Procurement as a force for good: From intent to impact

By Claire Barnhoorn | May 2025, following the NEVI CPO Summit

When I was invited to speak at NEVI's Chief Procurement Officer Summit, I felt both excited and challenged. Not because I had doubts about what I'd say, but because I knew I'd be stepping into a room full of professionals who manage procurement at a scale I deeply respect, yet often from a very different angle than mine.

My goal wasn't to lecture or to impress. It was to offer a shift in perspective. Because if there's one thing my career has taught me, from field logistics in humanitarian crises to building Solvoz, it's this: **Procurement is not just a function. It's a force. And right now, it's one of the most underused levers to drive meaningful change.**

That's especially true in the impact sectors. Many still see the humanitarian or 'aid' space as niche. Small. Almost symbolic in the broader global economy. But here's what many in the room didn't know:

- There are **over 10 million nonprofits** globally
- The 'aid' procurement market alone is estimated at **$450 billion** annually
- Add social entrepreneurship (health, education, climate etc) and we're talking **$2 trillion+** spent every year, in service of public good (WEF 2024 data)

This isn't a drop in the ocean. It's a massive, distributed economy. And it's powered by procurement. So, what if we got intentional about it? What if we stopped optimizing purely for price, and started sourcing for purpose? What if procurement became a mechanism to activate our values?

That's not theoretical. It's already happening, in pockets. At Solvoz, we've helped organizations move from reactive to proactive, from extractive to inclusive. We've seen process savings of over 75%, and local suppliers, often previously invisible, finally get a seat at the table.

But this is just the beginning. After my talk, over drinks, someone asked me: "How can this actually show up in tenders?" I answered with something simple: For all of us, not just in the sectors I support, we'd never dream of issuing a tender without asking whether child labour is involved. It's a baseline. A no-brainer.

So why couldn't we do the same for example with **maternity leave**? For **decent work**? If your internal policy ensures your employees don't work until their due date or immediately after giving birth, why not expect the same from your suppliers? A single line in an RFQ could shift the conversation. "Do you offer paid maternity leave?" Imagine what we could enable with just 1% more asking that question.

Procurement is where intention meets execution. It's where your ESG goals either come to life or remain a PDF. So, here's my takeaway for the CPO Summit: Whether you're in aid, health, infrastructure, or the boardroom of a Fortune 500, your procurement power is real. Let's stop treating it like a process. Let's start using it like a lever.

Because if we want to drive change, on equity, resilience, or sustainability, we don't need more strategy decks. **We need to put our money where our mouth is.**