

Despite being one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, Rwanda's procurement framework does not explicitly focus on gender equality.

A study by UN Women on Gender-Responsive to Public Procurement in Rwanda revealed that out of 332 sub-service tenders won between 2016 and 2019, women-led enterprises (WLB) won 43 of them. This represented 13 per cent of the tenders in terms of monetary value.

The report notes that WLBs predominantly won soft tenders related to supply of services; refreshments; event management, and supply of office furniture.

For instance, a senior government official confided, to a study by the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) that he manages 31 tenders but only three are by women, and all includes the supply of refreshments, cleaning and transport services.

"Currently, we have 31 tender contracts to manage and only three are women. And three are cleaning services, refreshment services, and transportation services. For the past five years, only four women have won tenders and only small ones. I have not seen a woman win a construction tender to give an example," the official added.

He continued on to confess that in his five years at the institution, no WLB has engaged in big tenders such as construction and provision of sophisticated equipment.

On the other hand, the report accentuates that men-owned businesses dominate large value tenders such as construction and agricultural input supply.

On their part, the WLBs attributed their limited participation in big tenders to inadequate capital, limited self-confidence and lack of technical capacity among others.

Due to corruption, unfavorable procurement environments expose not only to monetary bribery, but also sexual advances.

This finding corroborates the study by New Faces New Voices Rwanda in 2017. The study also reported limited participation by WLBs in tenders involving huge amounts of money.

In the report, the WLBs mention that their husbands don't trust them with collateral. The situation is different when men want to use the same collateral.

Due to a lack of collateral, WLBs furthermore said that they experience barriers to accessing finance and this limits their ability to acquire the necessary working capital needed to apply for government contracting opportunities.

Also, the AFIC report revealed that the Rwanda Public Procurement Authority (RPPA) does not collect gender-disaggregated data, making it difficult for policymakers to understand how women-led businesses participate and win tenders.

While explaining, RPPA stated that they follow the Rwanda public procurement law and policy; in these guiding documents, public procurement is open to all citizens, in other words, there are no discriminatory articles or clauses.

Additionally, RPPA acknowledges that apart from a requirement for 30 percent women representation on the appeals tender committee, there is no special consideration for women.

The study findings suggest that the overwhelming majority (91.2 per cent) of WLBs reside in urban areas. WLB may prefer urban areas due to different reasons such as better infrastructure, services, and more clientele.

To try and address the gap, the government has made tremendous progress in promoting gender equality and equity through specific initiatives.

For instance, the Business Development Fund (BDF) was established in 2011 to assist SMEs in accessing finance, mainly those without sufficient collateral like WLB to obtain credit from traditional institutions like COPEDU LTD, a local Microfinance.

The Rwanda Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (RCWE) is also improving women entrepreneurs' socio-economic status by creating opportunities for their development through enhanced economic participation. Currently, RCWE which has 12,334 active members has domesticated the SheTrades Hub in Rwanda.

Other examples of positive practices in enhancing Gender Responsive Public Procurement include Self-organized women's groups, and Tailor-Made Financial Services for Women and Tailor-Made Financial Services for Women.