

Women Entrepreneurs and Government tenders in Harare, Zimbabwe: Challenges and strategies for survival

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ABSTRACT

The Government of Zimbabwe's legislative framework to enhance small and medium enterprises' (SMEs) participation in public procurement encourages SMEs to tender for government contracts, either directly or indirectly through subcontracting with large firms. In acknowledgement of women's contribution to entrepreneurship in the country, the framework also prioritises women-owned businesses in public procurement. Women entrepreneurs however face a plethora of challenges in securing government tenders. This study examined the challenges hindering women's participation in public procurement, and the strategies they have adopted to address these challenges. It was conducted in the city of Harare, with empirical data collected from 30 purposively sampled women entrepreneurs using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Content analysis was employed for data analysis. The results revealed that women entrepreneurs encounter several challenges in tendering for government contracts. These include a lack of technical and professional competencies, inadequate facilities and equipment, and a lack of capital. Furthermore, they lack awareness of government procurement processes, procedures and opportunities, leading to missed business opportunities. Fundamental to these challenges is gender discrimination which is deeply rooted within the tendering processes. In response to these challenges, women have developed several strategies, including partnering with male businesses, women bidding for tenders as a group and forming business networks for information sharing. The study recommends bespoke training programmes for women to enhance their participation in public procurement, particularly tendering processes and procedures. Technology transfer and training will improve women's technical and professional competencies in handling government contracts. In addition, provision of finance through government-guaranteed loans is vital to increase women's participation in government tendering processes. Importantly, the onus is on women to adopt a proactive approach in searching for public procurement information and establishing information-sharing platforms for the benefit of women-owned businesses. Further studies could explore this topic in other Zimbabwean cities and also explore how the government promotes women's participation in public procurement.

Key phrases

Government tenders; public procurement; small businesses; SMEs; women entrepreneurs and Zimbabwe

JEL Classification: M19

1. INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean government's legislative framework to enhance SMEs' participation in public procurement is set out in Statutory Instrument 171 of 2002, which provides for preferential treatment of local suppliers and contractors over external bidders (Government of Zimbabwe 2002:6). It provides that "When a comparative schedule of tenders for contracts is being prepared, locally based contractors and suppliers should be allowed a 10 per centum preference on the purchase price or contract price, over external contractors" (Government of Zimbabwe 2002:6). Previously economically disadvantaged suppliers and contractors are also granted a 10 per centum preference on the purchase price or contract price, over other categories of contractors (Government of Zimbabwe 2002:6). The Zimbabwe Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act, Chapter 14, section 33 of 2007 was enacted to open up business opportunities for local entrepreneurs, regardless of gender to bid for supply contracts directly from the government and indirectly through subcontracts with large firms. These measures aim to promote SME growth and socio-economic transformation (Kirton 2013:9-10).

Worldwide, women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to household income and job creation (United Nations 2019:1). The International Trade Centre (2014:v) notes that women entrepreneurs tend to reinvest up to 90% of their business earnings towards the well-being of their families and communities. Women therefore play an active role in poverty alleviation and local economic development. Their participation in public procurement contracts offers opportunities to realise their economic aspirations (United Nations 2017:1). Securing government tenders enables women to access more profitable markets, which leads to the growth of their businesses. This on the other hand can only be achieved if women have equal opportunities to bid for government contracts. This means that obstacles in the procurement process should be minimised. Although both male and female entrepreneurs face challenges in securing government tenders, women seem to be confronted with more challenges by virtue of their gender. Given this background, it is important to explore the

challenges hindering their participation in public procurement in order to identify sustainable solutions.

Previous research on public procurement mainly explored inefficiencies in tendering processes in Africa (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss 2012:1; Osei-Tutu, Badu & Owusu-Manu 2010:1). Some researchers such as Osei-Tutu *et al.* (2010:1) focused on corruption in public procurement processes. The results indicated that conflicts of interest, bribery, embezzlement of funds, kickbacks, tender manipulation, and fraud occur in the delivery of infrastructure projects (Osei-Tutu *et al.* 2010:1). Such practices lead to economic stagnation.

Within the Zimbabwean context, most studies have focused on the challenges of public procurement processes (Chigudu 2014:24; Dzukey & Naude 2017:1; Dzukey & Naude 2015:1; Musanzikwa 2013:121); the legal framework for public procurement (Tsabora 2014:1); and strategies to manage supplier relations (Mandiyambira 2012:1). For example, Tsabora's (2014) study highlighted that relevant laws and policies create a transparent procurement system that instils business confidence and reduces corruption. Interestingly, the findings of most studies viewed public procurement as a breeding ground for corruption (Dzukey & Naude 2015; Osei-Tutu *et al.* 2010; Tsabora 2014). There is a scarcity of research studies on women and public procurement in developing countries, particularly Zimbabwe.

Previous research on the advancement of women entrepreneurs in Africa explored the factors affecting women in public procurement (Amega & Nyang'au 2017:1; Korir & Wanambiro 2017:1; Nkonge 2013:1; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Kinoti 2015:1). Amega and Nyang'au (2017:1) and Nkonge's (2013:1) research in Narok County and Thika District in Kenya, respectively revealed that cultural factors were impediments to women's participation in government procurement processes. Basheka and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2015:1) conducted a comparative study of Uganda and South Africa and Vyas-Doorgapersad and Kinoti's (2015) research compared the level of gender-based equality and responsiveness in public procurement policies in Kenya and South Africa. Both studies advocated for renewed policy formulation to enhance gender inclusion in public procurement. There is, however, a paucity of research on the obstacles that hinder women's participation in government procurement in Zimbabwe and the strategies they have adopted to do so. This study sought to add to the knowledge on this subject by examining the challenges hindering women's participation in public procurement and the strategies adopted by these entrepreneurs to secure such contracts in Harare, Zimbabwe. It makes a unique contribution to knowledge production from a gender perspective in accordance with the women's economic empowerment agenda.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the literature review.

2.1 Women entrepreneurs and government tenders

Governments advertise tenders to procure the goods and services required for the day-to-day running of public services (Kirton 2013:12). Chin (2017:36) notes that “governments are often the single largest purchasers of products and services in their countries”. Each year, governments, the world over, spend substantial amounts of money buying products and services for public consumption and for implementing public works (Chin 2017:36). Government tenders thus represent growth opportunities for women-owned businesses (Korir & Wanambiro 2017:808). The African Development Bank (2014:2) and Chin (2017:36) concur that governments are using public procurement as an essential tool to achieve their socio-economic goals of reducing poverty and equitable income distribution.

According to the African Development Bank (2019:2), the global public procurement market has become highly lucrative. In developed countries, public procurement contributes between 10% and 15% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while in developing nations it accounts for 30% (African Development Bank 2019; United Nations 2019:1). The Zimbabwean government spends approximately 40% of GDP on public procurement (Dube 2018:1). A limited number of women benefit from this global market despite the fact that they own a significant number of businesses in many countries (Derera, Chitakunye & O'Neill 2014:97). For example, in Latin America, women own approximately 39% of small businesses (Basheka 2018:90). Approximately 50% of businesses in the United States are owned by women entrepreneurs (Verveer & Azzareli 2014), while the figure for South Africa stands at approximately 38% (International Finance Corporation 2018:41). FinScope (2012:20) states that 53% of all the business in Zimbabwe are women-owned. It is noted that less than 2% of global procurement business is awarded to women entrepreneurs (Vazquez & Sherman 2013:43 cited in United Nations 2017:19). In developing countries, less than 1% of government tenders are awarded to women-owned businesses (Rimmer 2017:4). These statistics highlight the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in bidding for and securing government tenders.

2.2 Challenges faced by women in securing government tenders

Women entrepreneurs are confronted with a plethora of challenges in bidding for and securing government tenders (Amega & Nyang'au 2017:213-215; González 2017:1; Vyas-

Doorgapersad & Kinoti 2015:1). The World Bank (2017:2) notes that developing countries lack procedural frameworks to ensure transparent public procurement procedures that promote fair and equal treatment among businesses tendering for government business. Many procurement officials are unethical and unaccountable to citizens (World Bank 2017:2). The British High Commission (2015:Online) however posits that most developing countries have established sound legislative and regulatory public procurement frameworks that promote fair and equal treatment among businesses vying for government business. Importantly, these frameworks have special clauses that promote gender equality in procurement processes (British High Commission 2015:Online). It must be understood that this does not apply to all countries (October 2019:Online). As a result, some women entrepreneurs have been excluded from training workshops that aim to equip business owners with the skills required to secure government tenders (International Labour Organisation 2017:1). This stifles their participation in the mainstream economy.

It has been noted that there are unequal procurement opportunities between men and women, particularly in Africa (Rimmer 2017:4). Most African societies are traditionally and culturally patriarchal in such that men have far greater access to economic resources (such as land, infrastructure and credit finance) and men have more decision-making powers than women (Kirton 2013). Hence, access to resources is embedded in culture. These gender-based inequalities result in a lack of resources that negatively impacts women's abilities to secure government tenders (Korir & Wanambiro 2017:818; Rimmer 2017:4). Women entrepreneurs are not on an equal footing with their male counterparts when it comes to exploiting business opportunities and access to the key assets required to establish a business (United Nations 2017:Online). Consequently, they are underrepresented in public procurement processes. Kirton (2013:13) states that there is a positive correlation between gender equality and a country's level of competitiveness on the global market. Similarly, there is a correlation between GDP per capita and a country's rank in the Human Development Index (Kirton 2013:13). Therefore, reducing gender inequality promotes productivity, economic growth and development.

Women entrepreneurs also have less access to financial resources than their male counterparts and this discourages them from bidding for government tenders (Amega & Nyang'au 2017:213; Ellis, Manuel & Blackden 2005:22). Basheka (2018:88) observes that women entrepreneurs cannot secure large government contracts due to this constraint. Mohammed's (2019:40) study in Kenya also revealed that women struggle to access funding, and as such, find it difficult to bid for government contracts. Procuring government entities have to ensure that bidders or contractors have the financial resources to carry out

contracts. Some government contracts are too large for women entrepreneurs to handle (Manuel 2013:6). Therefore, the larger the monetary value of the contract, the more women are excluded from bidding for it.

Generally, women entrepreneurs lack the managerial and technical competencies required to undertake government contracts (Basheka 2018:89). It may also be the case that they may not have the necessary equipment and physical facilities to deliver the required goods and services at the prescribed quality (International Trade Centre 2014:v).

Some women entrepreneurs lack awareness and access to information regarding government bids and tender procedures (International Trade Centre 2014:xiv; Kenya Private Sector Alliance 2018:12). Further to that, women entrepreneurs are not well acquainted with the tendering language and face difficulties in preparing tender documents (Amega & Nyang'au 2017:213). The situation is even worse for illiterate women who intend to participate in government tendering processes (Korir & Wanambiro 2017:817). Therefore, lack of education and training impedes women's participation in government procurement.

Previous research showed that women-owned businesses tend to be smaller than those run by male entrepreneurs in terms of size, revenue, profitability, and the number of employees (Chin 2017:29; Derera *et al.* 2014:99). The revenues generated by women-owned businesses are, on average, lower than men-owned businesses (Chin 2017:29; Derera, Chitakunye, O'Neill & Tarkhar-Lail 2014:316). The Donor Community for Enterprise Development (DCED) (2017:18) observes that governments give preferential treatment to established and larger businesses at the expense of small businesses which are generally owned by women. This acts as a discriminatory barrier to women-owned businesses.

Finally, women-owned businesses are discouraged from participating in the government tendering process because the procurement procedures are often complex, burdensome and expensive. Tendering for government contracts generally involves high bid, proposal and compliance costs (International Trade Centre 2014:xiv). Women entrepreneurs with limited experience and financial capabilities thus find it difficult to participate in government tenders.

2.3 Strategies adopted by women to secure government contracts

Given their difficulties in securing government contracts, women entrepreneurs have partnered with male entrepreneurs in bidding for such (Aneke, Derera & Bomani 2017:45).

This has resulted in male entrepreneurs being at the forefront, while women entrepreneurs remain in the background.

Women entrepreneurs have also lobbied governments for recognition as serious contenders for government contracts. As a result, some governments have crafted policies that give preference to women entrepreneurs in tendering for government contracts (Basheka 2018:99). Women have also lobbied the government to lower the financial prerequisites for bidding for public procurement contracts.

Women entrepreneurs have also created business networks and platforms to share information on various issues, including government tenders (Aneke *et al.* 2017:45). Such networks enable women business owners to be informed of government tenders and any critical changes taking place in their respective industries. Networking has been enhanced by the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare. The interpretivist research paradigm guided the study and a qualitative approach was adopted. Thirty purposively sampled women entrepreneurs from the manufacturing and retail sectors participated in the study. The study was granted ethical clearance (number HSS/1114/013D) by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A gate keeper's letter was issued by the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperative Development in Harare. The researchers used the following criteria to select the women entrepreneurs: they should be operating registered businesses, had operated for at least five (5) years, and had previously applied for government tenders. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed to gather empirical evidence. In-depth interviews are used to gain in-depth insight into a phenomenon using relatively few participants (Brounéus 2011:130; Guion, Diehl & McDonald 2011:1). In this context, the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in bidding for and securing government tenders. Dilshad and Latif (2013:93) note that focus group discussions may be used in conjunction with in-depth interviews to achieve triangulation. Three (3) focus group discussions were held to complement the data generated from the in-depth interviews and to reduce the bias of the data sets. Guest, Namey and McKenna (2016:16) state that three (3) focus group discussions are sufficient to identify the most prevalent themes in a data set. Each focus group discussion had ten participants. All the in-depth interview respondents were involved in the focus group discussions. The in-depth interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes

while focus group discussions spanned about an hour. The questions focused on the cultural, technical, financial and other challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in tendering for government contracts. Another set of questions concentrated on the survival strategies adopted by women entrepreneurs to deal with the challenges they face in their attempt to participate in public procurement. The identity of the respondents in the in-depth interviews was concealed by using the numbers 1 to 30. Content analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section presents and discusses the research findings.

4.1 Challenges hindering women's participation in government procurement processes

The study's findings revealed that women entrepreneurs are not accorded the same opportunities as their male counterparts in terms of the training and skills acquisition required to successfully bid for and secure a government tender. This sentiment was echoed in both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. The results revealed that women entrepreneurs had limited access to the financial resources, equipment and physical facilities required to supply goods and services that meet the expected quality standards. In addition, they lacked the managerial and technical competencies necessary to successfully bid for government contracts. The respondents also noted that the government prefers to issue tenders to established businesses, most of which are owned by male entrepreneurs. They lamented that tenders are issued to people who are known to politicians. Finally, the results indicated that the tendering process is a complex, burdensome and expensive process. This has stifled women's participation in public procurement. The following statements by the respondents support these findings:

Respondent 6 noted that:

"We are excluded from training programmes and workshops where most male entrepreneurs are equipped with skills and information needed for them to successfully tender for government contracts".

This respondent implied that women entrepreneurs are not included in the government training programmes and workshops where male entrepreneurs acquire the skills required to successfully tender for government contracts. This is in line with extant literature. The International Labour Organisation (2017:1) notes that policies and legislation in some

countries are poorly implemented to the extent that women entrepreneurs are excluded from the training and skills acquisition needed to secure government tenders.

The results from both the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed that women entrepreneurs lack adequate financial resources to supply quality goods and services. As a result, bidding for government tenders is expensive for women entrepreneurs. A respondent in a focus group discussion commented that:

“Women entrepreneurs lack the needed amount of money to order and deliver goods and services to the government. In the end, the contracts are often taken by big companies which have the financial resources”.

This response indicates that women entrepreneurs have inadequate financial resources to meet the requirements of government contracts. Consequently, most, if not all government tenders are granted to large companies that have the financial capability to deliver the goods and services. These results concur with the existing literature. Ellis *et al.* (2005:22), Amega and Nyang’au (2017:213) and Mohammed (2019:40) posit that women entrepreneurs lack the financial wherewithal to successfully carry out government contracts. The value of some government tenders is too large for women entrepreneurs to handle, and as a result, they are excluded from bidding for and securing such contracts.

Closely related to the lack of financial resources is the lack of the equipment and physical facilities required to bid for and secure government contracts. Government tender evaluation committees have to ensure that a bidder has the required equipment, machinery and sometimes buildings to successfully execute a contract. All the respondents in the in-depth interviews noted that access to equipment and physical facilities was a major challenge. The same sentiments were expressed in the focus group discussions. For example, in the in-depth interview with respondent 10, she lamented that:

“As women entrepreneurs, access to equipment, machinery, and other physical facilities is a major challenge as we are small business owners. For some tenders, we are required to state the equipment and machinery that we have in order to successfully deliver the contract”.

The respondent indicates that the participation of women entrepreneurs in public procurement is hindered by the lack of equipment, machinery and other physical facilities. This observation concurs with the International Trade Centre’s (2014:v) assertion that a lack

of equipment and physical facilities are obstacles to women's ability to bid for and secure government contracts.

The results also indicated that women entrepreneurs lack the managerial and technical competencies required to deliver government contracts. It emerged from the focus group discussions that women business owners lack experiences in running businesses as well as bidding for public contracts. For example, a respondent in a focus group discussion stated that:

"Women entrepreneurs do not have the competence and experience of managing businesses. Also, some contracts need one to have the technical know-how, but we do not have that. Some big businesses have been bidding for government tenders for a long time and have acquired the experience. However, we do not have that experience. Hence, we struggle to bid for and secure public contracts".

This quotation shows that women are struggling to bid for and secure government contracts due to a lack of managerial experience and competencies. They also fall short of the technical knowledge required in some contracts. Since women rarely bid for government contracts due to various obstacles, their experience of the tendering process is limited. These results concur with Basheka (2018:89) who argues that women entrepreneurs do not have adequate managerial and technical competencies to deliver the goods and services required by the government.

In the focus group discussions, it emerged that women entrepreneurs have limited access to information about government contracts and tendering procedures. The language used in the tendering process is also difficult for them to understand. In addition, completing tender documents is very difficult for women entrepreneurs, especially those with limited education. One needs to be conversant with the technical jargon of the trade under which the tender falls. The tendering process is also burdensome and expensive. All the participants in the focus group discussions agreed with this observation, with one noting that:

"We have a problem of not getting information about government contracts and how to bid for the tenders. We also find it difficult to complete tender documents, because of the language they use in the documents. The whole process of tendering is difficult and expensive for us. We also do not get feedback as to why we could not win in the previous tenders. So, we continue making the same mistakes".

The respondent indicated that women entrepreneurs are ignorant of the government tender process and lack information about tenders they should bid for. The Kenya Private Sector Alliance (2018:12) also argues that women lack access to information regarding public contracts and the tender process. Moreover, the tendering process is burdensome for women entrepreneurs as the tendering language is difficult to understand. This is in line with Korir and Wanambiro (2017:817) who argue that women entrepreneurs are not well acquainted with the tendering language and face challenges in preparing tender documents.

The government gives preferential treatment to large and well-established businesses, most of which are owned by male entrepreneurs. Women-owned businesses are smaller in terms of size, income, profits and number of workers. Therefore, women entrepreneurs find it difficult to bid for and win large government tenders. The majority (26 out of 30) of the respondents that participated in in-depth interviews indicated that women-owned businesses are discriminated against in public procurement. For example, respondent 29 commented that:

“The government prefers to issue tenders to large businesses, most of which are owned by men. Women-owned businesses are small such that they cannot be awarded large government contracts. Therefore, as women, we feel discriminated against in public procurement”.

This statement shows that the government gives preference to established businesses, most of which are owned by men. Therefore, women entrepreneurs feel that they are discriminated against in the public procurement process. Rimmer (2017:16) observes that women-owned businesses tend to be smaller than those run by male entrepreneurs, in terms of size, revenue, profitability and number of employees. The DCED (2017:18) notes that governments prefer to issue tenders to established, larger businesses that have the capability to deliver the required goods and services. This acts as a discriminatory barrier to women-owned businesses.

4.2 Strategies adopted by women entrepreneurs to secure government tenders

The results indicate that women entrepreneurs have adopted various strategies to secure government tenders. Most (25 out of 30) of the respondents that participated in in-depth interviews noted that they partner with male entrepreneurs with established businesses. This was also noted during the focus group discussions. For example, respondent 23 commented that:

“For us to survive we partner with male entrepreneurs with established businesses. The government, it looks like, has respect for established businesses owned by male entrepreneurs”.

This finding is in agreement with the results of a study conducted by Aneke *et al.* (2017: 45) which revealed that men bid for government contracts while female entrepreneurs work in the background. Therefore, women entrepreneurs find it difficult to tender for some government contracts without the backing of male entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurs also struggle to secure government contracts due to their lack of financial resources to deliver on the contract. It emerged from the focus group discussions that women entrepreneurs pool their financial resources and tender for government contracts as cooperatives or partners. Respondent 16 noted that:

“As women, we pool our financial resources together and tender for government contracts. We do this to deal with the problem of lack of adequate financial resources”.

This quotation reveals that women entrepreneurs are in a better position when they pool their resources as this assists them in meeting the financial obligations of the tendering requirements. It consequently enhances their chances of securing government tenders.

Women entrepreneurs have lobbied the government to seriously consider their plight regarding government tenders. This could be addressed by developing and implementing a legal and policy framework that enhances women's participation in public procurement. Respondent 7 commented:

“We have asked the government to seriously consider us in the tendering process for government contracts through the implementation of relevant policies that help us to get government contracts”.

This quotation shows that women entrepreneurs have taken steps to lobby the government to enhance their participation in public procurement. Basheka (2018:99) notes that governments should develop policies that guide them in addressing gender disparities in public procurement. Thus, legal and policy frameworks are important in promoting women entrepreneurs' participation in public procurement.

Women entrepreneurs have also created networks to share information on general business issues, including public procurement. The majority of the respondents indicated that

networks assist them in obtaining such information. For example, a respondent noted during a focus group discussion that:

“We have created networks of men and women entrepreneurs for sharing information on business in general, including public tenders”.

This finding is in line with extant literature. Aneke *et al.* (2017:45) note that women entrepreneurs create networks for information sharing on business trends. Such information may also include public procurement.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In entrepreneurship, challenges are converted into opportunities in order to promote business growth. In the same vein, the challenges confronting women entrepreneurs require strategies to create opportunities that will enhance women's involvement in public contracts. Given the evidence of gender-based discrimination in public procurement, the Government of Zimbabwe should develop and implement policies that enhance women's participation in government contracts. It is recommended that a certain percentage of government contracts should be set aside for women entrepreneurs. Gender-based inequality can also be addressed by the formation of women organisations or associations for women entrepreneurs to lobby the government to increase their participation in the country's procurement space.

With regard to limited access to financial resources, government funding needs to be extended to women entrepreneurs who seek to participate in public procurement. To address the lack of information about public tenders, the government should provide such information on the websites of procuring entities and through newspapers and other means. Workshops and training programmes on public procurement should include women entrepreneurs so that they are equipped with the critical knowledge, skills and the technical know-how required in the tendering process.

In terms of lack of access to equipment, machinery and other physical facilities, the government should cluster women entrepreneurs and provide them with the necessary equipment and machinery. Alternatively, women could consider leasing rather than purchasing. Women can use their clusters to bid for and secure government contracts. Such a strategy would create a diversified, talented group of women entrepreneurs with the required skills and technical know-how. The tendering language is difficult for women entrepreneurs to comprehend and it is recommended that tender processes and documents

should be presented in simple language that is easy to understand. Women entrepreneurs fall short of many public tender requirements. Hence, it is critical that they work towards meeting specific tender requirements to ensure that they deliver as per government expectations. This includes familiarising themselves with the government tendering processes and acquiring the necessary training and technical know-how. They should, therefore, not wait for the government to do everything for them.

6. CONCLUSION

The study explored the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in securing government tenders and the strategies adopted to address these challenges. Empirical evidence was collected from women entrepreneurs operating businesses in the capital city of Harare, Zimbabwe. The study's results indicated that women entrepreneurs are excluded from government workshops and training programmes on public procurement. They lack the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies to carry out government contracts. The findings further revealed that women entrepreneurs face gender discrimination in the public procurement process; that women business owners have limited access to the equipment, machinery and other physical facilities required to successfully carry out government contracts; and that the government seems to favour large and established businesses at the expense of small businesses owned by women in issuing tenders. It is thus recommended that training and workshops be held for women entrepreneurs; funding be provided by the government; and that women entrepreneurs be clustered and provided with machinery, equipment, physical facilities and technical knowledge. It is also recommended that the government needs to formulate and implement policies that address gender discrimination.

The study explored a previously neglected research area on women in business. A limitation was that it was a case study and that data was only gathered in the city of Harare. The findings thus cannot be generalised to other towns and cities of Zimbabwe as each is unique. Further studies could explore the same topic in other Zimbabwean cities and also examine how the government promotes women's participation in public procurement.

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