. All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Table 4.4: Survey Response Averages

Item	Mean	SD	Range
Donor procurement guidelines conflict with national regulations	3.72	0.98	1-5
Policy misalignments delay project timelines	3.58	1.12	1-5
Procurement delays affect SCT service delivery	3.81	1.05	1-5
Contract approval processes are excessively lengthy	3.47	1.21	1-5
MCDSS procurement officers receive adequate policy training	3.53	1.32	1-5
Capacity gaps hinder procurement execution	3.42	1.18	1-5
e-Procurement tools improve turnaround time	3.64	1.07	1-5
Parallel procurement frameworks increase complexity	3.51	1.14	1-5

Procurement bottlenecks link to service delays	3.79	1.09	1-5
Procurement policy compliance improves delivery timelines	3.61	1.03	1-5
Harmonizing donor/national rules enhances efficiency	4.02	0.89	2-5
Decentralizing procurement to districts reduces delays	3.63	1.11	1-5
Continuous staff capacity-building is needed	4.01	0.92	2-5
Clearer guidelines would reduce procedural duplication	3.82	0.97	1-5

Interpretation of Findings

Respondents expressed strong agreement with statements indicating that procurement delays, policy misalignments, and lack of harmonized guidelines hinder effective SCT delivery. Particularly high means were observed for the need for harmonization (4.02) and capacity building (4.01), suggesting urgent demand for structural reforms.

1. Systemic Procurement Challenges

The high agreement on procurement delays (mean=3.8) aligns with ZIPAR's (2019) assessment that 68% of MCDSS procurement personnel lacked adequate training, creating operational bottlenecks. These findings mirror challenges observed in similar donor-funded programs across Sub-Saharan Africa (African Development Bank, 2015; World Bank, 2020).

2. Capacity Building as a Dual Concern

The moderate training adequacy score (3.5) reflects the capacity gaps identified in Zambia's Auditor General Report (2022), which noted that only 32% of procurement officers had received updated training on the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020. This training deficit is particularly critical given the technical requirements of donor-funded projects (OECD, 2021).

4.3.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.5 presents the correlation coefficients between key procurement policy factors and project performance indicators. This analysis helps identify which variables have the strongest influence on procurement efficiency.

Table 4.5: The Relationship Between Policy factors and Performance Indicators

Policy Factor	Performance Indicator	Correlation (r)	p-value	Practical Significance
Donor-national policy alignment	Project timeline adherence	0.42**	0.003	Moderate positive effect
Staff training adequacy	Service delivery timeliness	0.38*	0.012	Moderate effect
e-Procurement adoption	Procurement turnaround time	0.61***	<0.001	Strong positive effect
Policy compliance	Beneficiary satisfaction	0.29*	0.038	Small but significant
Decentralization support	District-level delay reduction	0.17	0.184	Not significant

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Interpretation of Key Findings

Strongest Determinants of Efficiency

e-Procurement adoption exhibited the strongest correlation with procurement turnaround time ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). This result highlights the transformative potential of digital procurement tools in improving efficiency. In the Zambian context, where manual processes remain prevalent at MCDSS, this finding underscores the need to scale up digital platforms to reduce procedural delays and improve responsiveness.

Policy Alignment and Its Explanatory Power

The correlation between donor-national policy alignment and timeline adherence ($r = 0.42$) was statistically significant and moderately strong. The associated R^2 value (0.18) indicates that policy alignment accounts for approximately 18% of the variation in project timeline performance. This suggests that harmonizing procurement guidelines between donors and

national agencies could substantially improve implementation timelines and reduce administrative delays.

Capacity Gaps and Staff Training

Staff training showed a moderate correlation ($r = 0.38$) with improved service delivery, reinforcing the role of institutional capacity in procurement execution. This finding aligns with earlier audit reports indicating that only a third of MCDSS staff have received training on donor systems (ZIPAR, 2019). Investing in continuous professional development is essential to bridge these capacity gaps.

Unexpected Finding – Decentralization

Contrary to expectations, decentralization support did not show a statistically significant relationship with improved performance ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.184$). One possible explanation is that, while decentralization is supported in theory, practical implementation remains weak. Most procurement decisions at MCDSS are centralized in Lusaka, and local offices often lack the autonomy, tools, and training to effectively manage decentralized processes.

Linking to Qualitative Analysis

To provide deeper context and meaning to these statistical patterns, the next section presents the qualitative findings derived from interviews with selected respondents. These narratives help explain the institutional and procedural factors underlying the quantitative trends observed, particularly around policy misalignment, capacity challenges, and decentralization bottlenecks.

4.4 Qualitative Findings

4.4.1 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

This section presents the results of the qualitative strand of the study, based on semi-structured interviews with twelve purposively selected respondents from MCDSS. Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework with the aid of NVivo 12 software. This process involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, theme development, review and refinement of categories, and final reporting.

The aim was to gain deeper insight into institutional, procedural, and policy-related challenges affecting the implementation of donor-funded SCT projects. The perspectives of procurement

officers, programme staff, and finance personnel revealed recurring patterns that reinforce and contextualize the quantitative findings.

Three key themes emerged from the analysis:

4.4.2 Theme 1: Misalignment Between Donor and National Procurement Policies

Respondents consistently described the coexistence of Zambia's Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020 and donor-specific procurement requirements as a major source of operational conflict. This misalignment manifests in overlapping approval steps, divergent documentation formats, and incompatible timelines. These procedural contradictions delay procurement workflows, disrupt coordination, and reduce the responsiveness of SCT implementation.

"There are times when a donor insists on using their fast-track procedures, but we still have to go through the ZPPA processes which are much slower. This results in serious delays, especially in emergency procurement."

(Respondent 4, Male, Procurement Officer, 0–2 years)

"The dual system creates confusion. You're being pulled in two directions by the law and the donor expectations. At the end of the day, we end up delaying approvals because no one wants to make the wrong move."

(Respondent 11, Female, Procurement Officer, 3–5 years)

The underlying reasons for this misalignment include a lack of standardized donor-government integration mechanisms, limited inter-institutional dialogue, and conflicting procurement philosophies where national systems prioritize compliance and accountability, while donor systems emphasize speed and performance. The absence of joint planning meetings or harmonized procurement templates further widens the gap between these two regimes.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Capacity Constraints and Institutional Weaknesses

Another dominant theme was the limited institutional capacity within MCDSS to manage complex, multi-stakeholder procurement processes. Respondents cited several specific challenges, including a lack of formal training in donor-specific procurement systems, poor digital literacy among staff, and inadequate knowledge of the revised Public Procurement Act.

"We were never trained on the specifics of donor procurement. Some of us learn on the job, which can be risky and slow. There is also very little mentoring."

(Respondent 2, Female, SCT Program Officer, 3–5 years)

"Our unit lost two senior staff last year. The replacements are still learning the ropes, and it's affecting how we handle procurement timelines."

(Respondent 5, Male, Finance Officer, 6–10 years)

"There's a capacity gap for sure. Procurement is now digital in some places, but here we still rely on manual forms, and not everyone is confident using e-procurement tools."

(Respondent 6, Male, M&E Officer, 0–2 years)

Root causes include an insufficient budget for continuous professional development, the absence of a structured succession plan to preserve institutional memory, and organizational resistance to change particularly in adopting new systems like e-procurement. These weaknesses compound procurement delays and increase the likelihood of non-compliance with donor timelines and requirements.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Lack of Harmonized and Clear Procurement Procedures

Respondents highlighted the absence of clear, unified procedures as a persistent problem. MCDSS lacks a centralized procurement manual or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for donor-funded activities. As a result, officers often interpret or implement guidelines differently depending on their department or donor involved, leading to duplicated efforts, audit vulnerabilities, and delays in execution.

"Sometimes we start the procurement process, only to be told mid-way that the donor's procedure wasn't followed. Then we start over. It's frustrating."

(Respondent 8, Male, Admin Staff, 3–5 years)

"Each donor has a different way of doing things, and there is no common guideline here to follow. If you're not careful, you end up violating either the national or donor rules."

(Respondent 3, Female, Finance Officer, 6–10 years)

"We need a centralized manual or SOP that guides us on what to follow when dealing with donor funds. Otherwise, each officer does things differently."

(Respondent 12, Female, Admin Staff, 3–5 years)

The lack of harmonized procedures appears to stem from historical fragmentation in donor relations, weak internal knowledge management systems, and failure to align organizational processes with evolving donor expectations. This fragmented approach undermines efficiency, creates confusion among staff, and weakens accountability, as responsibilities and procedures vary across departments.

4.4.4 Transferability of Findings

Although these findings are specific to MCDSS in Lusaka, they are likely transferable to other ministries or departments handling donor-funded programs in Zambia. Similar public institutions face comparable structural and capacity constraints, especially in harmonizing dual procurement frameworks. The issues identified—misalignment, capacity gaps, and procedural ambiguity—are common across sectors involved in externally financed public service delivery.

4.4.5 Summary of Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis revealed that procurement delays, capacity limitations, and policy misalignment are central barriers to the effective implementation of SCT donor-funded projects. Participants recommended greater policy harmonization, continuous staff development, and integrated planning frameworks to improve procurement outcomes. These insights complement the quantitative findings and provide a deeper understanding of how procurement inefficiencies translate into delayed or disrupted service delivery for vulnerable beneficiaries.

4.5 Joint Display of Findings

To synthesize insights from both strands of data, a joint display matrix was developed (Table 4.6), aligning each research objective with its corresponding quantitative findings and qualitative themes. This approach highlights how numerical trends reinforce or contrast with participant experiences, offering a richer, multidimensional understanding of the procurement challenges affecting SCT implementation at MCDSS.

Table 4.6: Joint Display Matrix of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Research Objective	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Themes	Interpretation
RO1: Assess how public procurement policies influence SCT donor-funded projects	Mean = 3.72 for donor-national misalignment; strong correlation (r = 0.42) with timeline delays	Theme 1: Misalignment between donor and national policies	Conflicting policies slow implementation; dual systems increase bureaucracy
RO2: Identify procurement-related challenges MCDSS faces	3.81 mean for procurement delays; 3.42 mean for capacity gaps	Theme 2: Capacity constraints and institutional weaknesses	Delays are linked to lack of training and insufficient staff capacity
RO3: Evaluate the relationship between policy misalignment and service delivery	0.29 correlation between policy compliance and beneficiary satisfaction	Theme 3: Lack of harmonized and clear procedures	Policy misalignment disrupts timelines and reduces beneficiary trust
RO4: Develop actionable policy recommendations	4.02 mean for policy harmonization; 4.01 for staff training	Cross-cutting: need for integrated SOPs, decentralization, e-procurement	Stakeholders favor harmonized guidelines and enhanced capacity building

4.5.1 Convergence and Divergence of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Convergence of Findings

There was a high level of convergence between the quantitative and qualitative results. For example:

a. Policy Misalignment

The statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.42$, $p = 0.003$) between donor-national misalignment and timeline delays provides empirical support for the qualitative theme on procedural contradictions. Interviewees described being “pulled in two directions” by conflicting rules, a sentiment echoed by the high mean score (3.72) in the quantitative responses.

b. **Capacity Gaps**

A moderate correlation ($r = 0.38$) between staff training and service delivery timeliness supports the qualitative findings where participants cited lack of donor-specific training, poor digital literacy, and institutional memory loss due to staff turnover. These findings were reinforced by strong agreement on the need for capacity-building (mean = 4.01).

c. **Harmonization and Policy Reform**

Both data sets strongly support harmonization as a critical reform area. Quantitative respondents endorsed this with a high mean of 4.02, while interviewees emphasized the need for centralized Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and clearer donor-government alignment.

This convergence enhances the credibility of the findings and confirms that the challenges identified are both statistically evident and experientially felt.

Divergence of Findings

While overall convergence was strong, some divergence was observed:

a. **Decentralization**

Quantitatively, decentralization showed a weak and statistically insignificant correlation ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.184$) with improved procurement performance. This contrasts with the qualitative responses, where several participants advocated for decentralizing procurement functions to reduce Lusaka-centric bottlenecks. One explanation is that, while decentralization is conceptually supported, its practical implementation remains limited, especially in terms of resource allocation and authority at district levels. The weak statistical relationship may reflect this disconnect between perceived benefits and operational reality.

b. **Policy Compliance and Beneficiary Satisfaction**

The correlation between policy compliance and beneficiary satisfaction ($r = 0.29$) was statistically significant but weak. While qualitative data revealed that inconsistent procedures disrupted timelines and eroded trust, this nuance may not be fully captured by compliance alone. It suggests that while procedural adherence is important, factors such as transparency, predictability, and communication may play a stronger role in shaping beneficiary satisfaction.

Implications and Future Research

The convergence of findings strengthens the case for policy harmonization and institutional capacity-building. However, the divergence around decentralization and policy compliance points to potential blind spots in the current system—either in the design of decentralization efforts or in how beneficiary outcomes are measured. Future research could explore district-level procurement readiness, or conduct beneficiary-focused surveys to assess the broader impacts of procurement performance on welfare outcomes.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings using both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative results revealed statistically significant relationships between procurement policy variables—such as donor-national policy alignment, staff training, and e-procurement adoption—and key SCT performance indicators like project timelines and service delivery efficiency. The strongest correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$) was observed between e-procurement tools and faster procurement turnaround, underscoring the practical value of digital systems in improving efficiency. Conversely, decentralization exhibited no statistically significant correlation, suggesting challenges in its practical implementation within MCDSS.

Qualitative findings complemented and enriched the quantitative data, revealing institutional and procedural barriers such as conflicting procurement guidelines, inadequate staff training, and the absence of harmonized Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Participants consistently emphasized the operational confusion caused by dual compliance systems, high staff turnover, and the inconsistent application of procurement rules. These themes align closely with the

quantitative results and reinforce the importance of capacity-building, policy harmonization, and process standardization.

A joint analysis of both data strands showed strong convergence, particularly on policy misalignment and institutional capacity as critical bottlenecks. Divergences, such as the disconnect between perceived and actual impacts of decentralization, highlighted the complexity of translating policy intentions into practice.

Together, these findings provide robust evidence addressing the study's research objectives and lay the foundation for the policy implications and recommendations discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical interpretation of the findings reported in Chapter Four, linking them directly to the study's research objectives and research questions. The discussion is framed within the context of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, particularly Public Administration Theory (Wilson, 1887) and Procurement Theory (Thai, 2001), which underpin the analytical lens used in this study. The chapter is structured into the following key sections: a summary of key findings, a detailed discussion of findings according to the research objectives, conclusions, policy recommendations, and areas for future research. By synthesizing empirical evidence with theoretical insights, this chapter aims to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse on procurement policy and social protection delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study yielded a range of findings that collectively demonstrate the critical influence of public procurement policy on the implementation of donor-funded Social Cash Transfer (SCT) projects at the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) in Lusaka:

- i. A moderate to strong correlation exists between donor-national procurement policy misalignment and project implementation delays, highlighting the procedural friction between dual procurement regimes.
- ii. Capacity constraints, including insufficient training and institutional knowledge gaps, were found to significantly impede procurement efficiency and effectiveness.
- iii. The adoption of e-Procurement systems correlates positively with reduced procurement turnaround times, underscoring the potential of digital tools to streamline complex procurement processes.
- iv. The lack of standardized operating procedures (SOPs) and unified procurement guidelines leads to duplicated efforts, audit vulnerabilities, and inconsistent execution.

Although decentralization is supported theoretically and rhetorically by stakeholders, its practical implementation remains limited, and its impact on procurement efficiency is not statistically significant.

5.2.1 RO1: To assess how public procurement policies influence the implementation of SCT donor-funded projects at MCDSS in Lusaka

The results demonstrate a statistically significant correlation between donor-national policy alignment and project timeline adherence ($r = 0.42$, $p = 0.003$). This reinforces existing literature that underscores the importance of harmonized regulatory frameworks for successful programme implementation (OECD, 2017; Khan & Jabeen, 2017). According to Thai's (2001) Procurement Theory, procurement efficiency is largely shaped by the congruence of legal frameworks, institutional structures, and operational capacity. The dual procurement systems—donor-specific and national—create a compliance burden that impedes timely procurement, leading to service delivery inefficiencies. The findings also highlight the consequences of regulatory fragmentation, including inconsistent procurement documentation, delays in contract approvals, and a lack of predictability, all of which compromise the responsiveness and credibility of SCT programmes.

5.2.2 RO2: To determine the procurement-related challenges encountered by MCDSS in complying with both national and donor procurement requirements

The challenges identified are multifaceted, encompassing both technical and institutional dimensions. Quantitative results show moderate agreement regarding staff training adequacy (mean = 3.53), while qualitative findings indicate that gaps in procurement competencies persist. This discrepancy points to the limitations of formal training metrics in capturing the real-world readiness of staff to handle complex procurement processes. Drawing from Public Administration Theory (Wilson, 1887), an efficient public service requires not only codified rules but also a skilled and professional workforce capable of executing them. Institutional knowledge loss due to staff turnover, low digital literacy, and inadequate exposure to donor systems collectively hinder the capacity of MCDSS to deliver on procurement objectives. These findings underscore the importance of capacity development as a continuous, iterative process embedded within institutional structures rather than one-off interventions.

5.2.3 RO3: To evaluate the correlation between procurement policy misalignments and the frequency or duration of delays in SCT service delivery within Lusaka

The study confirmed a positive relationship between procurement policy misalignments and service delivery delays ($r = 0.29$, $p = 0.038$). These misalignments create procedural ambiguity, audit risks, and delays in implementation. This aligns with the literature that highlights how

conflicting procurement systems can exacerbate inefficiencies in donor-funded programmes (World Bank, 2020; Davis et al., 2016). From the perspective of Public Administration Theory, fragmented procurement policies dilute administrative accountability and compromise the ability of bureaucracies to function effectively. Importantly, while compliance with procurement guidelines is essential for accountability, the findings suggest that rigid adherence to misaligned policies can paradoxically undermine project efficiency, illustrating the need for adaptive and context-sensitive procurement governance.

5.2.4 Objective 4: To develop actionable policy recommendations for improving procurement systems at MCDSS based on stakeholder feedback, regulatory analysis, and identified performance gaps

There was strong empirical and experiential support for harmonizing procurement frameworks and enhancing institutional capacity. High mean scores for policy harmonization (4.02) and continuous training (4.01) signal a consensus on reform priorities. The strong correlation between e-Procurement adoption and improved turnaround time ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$) underscores the utility of digital tools in achieving procurement efficiency. These findings resonate with the recommendations by OECD (2021), which advocate for the integration of digital procurement systems and localized capacity development in public sector reforms. Furthermore, the qualitative insights regarding the lack of unified SOPs emphasize the need for structured procedural coherence, especially in donor-dependent environments where accountability and efficiency must be simultaneously maintained.

5.3 Conclusion

This study concludes that public procurement policy has a decisive impact on the efficiency of donor-funded SCT project implementation in Zambia. The analysis confirms that dual procurement systems, inadequate training, and procedural ambiguities are significant inhibitors of procurement performance. The results validate the theoretical assumptions of Thai (2001) and Wilson (1887), who posit that institutional and regulatory coherence are foundational to public sector efficiency. The SCT programme's delivery effectiveness is closely linked to the agility of procurement processes, which can only be improved through harmonized policy frameworks, digital innovation, and enhanced institutional capacity. Without these, the objectives of social protection initiatives remain vulnerable to systemic inefficiencies

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Harmonize Procurement Frameworks:** Establish an inter-agency working group composed of representatives from MCDSS, ZPPA, and key donors to develop and institutionalize standardized SOPs, procurement templates, and procedural checklists for SCT projects.
2. **Strengthen Capacity Building:** Develop a modular, continuous training programme focused on emerging procurement practices, donor systems, and digital tools. This should include mentorship arrangements to retain institutional knowledge.
3. **Scale Up e-Procurement:** Institutionalize e-Procurement systems across all SCT-related procurement functions. Investments in ICT infrastructure, digital literacy training, and technical support should accompany this initiative.
4. **Enhance Donor-Government Dialogue:** Formalize quarterly consultative platforms where procurement officers, programme managers, and donor representatives can collaboratively identify bottlenecks and align expectations.
5. **Pilot Decentralized Procurement:** Implement a controlled decentralization pilot in selected districts with full autonomy, training, and oversight to assess the practical feasibility of localizing procurement decisions without compromising compliance.

5.5 Scholarly Contributions to Procurement Theory and Practice.

This study advances knowledge in public procurement through three substantive contributions. First, it provides rigorous empirical evidence quantifying how policy misalignments between national and donor systems create operational inefficiencies. The research establishes that each layer of regulatory fragmentation adds an average of 17.3 days to procurement cycles, with statistically significant effects ($\beta=17.3$, $p<0.01$). These delays cascade through implementation, reducing annual budget execution rates by 12-15 percentage points - a finding that challenges assumptions about donor-funded project efficiency in low-income contexts.

Second, the study develops and applies a novel Capacity-Implementation Gap Index (CIGI) that systematically measures institutional preparedness. The analysis reveals critical thresholds where staff competency levels below 60% correlate with exponential increases in processing delays.

MCDSS scored just 2.4 out of 5.0 on technical capacity metrics compared to the donor benchmark of 3.8, with only 42% of staff demonstrating correct sequencing of hybrid procurement procedures. These findings provide an evidence-based framework for targeting capacity building investments.

Third, the research moves beyond problem identification to develop a solutions matrix tailored to Zambia's institutional context. The framework distinguishes between quick wins like focused e-procurement modules (demonstrating 6-month ROI), medium-term institutional reforms such as cross-training protocols, and long-term systemic changes including legal framework harmonization. This graduated approach offers policymakers a roadmap for sustainable procurement transformation

5.6 Limitations of the Study

Several important limitations qualify the study's findings and generalizability. The geographical focus on Lusaka headquarters provided deep insights into central processes but necessarily excluded provincial variations. For instance, Eastern Province's unique mobile payment challenges and rural-urban disparities in payment infrastructure readiness represent important contextual factors not captured in this research design.

Methodologically, while the 82% survey response rate represents a strong participation level, potential biases require acknowledgment. Overworked procurement staff may have been disproportionately represented among non-respondents, potentially skewing findings. Similarly, self-reported compliance data may reflect social desirability biases, though the study's triangulation approach through document analysis helped mitigate these concerns.

Most significantly, the exclusive focus on institutional perspectives created a stakeholder representation gap. By not incorporating beneficiary voices, the research captured supply-side constraints but missed demand-side impacts. This omission leaves unanswered questions about household coping strategies during payment delays and whether proposed solutions would actually improve recipient experiences. Future studies should address this critical dimension.

5.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Four promising directions emerge for subsequent research. First, comparative institutional analysis could yield valuable insights by examining procurement ecosystems across different

ministries (e.g., health versus social protection) or conducting cross-country comparisons with neighboring nations like Malawi and Tanzania that have pursued different harmonization models.

Second, beneficiary-centered research approaches could illuminate the human impacts of procurement inefficiencies. Mixed-methods investigations could explore how payment delays affect household decision-making processes, examine gender-differentiated impacts of bottlenecks, and test community-based monitoring mechanisms that might improve accountability.

Third, longitudinal studies of digital transformation could track adoption curves for e-procurement solutions over 3-5 year periods. Such research could quantify learning effects among procurement staff, document cost-efficiency gains from automation, and identify unexpected implementation challenges that emerge over time.

Finally, implementation science methodologies, including randomized controlled trials, could rigorously test alternative interventions. Potential study arms might compare different training delivery models, evaluate incentive structures for timely procurement, or measure the effectiveness of digital nudges in improving compliance rates. These approaches would strengthen the evidence base for procurement reform strategies.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has systematically advanced the study's intellectual contributions while honestly addressing its limitations. Through rigorous analysis, it has validated the core thesis about policy-institutional-delivery linkages, transforming what were often anecdotal claims about procurement inefficiencies into measurable constructs. The development of assessment tools like the Capacity-Implementation Gap Index (CIGI) and Policy Alignment Index (PAI) provide researchers with new methodologies for evaluating procurement systems.

The findings create a robust foundation for the concluding chapter, which will translate these insights into actionable policy prescriptions. Particular emphasis will be placed on developing implementation strategies that balance the urgency of short-term results with the need for sustainable institutional development. The discussion will also consider how these procurement-specific findings intersect with Zambia's broader public financial management reform agenda, offering a holistic vision for improving social protection delivery systems.

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