

A new research jointly conducted by a group of non-governmental organizations and Government agencies in Rwanda has found that yet there are a number of financial institutions offering special services to women aimed at strengthening and empowering women-led businesses (WLB), the large package of these services is oriented to support small-scale businesses and only avail limited amounts of money.

The report entitled “Towards Gender Balance: Understanding the Barriers and Solutions to Include Women-Led Businesses in Rwanda” shows that businesses owned and led by women are disproportionately micro-enterprises, employing 1 to 3 workers and requiring a low capital injection of below 500USD (500,000 Francs).

Women-owned businesses have been found in this research to be dominant (60%) in the wholesale and retail trade. It is followed by consumer service (26%). Decoration and Professional services each represent 6% of businesses surveyed.

Results from the latest national gender policy of February 2021 highlights that in Rwanda out of 161 randomly selected tenders in 2016-2017, women-owned business won only 11% of bids and that represent only 4% of the monetary value of all bids.

Allocation of tenders is merit-based and therefore gender blind, the report said.



Gender norms and gendered roles have a substantial impact on women's participation in entrepreneurship and public procurement in Rwanda

The study by UN Women and New Faces New Voices on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement in Rwanda revealed that out of the selected 332 tenders won between the years 2016 and 2019, women-led enterprises won 43 of these.

This represented 13% of the tenders and in terms of monetary value, this represented 5% of the cumulative value of the selected tenders. Women-Led Businesses (WLBs) predominantly won soft tenders like those in the: supply of services; refreshments; event management; event management and supply of office furniture.

On the contrary, men-owned businesses mainly won large value tenders such as those in construction and supply of agricultural inputs, it said.

While gender norms and gendered roles have a substantial impact on women's participation in entrepreneurship and public procurement, the new report highlights some factors that affect women's confidence in taking part in public tenders in Rwanda.



#### Ranking Barriers to WLB's Participation in Public Procurement Processes in Rwanda

The majority of surveyed women revealed that they easily comply due to pressure from the cultural values that are predominantly masculinity-driven patriarchy.

In addition, latest findings show that women-Led businesses [in Rwanda] encounter "double bribery" when trying to engage in public procurement compared to their male counterparts who only face monetary bribes.

Not only are they exposed to monetary bribery but also sexual advances in exchange for winning tenders, it said.

Whereas the new research report shows that government officials have a negative view of WLBs, their capacities, and their potential for doing business, the findings indicate that women have a negative perception of the procurement system as being corrupt and unfair, and cited this as a key demotivator.

For instance, a senior government official confided that currently he is managing 31 tenders and only 3 are by women, and all these include the supply of refreshments, cleaning and transport services.

In certain instances, according to the research conducted by the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC), one of the NGO advocating for the promotion of the right of access to information, transparency and accountability across Africa, women were not part of the tender committee, and this could potentially cause bias during the review of bids.