EFFECT OF GREEN PROCUREMENT PRACTICES ON COMPETITIVENESS OF MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN KENYA: A CASE OF UNILEVER KENYA LIMITED

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Abstract

An increasing number of companies are recognizing environmental consciousness as mandatory business imperative. Firms are incorporating green procurement into their daily operations across industries; however, not all firms pursue green procurement initiatives and as such they may not know the impact it has on their organization. The general objective of this study was to determine the effect of green procurement practices on competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Kenya: a case of Unilever Kenya Limited. The study specifically sought to determine the effect of supplier selection, product contents, procurement process and ethical practices on competitiveness of Unilever Kenya Limited. The study adopted descriptive research design. The target population was 60 managers in Unilever Kenya Limited who includes the senior management, middle level managers and lower level managers. Since the population was small, a census study was adopted whereby the entire population of 60 managers formed the sample size for the study. The study collected primary data using a questionnaire. A pilot test was conducted to test for validity and reliability of the data collection tool. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were adopted for analysis. Descriptive statistics included frequency distribution tables, mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics entailed regression analysis. Data was presented using tables, charts and graphs. The study found out that selection of suppliers, procurement of products with less harmful contents, green procurement processes

and green logistics influenced competitiveness of the company to a great extent. The study found out that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between firm competitiveness and green products; green procurement processes; green logistics. The study concludes that Unilever Kenya had embraced green procurement practices among them selection of suppliers are "green" or have adopted green procurement. The company ensured that it adhered to environmental standards and quality control measures to ensure that the products procured are of quality. The study also concludes that Unilever Company had adopted green procurement processes such as the 3Rs and paperless procurement. The green logistics also provided flexible and efficient physical distribution systems to the company; and enhanced reliable and on-time distribution of goods to the market with less environmental damage. The study recommends that organizations should put more effort to develop suppliers into more strategic partners in the supply chain. The managers need to realize that green procurement alone cannot help in improving supplier performance. Instead, focal firms are crucial for improving downstream capabilities of suppliers.

Key Words: Competitiveness, green procurement, green supply chain management, green manufacturing, green distribution, green logistics

Introduction

Today's business environment is characterized by increasing uncertainties and environmental management has become a topic of mutual concern for businesses, governments and consumers due to increasing high levels of industrialization (Roberts, 2009). The growing concern in the global market for "green" issues and the scarcity of natural resources have forced executives to view supply chain strategies from an environmental perspective. Green supply chain management (GSCM) is an emerging field motivated by the need for environmental consciousness (Srivastava, 2007).

Green Procurement has emerged as an important new innovation that helps organizations develop "win-win" strategies that achieve profit and market share objectives by lowering their environmental risks and impacts, while raising their ecological efficiency (Van Hock, 2000). The increased interest on green procurement has been ignited by environmental issues under legislation and directives from customer especially in the US, the European Union (EU), and Japan become an important concern for manufacturers (Ninlawan, Seksan, Tossapol, & Pilada,

2010). Customer demands and governmental pressures continue to push businesses to be more and more sustainable. Consequently, governmental legislations and public mandates for environmental accountability have brought up these issues on the drawing board of many strategic planners, bringing several green concepts into place (Srivastava, 2007). Following the green or ecological pressures from customers, stakeholders, and governments, a number of operational guidelines, standards and legislative frameworks have been put in place to minimize environmental impact. Motivated by the need for companies to move towards ecologically sustainable business practices, the ISO14000 series standard was designed with the objective of encouraging an internationally common approach to environmental management; strengthening companies' abilities to measure and improve environmental performance, through continual system audits, and; improving international trade and removing trade barriers (Mutingi, 2013).

Green procurement has emerged as an important new approach for enterprises to achieve profit and market share objectives by reducing environmental risk and impact (Li, 2011; Hu & Hsu, 2010). In supply chains with multiple vendors, manufacturers, distributors and retailers, whether regionally or globally dispersed, performance measurement is challenging because it is difficult to attribute performance results to one particular entity within the chain. Performance measurement in supply chains is difficult for additional reasons, especially when looking at numerous tiers within a supply chain, and green supply chain management performance measurement is virtually non-existent. With these barriers and difficulties in mind, green procurement is needed for a number of reasons (including regulatory, marketing and competitiveness reasons). Overcoming these barriers is not a trivial issue, but the long-term sustainability (environmental and otherwise) and competitiveness of organizations may rely on successful adoption of GSCM (Sharfman, Shaft & Anex, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Manufacturing firms in Kenya are facing major challenges (KAM, 2013). Kenya's manufacturing sector which contributes about 11% to the Gross Domestic Product has been stagnant in recent years. Low overall productivity and large productivity differences in firms across subsectors point to lack of competition (World Bank report, 2015). However, the report forecast a growth rate of 6% in 2015, and predicted that the positive trend will continue with the growth rate rising to 6.6% in 2016 and 7% in 2017. Chege, Ngui and Kimuyu (2014) also

revealed that inefficiency in the manufacturing sector and lack of competitiveness has led to reviews of the industrial strategies and the structure of incentives; for instance through tax incentives and reduced unnecessary regulations in order to spur competition. These incentives have not done much to improve competition in the sector. However, according to Chen et al. (2004), green supply chain practices can result in establishing deeply-embedded capabilities that are tacit, relationship-specific, and not easily replicated by competition; hence promoting the competitiveness of a firm.

Unilever limited is one of the leading manufacturers of consumer goods in Kenya and it enjoys a good market share; according to Euromonitor (2010) Unilever Kenya Ltd continued to lead the market with a 10 per cent value share. It also contributes largely to the national GDP; in 2012, the company registered a production turnover of 10.8 billion which was 1.6 percent of the production turnover of the manufacturing sector (KAM, 2013); it also remits an average of Ksh 1.5 billion annually through direct and indirect taxes and rates to the government (Ecomomic Survey, 2013). However, its activities just like many other manufacturing firms in Kenya have been associated with the increased use of plastic bags often used to package the manufactured goods hence posing environmental challenges (UNEP, 2005; KAM, 2013). Moreover, Unilever has encountered other environmental challenges such as hazardous waste, that is, waste disposal of the products by the consumers; need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. A report by Unilever (2010) revealed its overall emissions per consumer rose by 5% by 2010 which made it difficult for the company to convince consumers to use their products hence undermining their competitiveness in the market. It is against these challenges that Unilever launched the Sustainable Living Plan in 2010, in a bid to rapidly increasing business benefits from reductions in environmental impacts as they transform their manufacturing processes and redesign our products and packaging (Unilever Report, 2014). As guided by the Sustainable Living Plan (2010), the company has continually adopted green procurement practices which include product re-usability, supplier involvement and ethical practices as well as participating and promoting CSR activities on environmental care. The company has been developing green strategies with the objective of improving environmental, economic, and social performance. There is need to establish whether the company's adoption of green supplier initiatives has improved its competitiveness in the market. It is against this background therefore that the study sought to

determine the effect of green procurement practices on competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Kenya, with a specific focus on Unilever Kenya Limited.

Objective of the Study

The general objective was to determine the effect of green procurement practices on competitiveness of manufacturing firms in Kenya.

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

i. To establish the effect of green supplier selection on competitiveness of Unilever Kenya Limited.
ii. To determine the effect of green products on competitiveness of Unilever Kenya Limited.
iii. To examine the effect of green procurement process on competitiveness of Unilever Kenya Limited.
iv. To explore the effect of green logistics on competitiveness of Unilever Kenya Limited.

Review of Related Literature

Baskaran, Nachiappan and Rahman (2012) conducted study on Indian textile suppliers' sustainability evaluation using the grey approach. The paper evaluated suppliers' within the Indian textile and clothing industry (both garment manufacturers and ancillary suppliers) using sustainability criteria and examining a sample of sixty-three suppliers. The study found out that while initially firms mainly focused on conventional criteria such as price, quality and delivery time; recently firms are moving towards the integration of environmental factors into supplier selection decisions. It was concluded that supplier evaluation is a management decision-making process that addresses how organizations select strategic suppliers to enhance their competitive advantage. The above findings are supported by Lee *et al.* (2009) who conducted a study on green supplier selection model for high-tech industry and found out that with environmental awareness; increasingly more and more firms are carrying out supplier selection in the light of environmental aspect. Though firms need to consider both environmental and conventional factors in order to select the most appropriate supplier for partnership, they found out that some firms generally considered environmental aspects only, such as pollution production, resource consumption, eco-design (environmental-conscious design), green image, and environmental management systems.

Rao and Kondo (2010) did a study to explore the link between green purchasing initiatives and business performance. The study targeted 92 organizations in the Philippines. The study found out that, in product content restriction the organization needs to specify that the products purchased should not contain environmentally hazardous attributes. The organization requires the suppliers to provide a complete listing of the environment and safety attributes of the product contents of the items it buys from the suppliers. There was a statistically significant relationship between product content restrictions; that is, specifying products must not contain environmentally undesirable attributes and requiring suppliers to provide information about their environmental aspects. Greening/ monitoring suppliers' products content would ultimately lead to green process and thereafter to environmental performance and business performance

A study by Lacroix, Laios and Moschuris (2010) examined the challenges and opportunities of greening the procurement process. The study sought to present the challenges and opportunities faced by many organizations worldwide in trying to embark in the purchasing of products and services that are less harmful to local and global environments. The study also presented how green procurement can be used as a means towards improving their products and operations from the environmental perspective to reduce risk, total cost of ownership and improve supply chain performance. Examples of green initiatives from Greece are presented together with references to success stories from the private sector. The study found out that integrating environmental, health and safety aspects of products/services into the procurement process (and weighting them accordingly), alongside the traditional criteria of cost, quality, safety and technical performance continues to be the major challenge with both public and private sector organizations. However, companies that are keen in identify and procuring materials, substances and chemicals in their products that pose significant environmental, has the potential to reduce the frequency/severity of accidents, reduce liability and material handling and disposal; hence direct cost savings and increased environmental benefits.

Lacroix (2011) reviewed the effort that many organizations worldwide are making to purchase products and services that are less harmful to local and global environments. The findings suggested some typical green procurement program elements that organizations adopt, they include: recycled content products, energy efficient products and energy efficient standby power devices, alternative fuel vehicles, alternative fuels, and fuel efficient vehicles, bio-based

products, non-ozone depleting substances, alternative fuels and fuel efficient vehicles and environmental protection priority chemicals.

Ninlawan *et al.*, (2010) conducted a study on green implementation on electronics industries where he proposed activities of green supply chain management. These activities compromises all the process in green supply chain starting from green procurement to green manufacturing to green distribution till recycle and waste management of the product.

Sari and Yanginlar (2015) investigated the relationship between green logistics practices and firm performance in healthcare organizations in Turkey. The study categorized green logistics practices into three groups as: reverse logistics, green distribution and marketing, green purchasing and manufacturing practices. Firm performance was measured with three indicators- operational, economic, and environmental performances. The study established that green logistics practices positively supported firm performance in all three performance indicators for hospitals in Turkey.

Abareshia and Mollaa (2013) investigated the role of absorptive capacity in implementing green logistics practices and the impact of the implementation on green logistics performance (GLP). Data were collected from a survey of 279 Australian Logistics and Transport operators and analysed using structural equation modelling. The findings indicated that enhancing green logistics knowledge exploitation is important to improve GLP. This can be achieved through changing the logistics operations and incorporating new knowledge into green practices in a way that can reduce CO_2 emission, fuel consumption, or the cost of environmental compliance. The findings also show that addressing environmental concerns requires a process in which environmental information, through a wide range of channels and practices, is acquired, assimilated, transformed, and exploited.

Mudgal *et al.*, (2009) conducted a study on greening the supply chain practices in an Indian perspective. They identified the various variables which help in greening the supply chain of Indian manufacturing sector. They focused on societal concern for protection of natural environment, regulations, supplier involvement, customer satisfaction, EMS, employee involvement/empowerment, green product development, green procurement practices, availability of clean technology, green disposal, green transportation, 3R- reduce/ remanufacture/

recycle, lean manufacturing practices, economic interests, eco labelling of products, reverse logistics practices, competitiveness and corporate image. The authors suggested that a properly design environmental standard can trigger innovation that lower the total cost of a product or improve its value.

Research Methodology

The population of the study was 60 managers in Unilever Kenya Limited who includes the senior management, middle level managers and lower level managers.Since the population is small, a census study was adopted whereby the entire population of procurement staff was considered for the study. According to Cooper and Schindler (2007) a census is feasible when the population is small and necessary when the elements are quite different from each other. When the population is small and variable, any sample drawn may not be representative of the population from which it is drawn. Therefore, a census study was deemed appropriate for study since the sampling frame is small; thus all the 60 managers formed the sample size for the study.

The study collected primary data. The data was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire had both closed and open-ended questions. The closed ended questions enabled the researcher to collect quantitative data while open-ended questions enabled the researcher to collect qualitative data. Pilot test was conducted to check for validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability was calculated through Cronbach's alpha test while validity of the was established by the supervisor who reviewed the items in the questionnaire.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were adopted for the study. Descriptive statistics included frequency distribution tables and measures of central tendency (the mean), measures of variability (standard deviation) and measures of relative frequencies while inferential statistics included a multivariate linear regression analysis. The analysis was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The results were presented using tables, charts and graphs.

Results and Discussion

The study results show that the respondents agreed that Unilever selected suppliers who have met the required quality standards on green procurement practices to reduce costs; this is shown by a mean score of 4.46. The respondents also agreed that the company chose suppliers with technical capability on environmental practices in order to have quality products. The company

also critically reviewed financial capability of the supplier to implement green practices in line with the company's policy; this is shown by a mean score of 3.79 and 3.54 respectively. The findings are in line with those of Kirytopolos *et al.* (2008) who found out that firms considered aspects such as cost, service, supplier's profile, quality, and risk in selection and evaluation of suppliers. On the other hand, Baskaran et al. (2012) who conducted a study on Indian textile suppliers also supports these findings. Their study established that while initially firms mainly focused on conventional criteria such as price, quality and delivery time; firms are now moving towards the integration of environmental factors into supplier selection decisions.

The study results show that 45.8% of the respondents indicated that selection of suppliers on green procurement practices influenced firm competitiveness to a great extent while 18.8% indicated to a very great extent. These findings corroborates with those of Li et al. (2006) who illustrated that suppliers' selection criteria is the need to assess a supplier's quality and service capabilities as well as his green strategies and managerial alignment with the buyer. This strategic alignment leads to enhanced competitive advantage and improved organizational performance. The findings also show that the respondents agreed that the company had adopted environmental standards and quality control measures to ensure that the products procured are of quality; this is shown by a mean score of 4.21. The respondents also agreed that Unilever restraints itself from procuring products with harmful substances; and that the company avoids procurement products/goods with environmental risks which that would expose the company to losses or damages; this is shown by mean scores of 4.31 and 4.42 respectively. The findings are in agreement with those of Hamner (2006) who indicated that the risk of losing consumer trust or access to the major markets due to non-compliance with hazardous substance regulations has renewed the firms' commitment to product safety. The basic elements for green product element are product content requirements, product content restrictions, product content labeling or disclosure, etc.

Results show that majority of the respondents (56.3%) indicated that the firm decision to procure products with less harmful contents influenced the competitiveness of the firm to a great extent. The sentiments were supported by 18.8% who indicated that such procurement influenced competitiveness of the firm to a very great extent. The findings are agreement with those of Rao and Kondo (2010) who established that greening or monitoring suppliers' products content

would ultimately lead to green process and thereafter to environmental performance and business performance. The respondents indicated that procurement of reusable and recycled products contents had improved the quality of products being procured by the company to a great extent; this is shown by a mean score of 3.75. The respondents also indicated that adoption of green procurement processes had enhanced other uses for waste materials including re-manufacturing into other products hence reducing costs to the company to a great extent; as shown by a mean score of 3.92. However, the respondents indicated that the adoption of paperless procurement had reduced costs of operations to the company to a moderate extent as shown by a mean score of 3.58 on the likert scale.

On the effect of green logistics, the study findings show that the respondents agreed that green logistics reduced costs through improvement in packaging and reduction of wastes; this is shown by a mean score of 4.33. Further, the respondents agreed that green logistics provide flexible and efficient physical distribution systems to the company; and that it enhanced reliable and on-time distribution of goods to the market with less environmental damage; this is shown by the mean scores of 4.21 and 4.06 respectively. The findings are in line with those of Abareshia and Mollaa (2013) who indicated that green logistics can be enhanced through practices that can reduce CO_2 emission, fuel consumption, or the cost of environmental compliance. The findings are also supported by Saroha (2014) who found out that customers are demanding that the businesses adopt green logistics which enhances reduced traffic congestion, reduced pollution, promote social harmony and to save transportation costs. Majority of the respondents (60.4%) indicated that green logistics influenced competitiveness of the company to a great extent while 16.7% indicated to a very great extent. These findings are in agreement with those of Sari and Yanginlar (2015) who investigated the relationship between green logistics practices and firm performance in healthcare organizations in Turkey. The study found out that green logistics practices positively supported firm performance (in terms of operational, economic, and environmental performances).

Table 1: Coefficients Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.729	0.634		1.150	0.257
	Green suppliers selection	0.028	0.072	0.053	0.394	0.696
	Green products	0.280	0.077	0.439	3.640	0.001
	Green procurement processes	0.290	0.051	0.579	5.684	0.000
	Green logistics f	0.255	0.064	0.433	3.958	0.000

a Dependent Variable: Firm Competitiveness

The regression results shows that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between firm competitiveness and green products ($\beta = 0.280$, $p=0.001<0.05$); green procurement processes ($\beta = 0.290$, $p=0.000<0.05$); green logistics ($\beta = 0.255$, $p=0.000<0.05$). The above findings are in line with those of Rao and Kondo (2010) that there was a statistically significant relationship between green procurement aspects such product content restrictions; avoiding environmentally undesirable attributes, green suppliers and environmental performance and business performance. However, the study found a positive but statistically insignificant association between firm competitiveness and green supplier selection as shown by $\beta = 0.028$; $p= 0.696>0.05$.

Conclusions

The study concludes that Unilever Kenya had embraced green procurement practices among them selection of suppliers are "green" or have adopted green procurement. The study established that company selected suppliers who had met the required quality standards on green procurement practices in order to have quality products and reduce costs. The study found out that selection of suppliers on green procurement practices influenced firm competitiveness to a great extent.

The company ensured that it adhered to environmental standards and quality control measures to ensure that the products procured are of quality. In this regard, the company restraints itself from procuring products with harmful substances; and also avoids procurement products with environmental risks or hazards which would expose the company to losses or damages. Procurement of products or product contents with less harmful contents influenced the competitiveness of the firm to a great extent.

The study also concludes that Unilever Company had adopted green procurement processes such as the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and paperless procurement (order via email, e-procurement). The procurement of reusable and recycled products contents had improved the quality of products and enhanced other uses for waste materials hence reducing costs to the company. The minimization of wastes and reduced costs enhanced the company's competitiveness to a great extent.

Green logistics influenced competitiveness of the company to a great extent. Logistics is a function responsible for all movements of materials through the supply chain and green logistics reduced costs through improvement in packaging and reduction of wastes. The green logistics also provided flexible and efficient physical distribution systems to the company; and enhanced reliable and on-time distribution of goods to the market with less environmental damage. Green logistics lead to more intangible benefits such as image and reputation enhancement.

Recommendations

The study recommends that due to the importance and influence of evaluation criteria, organizations should choose carefully the criteria that a supplier should be evaluated against based on the needs and objectives of the organization. The study recommends that organizations should put more effort to develop suppliers into more strategic partners in the supply chain. Through this organizations will be able to develop collaborative relationships with suppliers which will result in more effective risk management, product and/ or service differentiation and cost reduction and thus achieving a competitive advantage in the supply chain.

Green procurement initiatives that focus on reduction of waste and packaging, and design of easier recyclable products should be promoted. Such green procurement initiatives could

facilitate green supplier development. More importantly, managers need to realize that green procurement alone cannot help in improving supplier performance. Instead, focal firms are crucial for improving downstream capabilities of suppliers. If so, such an involvement will boost suppliers' service quality and increase their responsiveness, thereby eventually translating into better products.

An environmentally-oriented procurement strategy not only minimises the environmental impact of products of the focal firm, but it could also help in identifying as well as exploiting green competencies available in the supply chain. The company needs to adopt more green practices as green procurement and green supplier development are envisioned to result in superior supplier performance and competitiveness.

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