Inclusive Public Procurement

Opportunities, Barriers and Strategies (OBS) to Women Entrepreneur’s Participation in Public Procurement in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The agenda and call to increasing Women and Women Owned Businesses (WOB) participation in public procurement is now a key policy area in both developed and developing countries. Influenced by the global declarations and the drive towards realisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries have adopted affirmative action strategies aimed at ensuring equalisation of opportunities between men and women. For any country like Uganda to develop implementable strategies, not only is a situational analysis of the state of affairs necessary but a glance into the opportunities and barriers that mitigate their participation needs to be re-emphasised. Uganda is a country within the East African region whose expenditure on acquisition of goods, services and works to meet government objectives could be exploited to address the gender gap. The purpose of this article is to examine, using empirical findings collected from a cross-sectional survey process the state of affairs regarding women’s opportunities in Uganda’s public procurement. The article specifically addresses three key issues: opportunities for women and their enterprises, the barriers to their participation and policy and management action strategies needed to address this dilemma. A framework for increasing participation is presented.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing women’s economic opportunities and addressing the numerous barriers that mitigate against their full participation in Uganda’s public procurement
system, the region and the world at large; is informed and theoretically grounded in a number of premises: 1) women comprise half of the human resources of many economies and evidence shows that economies do better when women are utilised; 2) it is a moral imperative and is a matter of fairness and equity; 3) women have the right to (economic) development; 4) procurement of goods, services and works by government is a key policy tool to advance social economic goals including gender; 5) the global and development agenda pronouncements strongly support gender equity principles; and 6) women are now a formidable force in all sectors and are ready or committed to vigorously advance the gender agenda as a cross-cutting theme in every aspect of public spending. 

Public procurement (PP) in any country is viewed as a core government function that can be used to positively equalise opportunities of WOBs. This function of government can also be used to address the barriers that affect women’s participation in tendering processes at both the central government and local government levels. Bolton (2016:4) reports from the South African context how over the years the range of public policies that PP can use to promote social inclusion have broadened unlike when PP was used as a tool to protect the environment and was more at the forefront. Recent events and experiences point to numerous examples where PP is and should be used to stimulate innovation and this perspective is receiving growing attention and acceptability. The argument in favour of this reasoning is the increasing purchasing power of governments which has also been due to growth of economies. Quinot, (2013:405) reminds us that governments have long used PP as a tool to promote socio-economic objectives which are sometimes referred to as ‘horizontal’ or ‘collateral’ because they are ancillary to the primary purpose of PP—acquiring goods and services for the government. Recent calls for inclusion of the marginalised—particularly the youth and women, has set a policy imperative agenda for all countries. Consideration of women in the award of tenders and other economic activities of government has seen a steep climb of interest in many countries due to the actual or perceived benefits of this policy shift. From a trade perspective for example, public procurement policy (PPP) is important because it commands a significant share of GDP. Unfortunately, most procurement and investment opportunities in Uganda have rarely considered gender inclusion and equality as a selection criterion during evaluation of PP bids, a trend that has negatively affected WOBs’ ability to sell to large buyers. Women entrepreneurs and business owners have been largely unable to capitalise on government spending. Some sectors present more challenges than others with a trend of facts pointing to dominance of women only in some trade sector and small supplies procurement. 

Defining a gender-sensitive PPP is urgent and requires political will and administrative support mechanisms. The drive, however, has to deal with a culture
paradigm shift to fight the strong forces that support maintaining a status quo. Challenging entrenched viewpoints requires open engagement and dialogue on potential benefits of change. Such a dialogue requires involvement of all actors/agents to discuss the context in which affirmative action needs to be considered and applied. Experiences from around the globe indicate that affirmative action is more readily acceptable where there is a historical reference to past discrimination. In a number of countries, addressing this challenge has occasioned construction of laws, regulations and policies which protect the rights and opportunities of previously disadvantaged communities. The next section describes the nature and context of women and WOB enterprises.

THE NATURE OF WOMEN-OWNED ENTERPRISES IN UGANDA

Amanda et al. (2006:22) report on how challenges relating to women’s lack of control over productive resources and assets, has been a systemic issue that has worked with the inequity in marital status and property ownership, which tend to intersect with cultural attitudes and beliefs to create formidable obstacles for women’s emancipation. Across Africa, while women are reportedly a powerful force for growth and strong economic and political actors in the machinery of governments and form a formidable force in the private sector and civil society organisations where they are: policymakers, workers, property owners, entrepreneurs, educators, managers and boardroom members; this position has not translated into concrete tangible outcomes to benefit the majority of women. Some women have established their owned enterprises (big or small) a process that has seen them go through normal registration processes like other businesses owned by males. It has given them experience on what challenges the WOBs experience.

While the delays and costs of registration and licensing processes of businesses for example impose a burden on all businesses, emerging evidence suggests that such requirements impose a disproportionate burden on enterprises headed by women. Evidence further suggests that women perceive the regulatory burden as greater than men do, that women are “time poor” and therefore less inclined to formalise their businesses, and that enterprises headed by women are much more likely to be subject to harassment and bribes than businesses headed by men (Amanda et al. 2006:27). This current study on Uganda reported experiences where some women indicated the first ‘criteria’ for winning tenders in some agencies was acceptance of sexual favours from males who managed the tendering processes. Women are seen as “soft targets” (Amanda et al. 2006:27). Moreover, as Snyder (2000:17) reported, the contemporary story of female entrepreneurs in
Uganda mirrors the country’s experience in the recovery from civil war and its legacy of death, destruction and fear. A “veritable explosion of Ugandan African entrepreneurship was born out of the need to survive amidst chaos” (Snyder 2000:17). The civil wars and economic crises that engulfed the country in the 1970s and early 1980s had profound demographic and structural impacts on any business initiative to reach acceptable levels.

The World Bank (2005:17) in The Gender and Growth Assessment study found that access to business development services and training, particularly in relation to financial management and exporting, were constraints to female entrepreneurial development. While women provided approximately 70% of the labour force, they were predominantly in the informal sector. This highlights their challenges in accessing resources, both tangible and intangible, which also continues to hinder their effective participation in the formal private sector. Some initiatives have undoubtedly been undertaken to address some of these challenges of women’s participation. Notable among these has been the establishment of women’s business associations which have undertaken advocacy, networking, and training roles although they are yet to cover the significant number of women, especially in the local governments where tendering opportunities exist, due to the decentralised nature of Uganda’s PP system. Government also attempted to integrate entrepreneurship courses into the educational curriculum which is laudable and was anticipated at its incubation to help mitigate the negative attitudes that women entrepreneurs believed affected their business operations. The Uganda Investment Authority has also encouraged positive role models through the Distinguished Woman Investor of the Year Award at its annual awards ceremony (Amanda et al. 2006:25).

The barriers to WOBs are not unique to a single African country and take a varied nature. Hindrances to the participation of WOBs in PP span across borders and regions and are located at every stage of the PP process and almost in every government Ministry, Department or Agency (MDA). Internationally, key hindrances to WOBs’ participation in PP include bundling, where small contracts for unrelated goods are bundled together to enjoy the economies of scale; corruption, lack of information on opportunities, and preferential treatment towards established contractors and by extension those predominantly male-dominated businesses; have stood in the way of increased participation of women in PP.

The other challenges relate to companies fronting as WOBs when they are not. WOBs for example are defined in some countries to refer to businesses with a women ownership level of more than 50% while in other countries, they give a definition where a women owned if she was the principal signatory to the accounts of the company. Further hindrance relates to the processes of tendering which are unnecessarily complicated and require a lot of documentation which
most women or their enterprises may not be able to afford because of a low financial base. The other problem has been blamed on procurement officers who do not appreciate how they can conduct procurement within the law by being supportive of the women’s agenda. Perceived inadequate supply of women bidding for contracts and a poor job done by those who have previously won government tenders due to lack of capacity, have equally been cited and documented.

**THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Government procurement spending is sizable. However, it is estimated globally that the share of contracts that are awarded to women or their enterprises is less than 2% globally. Yet, women are estimated to own a sizeable number of businesses in many countries with an estimate of more than 39% of businesses in Latin America (Hetland 2012:3) and 38% of businesses in South Africa. Uganda, like other countries, has not fully exploited PP as a tool to unleash the vast economic potential to attracting women entrepreneurs. Contributing to this under-representation is the absence of a policy stance that explicitly promotes equality for WOBs and drives the promotion of WOBs in PP as is the case in some countries like South Africa, the USA, Kenya and Ethiopia; among others. Besides, there are technicalities such as definitional inconsistencies in terms of what is defined as a WOB, a lack of standardised targets that are set for allocation of a share of PP to WOBs, the absence of a homogeneous monitoring framework to track PP spending awarded to WOBs and a lack of repercussions for not meeting targets. Uganda spends millions of shillings on PP but not much of these opportunities cascade to women or their enterprises.

In the United States, women are estimated to own about 50% of the businesses. There are reported systemic issues and weaknesses that prevent women’s participation. However, there is a dearth of empirical facts documenting the exact hindrances yet this is the kind of information policymakers would need to provide solutions. Moreover, with the apparent lack of policy framework to create affirmative action for women in Uganda’s public sector procurement, a need for a study to provide a situational analysis was necessary. To address the above gaps, and to generate evidence-based data that could guide solution finding, this study was undertaken to address three key questions:

- What opportunities exist in Uganda’s PP that can be exploited by women or WOBs?
- What factors inhibit women or their businesses from exploiting opportunities in PP in Uganda?
- What strategies need to be undertaken to reduce or minimise the barriers and increase opportunities for business or WOBs in Uganda’s PP?
METHODOLOGY AND PROFILING OF RESPONDENTS

The study used two approaches and models as tools of conceptual analysis. The first was the CIPP (context, input, processes and product) model. This model was used with the reasoning that to understand the barriers and opportunities to women’s participation in PP and later offer workable strategies, required an understanding of the CIPP of government departments and agencies. The context in which women’s enterprises operate and the context in which PP takes place are vital. Next to understanding the context is to consider the inputs (resources, policies) in place for PP and those needed by women or their businesses to participate in PP.

Third, the processes of PP and general registration of women’s enterprises present barriers and opportunities. The bidding processes, the rules and regulations involved, all need to be understood. Finally, one needs a review of the expected outputs of the procurement process which, in addition to providing service/goods/supplies, needs payment for tenders. Analysing the procurement spend with particular interest in understanding the payments that go to women’s enterprises in the category of works, services and supplies, is crucial. It is appropriate to analyse this trend sector by sector.

In addition to the CIPP model, the study considered the importance of the McKinsey 7-S Framework. The 7-S model was used to understand that the barriers to participation of women in PP lay in the strategies used, the systems in place, the structures, staffing, skills, styles and the shared values practised in the government systems at central and local levels. Reducing the gender gap and addressing the barriers to participation of women in PP needed therefore to address strategies in each of these elements. The systems, styles, skills, strategies, shared values and structures in PP dictate women’s involvement or present the barriers to their participation.

A triangulated approach was used in the study. Primary and secondary data was collected and the corresponding data collection methods were applied. Interviews were conducted with key informants at central and local government levels while a survey instrument was administered to various women’s enterprises in areas covered by this study. In addition to these two data collection methods, secondary review of documents especially pertaining to women’s participation provided useful supporting findings for the study. The study sought to understand the nature of business the respondents were involved in for both the surveyed and those who were interviewed. The analysis of those surveyed found that the majority, at 43%, of respondents’ business were in services, 29% were in trade, 6% in manufacturing, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The nature of business sectors where the majority of women were involved points to a policy area where affirmative action initiatives could be directed to
increase participation of women in PP. The findings are suggestive that women could be given special consideration in trade and services sectors.

There can be reservation schemes for women or their owned enterprises that deal in supplies like stationary and other office equipment as well as in services like catering services, cleaning services, hotel services, and consultancy services among other areas. WOBs appear to have a competitive advantage according to the findings of this study. This further takes into account the nature of WOBs which are usually small and with limited capital to finance big procurement requirements. Regarding the number of employees in the businesses surveyed, the results showed that the majority (33%) of respondents’ businesses had 10–20 employees, 29% were below 10 employees, 19% were more than 20 employees, and 11% were owner-managed as illustrated in Figure 2.

Profiling respondents by the age of their business revealed that 39% of the businesses had been in existence for between 1 to 5-years, 29% 6 to 10-years, 15% over 20-years and 1% was just below one year. The survival rate of most business enterprises is five years implying, 15% of those surveyed had businesses that survived longer than five years.
KEY STUDY FINDINGS

The findings are presented around a cluster of variables and themes that collectively target an understanding of the opportunities, barriers and strategies for increasing women’s participation.

- The analysis of the survey responses in terms of the status of women’s participation in PP bidding in Uganda showed that the majority (38%) of respondents had never participated in PP bidding, 31% had done so just a few times, 14% regularly participated, while 8% participated very often.

- Evidence from the literature indicates that countries which have succeeded in increasing opportunities for women’s participation in PP have invested in some specialised trainings targeting WOBs and their owners. This study undertook to assess the extent to which WOBs surveyed had benefited from PP trainings. Analysis of the study findings showed that the majority (38%) of respondents had never participated in PP training, 31% did a few times, 14% regularly participate, while 8% participate very often.

- In terms of the success rates in getting a government contract/bid by women; analysis showed that the majority (56%) of respondents never succeeded in getting a government contract/bid, 19% did a few times, 14% just once, 8% regularly, and 3% very often.

- In terms of the reasons given for not winning a government tender the analysis showed that 24% of respondents were given no reason at all for not winning a government tender in which they participated, 4% lacked capacity, 3% experienced very high bid prices and 1% had incomplete documentation.
On the other hand 61% of the respondents found this question not applicable to them.

- The major reasons for not participating in some government tenders are that the majority (24%) of respondents did not participate in government tenders due to corruption, 18% due to a very costly process, 17% was due to insufficient capacity and 6% was due to technical bid documents involved.

Findings on barriers to women’s participation in Uganda

A number of barriers to women participating in Uganda have been reported in the literature as affecting the participation of WOBs in PP. Using the existing international literature in different countries, major barriers (women capacity, information accessibility, financing and Policy-Regulatory Frameworks) were assessed in Uganda. Respondents were asked their views on how they felt each of these factors contributed. In this section, findings on each of the barriers are presented.

Analysis showed that:
- 92% of respondents agreed that women lacked training about PP
- 83% agreed that most women lacked information on tendering opportunities

![Operational Framework for understanding the barriers to women participation in Public Procurement in Uganda](source: Basheka 2017)
79% agreed that most women’s enterprises lacked capacity in preparing competitive bids
70% agreed that most women’s businesses are too small yet most government contracts were too big
64% agree that most women entrepreneurs lacked entrepreneurial skills
92% agreed that most women lacked training about PP
66% agreed that most women entrepreneurs had limited managerial skills although a sizeable 31% disagreed on this
55% agreed that quality requirements were too high and most women entrepreneurs could not comply
84% agreed that most women lacked information on tendering opportunities
66% agreed that most women entrepreneurs lacked the legal requirements for bidding in government agencies
80% agreed that most women enterprises lacked capacity in preparing competitive bids
76% agreed that most women entrepreneurs lacked capacity to bid in joint ventures because of documents involved

Specifically, the study interrogated the dimensions under each of these broad barriers to participation. For example, financial constraints to women’s participation in PP in Uganda varied. Many women entrepreneurs interested in doing business with the government do not have the financial literacy to properly maintain their books and records, nor can they afford to have their accounts audited every year. Other financial requirements, such as performance bonds, bid guarantees, and fees for tender documents, are also beyond the reach of some WOBs. Like all qualification criteria, financial requirements need to be reviewed and appropriately tailored. Rationalising and tailoring technical and financial qualifications should not mean compromising standards.

Financial constraints

Analysis showed that 89% of the respondents agreed that most women entrepreneurs used small amounts of money where they cannot wait for delayed payment of the supplies to government, 85% agreed that government departments take long to pay for goods/services supplied which affects women’s business enterprises, 83% agreed that interest rates on loans are too high which discourages women to borrow to participate in PP and women businesses are financially constrained to raise funds from banks for participating in PP respectively. Furthermore 80% of respondents agreed that most government contracts required kickbacks (bribes) that most women entrepreneurs cannot afford, 79% agreed that bidding costs including bid security and bid document preparation were too high for WOBs
in Uganda, 78% agreed that most women entrepreneurs did not have necessary finances to use in the bidding processes while 69% agreed that most contractors who subcontracted to WOBs received big commissions at the expense of the women enterprises.

During interviews with key informants, the following major reasons for failure of women enterprises to participate in some government tenders in Uganda were recorded:

- Lack of capacity
- Suspicion that selection process favours insiders
- Difficulty competing with large firms
- Education level
- Structural issues in organisations
- Cultural biases
- Women do not prefer this kind of job
They do not know the process
Women are not transparent
Lack of adequate knowledge
Bidder collusion
Some think winners are predetermined
Non-competitive products
Tendering is too complicated
Low mobilisation power of resources for the down-payment
Lower experience levels in some of the areas tendered
Low self-esteem
Corruption and social pressure to please the bosses
Mindset where women feel that government tenders are mainly done by men who are able to run up and down
Failure by women to “oil the system”
Lack of special considerations by government tenders for women
Lack of systems for capturing their participation

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS

A framework for addressing the challenges requires a collective multiple strategy involving a number of stakeholders. The framework requires a systematic and coordinated approach that aims at addressing the structural and systemic challenges. While the framework assumes a linear view, this is not likely to be the case considering the erratic environment in which government acquisition processes take place. The framework is based on key processes.

Need to define a Women Owned Business

This is a very important parameter due to the varying opinions. Uganda needs to have its own definition based on its context specific factors. While Kenya for example, defines such as an entity where the woman is a signatory to the accounts, stakeholder consultation with women’s enterprises can generate acceptable standard definition.

Definition of eligibility criteria

Once the definition is agreed on, there is need to define a set of parameters upon which WOBs can be admitted. This criterion should vary depending on the sizes of the enterprises and the sectors where the women are anticipated to participate.
Figure 5: Framework for addressing the barriers to participation of women in public procurement in Uganda

1. Definition of Women Owned Businesses (WOBs)
2. Define opportunity areas for women participation
3. Determine the criteria for participation
4. Training programmes
5. Certification Framework for eligible individuals or women groups
6. Addressing systemic barriers
7. Undertake special procurement reforms
8. Design special guidelines (PPDA)
9. Build PDE Capacity
10. Compliance Requirement templates
11. Reporting on PDE reporting, PPDA reporting
12. Monitor Performance
   - Impact Analysis
   - Defence Analysis
   - Output Analysis
13. Research and Reviews

Specialized academy for training WOBs / partnerships with Institutions / firms

Source: (Basheka 2017)
A classification scheme of categories of procurements for segments either by supplies, services, and works or based on agreed thresholds can be established.

**Certified training programmes**

WOBs need to undergo specialised training programmes on the requirements and dynamics of meeting the criteria agreed upon. The training programmes should go beyond mere procurement cycles in PP but ought to cover management skills, enterpreneural and basic consultancy practices. Those who have fulfilled certain set requirements will be certified to participate in PP. This is a quality assurance mechanism that would ensure quality and capacity of WOBs and will ensure some degree of standardisation.

**Addressing systemic issues in government**

The study has identified a number of systemic issues that prevent WOBs from participating in PP. Some of these issues are strategic, others are related to the systems, structures, staff, skills, styles, and shared values. Some issues are related to the procurement frameworks in place while others relate to operation of procurement frameworks by entities. Payment delays, corruption and the evaluation criteria setting, are issues that can be addressed to minimise the frustration of endeavors by WOBs to participate in PP. The registration systems for participation, the requirements for audited accounts, the complexity of bidding documents and accessibility to information for bid opportunities all need to be addressed.

**Targeted procurement reforms**

The success of the proposals/recommendations will require some targeted procurement reforms. One specific area of law would involve setting the percentage of contracts reserved for women and the youth. The other area will be the bid documents modifications to target the criteria agreed upon in stage two above. Rationalisation of eligibility requirements at the preliminary level would need to be changed to take into account the certification stage that those bidding have already accomplished. Technical tendering restrictions occasioned by the legal framework need to be addressed.

**Formulation of special guidelines and frameworks**

There will be a need by the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) to design and formulate special guidelines to provide a framework to procurement entities on how to enforce the agreed affirmative action
initiatives. The guidelines could offer special guidance on teaming up arrange-
ments among WOBs, contract sizes to be reserved and the sectors, the reporting
arrangements as well as timelines for bidding processes.

**Compliance assessment frameworks**

PPDA will need to design a compliance assessment framework upon which all
Public Development Enterprises (PDEs) will be assessed. The framework should
be demanding affirmative action plans from PPDA and contract compliance re-
quirements. Compliance will be required at different levels like PPDA and PDEs
level. The framework should have meaningful indicators.

**Compliance reporting and rating**

There will be a need for quarterly and annual reporting by entities on how the
affirmative action plan has been implemented as well as the key challenges, the
best practices and lessons learnt. PPDA will base the reporting on templates de-
veloped in the compliance assessment framework. The templates should allow
scientific rational assessment which can facilitate annual ranking of compliance.
The system should also generate the best role models of WOBs in different sec-
tors whose success stories can be documented for mentorship purposes.

**Monitoring and review**

The system will work where there is continuous monitoring and evaluation to as-
sess what worked and what did not work. This will require evaluating the impact,
outcomes, and outputs of agreed affirmative actions.

**PPDA annual report**

PPDA will be required to give a comprehensive state of gender-participation sta-
tus report. It could be made a separate report or a special chapter in its annual
report can be used for this purpose.

**Research and ICT-enabled systems**

The system should be based on regular evidence-based research to inform
decision-making. Annual research studies will need to be commissioned and find-
ings should be shared extensively among a wide range of stakeholders. The world
has changed in the business processes management engagements and the system
should emphasise ICT-enabled solutions to allow instant tracking of progress.
RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The following recommendations could be implemented to address the barriers to women’s participation in PP in Uganda.

- **Procurement policy and legal frameworks**: To be effective, legislators and government officials must establish an appropriate legal and regulatory framework as a prerequisite for any affirmative action initiatives. Uganda needs to start from this stage. There is a need to have appropriate legal and policy procurement affirmative action frameworks supported by top level commitment. The ongoing PPDA amendments should be used as a perfect opportunity for crafting an appropriate legal and policy framework that integrate gender and youth issues at the heart of the PP laws.

- **Capacity development**: There is need for increased capacity building and technical assistance for women’s businesses to access national and international trading opportunities on a level playing field. It is essential for policies to be developed in support of education, training and business development for women’s businesses which are unable to compete due to an apparent lack of technical and managerial skills. Capacity development needs to move beyond the individual to institutional and societal capacity building dimensions. It needs to move beyond trainings in basic procurement tendering procedures to more strategic procurement, managerial and consulting skills. The capacity building needs to move beyond workshops and seminars to systematic mentorship initiatives for WOBs.

- **Transparent procurement systems**: A move towards more transparent procurement policies needs to be emphasised and existing policies that support this principle need to be fully implemented. The process must recognise the need for more gender responsive open policies and special awareness campaigns including the writing of tenders in forms and avenues that can be reached by the WOBs. While there is a need for more transparent procurement policies, the rules and regulations put in place to ensure value for money must also take into account how they can inadvertently restrict small and medium sized WOBs which may not have the capacity to implement the necessary policies and procedures required.

- **Networks for information sharing**: Information sharing is an important mechanism for scaling up the opportunities for women’s participation. It is recommended that government-wide information networks be created for sharing bid opportunities to WOBs. A desk office of an IT person could also be established in each women-business oriented network organisation to scan daily opportunities for sharing to WOBs. Existing network women’s groups should be linked to key local and international tender portals that offer opportunities for WOBs. There will be a need to simplify the information for the
targeted groups since women’s organisations are assumed to know the needs and capacity of their members.

- **Production of success stories by PDEs:** PPDA should annually publish reports from PDEs on stories of successful women suppliers who were involved in PP in selected entities. The nature of contracts won, the sectors, and the amounts involved should be key performance metrics. Women’s organisations and the UN-women alongside the relevant government departments should also produce such success stories and annual awards could be given in different categories to encourage competition.

- **Research and needs assessment:** There is need for regular research and needs assessment to identify where technical assistance is required and the adoption of more inclusive PP training programmes could help build the specific capacity of small and medium women’s enterprises to gain greater access as identified by the needs assessment.

- **Procurement spend reporting:** PPDA should report on procurement spend per entity indicating the type and volume of procurement being allocated to WBOs in a financial year. A specific chapter in its annual report could as well be created for this purpose.

- **Preferential policies:** There is need for clear policy position on affirmative action initiatives. The exact percentage should be agreed upon at policy level taking into account the comparative ranges and the specific type of preference scheme appropriate for Uganda. Adoption of a standard PPP that includes an affirmative action component specifically favouring women’s enterprises will most directly facilitate women’s access to PP. There will be need to foster an equitable participation of rural and indigenous women, and social enterprises, increasing their access to opportunities.

- **Rewards for commitment:** Procurement mechanisms should reward commitments made to gender. The criteria for fulfilling a tender should have a clear gender component that the applicant can respond to. Incentivising the private sector to invest in the empowerment of women throughout their business operations, supply chains, senior management and decision-making roles, and corporate social responsibility programmes, can also be supported.

- **Government support systems:** There is need for other visible government support systems for women’s economic empowerment at the highest levels through high profile statements by senior officials and public acknowledgment of successful initiatives taking place within the PP domain.

- **Women entrepreneur mapping and skills analysis:** There is need for a profiling of WOBs and their strengths for purposes of advocacy. There is need for further evidence-based analysis by women’s organisations to influence policymakers. The system should identify women who are already involved in the PP
business and present them as role models for other women who may want to get involved in that sector.

- **Public sector policy reforms**: Proactive policies to engage women’s businesses should be initiated alongside wider policy reforms to address inequalities within nations: There is need for more proactive policies to include women businesses’ access to procurement. As has been shown in the case of India, these policies must go beyond women-focused initiatives such as increasing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and microfinance in order for enterprises for women to move to the next level. Policies should take into account what prohibits access to PP and international trade; such as education, class and rural locations, so that new procedures developed are not only for the elite but can benefit all society.

- **Policy-oriented research**: There is need for supporting policy-oriented research that aims at identifying existing gaps and one that measures how positively impact on WOBs at all levels can be attained.

- **Establishment of data base**: Women’s organisations and UN-women should systematically collect data on women’s ownership of businesses at all levels of the economy, including ownership levels within these businesses, how profits are utilised within the family unit, and growth in businesses over time; to monitor progress and to judge the effectiveness of programmes to support WOBs.

- **Frameworks for assessment and solution mapping**: There is need to develop appropriate comprehensive frameworks at government level, regulatory level and PDE level to assess country gaps in supporting gender equality, including women’s participation. This will require applying an ecosystem approach to encourage collaboration and enable women’s entrepreneurship.

- **WOB definition**: There is need to develop a definition of WOB in Uganda and establish a firm knowledge base of gender disaggregated data for SMEs. This will require understanding women-owned SMEs as a sub-segment of greater SME finance, and therefore develop a specific value proposition to serve them profitably and sustainably.

- **Special supporting systems**: There is need to develop a framework for engaging financial institutions and other government bodies like Uganda registration services bureau, URA, UIA to design requirements that support women’s entrepreneurship and increased participation in PP.

- **Cultural shift and perspective change**: There is need for a robust system of ensuring procuring entities are sensitised through training to implement the agreed upon affirmative action initiatives efficiently. Procuring entities need to further develop, operationalise and implement preferential procurement policies, procedures and programmes. Procuring officials must be sensitised to the unique barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. They require
training to understand and comply with preferential procurement policies, procedures and programmes, and account for their implementation.

- **Affirmative action-oriented reporting:** There will be a need for affirmative action reporting. The ministry of finance needs to generate disaggregated data that indicates the contracts won by WOBs and in the sectors. A trend reporting approach should be adopted. PPDA needs to produce an annual status report on the implementation of affirmative action. If this information is to be integrated in the PPDA annual report, a special chapter devoted to this cause is recommended. PDEs also need to provide quarterly reports upon which PPDA generates its annual report.

- **Champion leadership:** Transformation requires high level advocacy and the women’s groups need to agree on sector leadership to champion the advocacy for increased participation of women in PP in Uganda. The leadership should adopt a consultative approach supported by regular feedback to members.

- **Monitoring and evaluation system:** For effectively allowing lesson learning and best practice development, a comprehensive system for monitoring, evaluating and review should be developed and implemented. This could be the primary country responsibility of UN-women.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The article concludes that emerging from the findings, there is lack of the exact volume and value of PP contracts awarded to women or their enterprises in the PP system of the country. There is no system in place at PPDA and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to capture this disaggregated data required for evidence-based decision-making. WOBs’ participation in PP in Uganda, based on opinions and views of those interviewed and surveyed, remains low and is skewed towards the micro and small enterprises. The majority of women and their enterprises who have participated in PP have been in supplies and trade which offer low volumes of procurement compared to the lucrative consultancy and works tenders.

Barriers to women’s participation in PP are spread across the entire PP cycle—planning and budgeting, specification criteria, bidding, evaluation, and contract award and contract management. Some barriers are structural, legal and others relate to systems in place, the people managing the systems, the shared values, the styles as well as the strategies adopted. Corruption is a major issue that affects the effective participation of WOBs in the PP system. Coupled with the social value systems and the dominance of males in the procurement cycle, most WOBs do not offer required kick-backs hence they miss out on some tenders as they are not given official reasons for not winning contracts.
There are a number of system-wide issues that militate against effective involvement of WOBs in the PP system. There are reported consistent difficulties in accessing information on bid opportunities, lack of managerial expertise and skilled workers to prepare responsive proposals by women’s enterprises, coupled with expensive bid processes and limited ICT capacity this hinders their effective participation. The PP regime in Uganda has no specific affirmative action schemes targeting women and their enterprises. There are, however, some positive initiatives like gender-based budgeting, the equal opportunities commission report and the establishment of a gender committee in PPDA.

WOBs generally lack a conducive environment for increased participation in PP. Not only do they lack access to financing but the support systems for their participation are weak. The PP and gender sectors lack a clear framework for mentorship of successful businesses which is required for ensuring sustainability of WOB participation in PP. There is lack of a clear definition of WOB in the context of Uganda which is understood by different stakeholders and can be used as a basis for measuring the performance of women’s groups in the PP system. There is lack of a robust training curriculum designed for scaling up the participation of women and their enterprises in PP. There is lack of systematic curricula upon which the training is based and neither are there formally accredited institutions to advance this specialised knowledge transfer. There has been a noticeable concentration of WOBs in services and supplies which offer small economic benefits compared to huge consultancies and construction works. The findings in Uganda do not contradict those found elsewhere as far as women’s participation in PP and affirmative action initiatives are concerned. The barriers in Uganda revolve around the women’s capacity, the accessibility to information, financial challenges and are related to regulatory and legal frameworks.

NOTES

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