Towards Rio+20: Procuring the green economy

In just over 100 days, delegates will gather in Brazil for the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

From June 20-22 delegates will seek to assess progress and renew commitment to the sustainable development goals agreed at the previous UNSD conferences in Rio (1992) and Johannesburg (2002). Developing a global green economy is one of the themes, and sustainable public procurement (SPP) may play a key role.

The final declaration adopted by civil society organisations from across the world in Bonn, Germany last year in the run up to the conference includes a specific target on SPP. By 2020, the declaration calls for the majority of the world’s goods and services to be procured by governments from sources certified by objective third parties as sustainably produced.

The recent report of the UN’s High Level Panel on Sustainability calls for a shift towards cost-effective SPP over the next 10 years, with annual public reports on progress. However the zero draft of the resolution to be adopted at the conference, published in January, does not contain any specific targets for public procurement. The Brazilian government has suggested the possibility of a separate global pact on sustainable consumption and production, including SPP measures.

Meanwhile, the Green Economy Coalition, a grouping of NGOs, research institutes, UN organisations and trade unions has called for all public procurement contracts to include specifications for labour and environmental sustainability standards.

Ireland’s new strategy on GPP

Aidan Kinch, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Ireland just adopted its first National Action Plan for GPP, Green Tenders. Eight priority sectors were identified, and the target adopted for 50 percent of all contracts (by number and value) awarded in these sectors to comply with core EU GPP criteria.

How were the priority sectors identified, and appropriate green criteria determined?

GPP is a constantly evolving process and more and more product groups will be targeted over time. For our first National Action Plan, eight were selected as being best placed to deliver from several points of view, their share of the overall public procurement spend; their suitability for stricter green criteria; the scale of the environmental benefits that can accrue; and their importance in enhancing the profile of GPP.

One of the topics addressed in Green Tenders is life-cycle costing (LCC). Do you see potential for cost savings in implementing GPP in Ireland?

Very much so. The Irish public sector procurement budget was over €14 billion last year. If this annual spend is leveraged to support environmental and wider sustainability objectives, it will make a real difference. Many public bodies already save money by taking the “greener” option. Some GPP options like recycled paper, cost less up front than conventional alternatives. Many GPP options result in financial, as well as environmental savings.

What challenges do you foresee in terms of implementation and monitoring?

Our approach will be to establish an Implementation Group to oversee all aspects, comprising relevant Government Departments and agencies and other stakeholders. It will report annually.

To view the interview in full, click here.
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GPP examples

French town procures more sustainable cleaning supplies

The town of Venelles near Aix-en-Provence has made a strong commitment to reducing its environmental footprint. As part of this commitment, the Mayor and Council of Venelles have supported the implementation of a comprehensive GPP policy since 2007, covering most municipal procurement projects.

A recent tender for cleaning products offered the opportunity to put this policy into action. By including criteria for the environmental performance of the products used in its schools, Venelles was able to achieve a healthier setting for students and staff while also reducing the impact associated with the production and packaging of products.

A majority of the products purchased are eco-labelled and fully biodegradable. 96 percent of all the products supplied come in refillable packs and with environmentally friendly packaging. Training has also been provided to cleaning personnel on how to use reduced amounts of the products and water.

Download the GPP example here.

Bulgarian Agency greens its project management

The Bulgarian Agency for Social Assistance has been piloting a more sustainable approach to managing projects. In 2011, it awarded a number of contracts which applied GPP criteria for the supply of printed material, paper and office supplies, as well as logistics in organising and conducting seminars.

With good results emerging from the pilot, the ASA is making a broader commitment to implement GPP in its activities. It is also acting as an ambassador for other agencies and departments wishing to apply similar practices. The result is helping to achieve the targets set out in Bulgaria’s National Action Plan for 2012-2014.

Download the GPP example here.

Zoom in on…Support for bio-based economy

The EU has launched a new strategy to support products made from renewable raw materials, known as bio-based products.

The Bioeconomy Strategy and its Action Plan aim to help reconcile food security with the sustainable use of renewable resources for industrial purposes, while ensuring environmental protection.

GPP is identified as one of the key policy approaches to realise this goal, and the Action Plan calls for the development of labels, a European product list and training for public procurers.

More information...

Zoom in on…Procurement and Innovation

Two recent events put the spotlight on the role of public procurement in supporting innovation.

On 9 February a High Level Meeting on Public Procurement of Innovation was held in Brussels, Belgium, presenting directions for future EU support.

From 9-10 February Copenhagen, Denmark hosted the Public Procurement Days: Modernisation, Innovation and Growth. The reform of the EU procurement rules and the role of eco-innovation were amongst the topics addressed by the speakers.

To read more GPP examples, visit the GPP website. Previous News Alerts are available here.