

# **EDITORIAL: FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC PROCUREMENT LAW IN AFRICA**

**Geo Quinot & Sope Williams**

**(2023) 10 APPLJ 40**

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Conference Directors

On 11 and 12 September 2023, the African Procurement Law Unit (APLU) convened the Fourth International Conference on Public Procurement Law in Africa in Cape Town. The fourth edition of APLU's series of conferences focusing on public procurement (law) relevant to the African context, was originally scheduled for 2020. This followed the biennial routine established since the second conference in 2016 and the third conference in 2018. However, the global COVID-19 pandemic also interrupted this conference routine, like most other routines. After two attempts to reschedule (in 2021 and 2022 respectively) also fell prey to renewed waves of the pandemic with consequent restrictions, 2023 finally brought sufficient stability to enable the successful resumption of the conference series. It was accordingly with great relief that we welcomed more than 130 delegates to the conference on 11 September.

The 2023 conference was by far the largest in this series of conferences yet. Not only did the number of attendees almost double, but the number of abstracts received, and papers delivered increased exponentially. For the first time since the start of the conference series, we had to schedule parallel streams to accommodate all papers. This growth in interest in public procurement law in Africa is extremely gratifying. And even more, the growth in high-quality research in this area and the depth of the discussions at the conference are clear signs of a maturing field of study. Beyond the academic significance of this development in the field, the mix of theoretical and practice perspectives at the conference, in relation to the papers presented, delegates attending and discussions in sessions and during breaks, suggest a very healthy balance in the study of public procurement law in Africa. In turn, this bodes well for continued efforts to optimally leverage public procurement for development on the continent.

The overarching theme of the fourth conference was *Public Procurement and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa: Opportunities towards 2030*. Across many dimensions of public procurement regulation, delegates sought to interrogate the role that public procurement, and specifically the regulation of public procurement, plays in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa within the home stretch towards

the UN's Agenda 2030. The opening and closing keynotes at the conference provided excellent bookends to these discussions.

In his opening keynote address, Mr. Saul Roux, head of environmental strategy implementation at the City of Cape Town's Environmental Management Department, shared inspiring examples of how the City is mainstreaming green public procurement. One of the key insights of his presentation was that even though the adoption of sound sustainable public procurement practices by the City has required complex considerations throughout the supply chain management process, within a seemingly rigid and unaccommodating procurement regulatory context, the City has found ways to achieve significant success in this area wholly within existing procurement law. He thus noted that while explicit regulatory mandates for sustainable public procurement would greatly enhance implementation of sustainable public procurement, the absence of such explicit mandates should not be viewed as an insurmountable hurdle in pursuit of sustainability through public procurement.

In his keynote closing remarks, Dr Tebogo Makube, Chief Director of Industrial Procurement in the South African Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, neatly linked to the opening address by discussing the complementarities, contradictions and trade-offs to consider in pursuing sustainable development through public procurement. He noted the need to understand the achievement of the core (traditional) objectives of public procurement, viz. acquiring goods and services for public functions at best value, as part of the pursuit of sustainable development.

While a selection of papers delivered at the second and third international conferences on public procurement law in Africa were published in book form as edited collections, we decided to publish a selection of papers from the fourth conference across two editions of the *African Public Procurement Law Journal*, starting with this second edition of volume 10 (2023). One of the main reasons for adopting a different approach to dissemination than before, was our desire to get these papers out as soon as possible and in as accessible format as possible. The *African Public Procurement Law Journal* perfectly delivers on both those objectives, being an electronic journal not dependent on printing schedules and published online in open-access form. We believe that this approach will enable an even larger audience to benefit from these excellent contributions and thus support development of public procurement law in Africa in the best way.