

Factors Influencing Uptake of Government Procurement Opportunities By Vulnerable Groups In Kenyan County Governments: (A Case Study of Laikipia County Government)

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Abstract: *Vulnerable groups lack access to resources useful for their survival. In worse situations they are subjected to prejudice or bias. As members of a vulnerable group, women, the youth and persons with disabilities feel excluded from government procurement opportunities. The aim of the study was to evaluate the factors affecting uptake of government procurement opportunities for vulnerable groups in Kenyan County Governments. The specific objectives of the study were to examine how information availability affects uptake of government procurement opportunities, assess the effect of availability of funds on uptake of government procurement opportunities and to ascertain the effect of tendering process on uptake of government procurement opportunities by vulnerable groups in Laikipia County. The study relied on primary data collected by use of questionnaires which were administered to a sample of 46 respondents that included procurement officers in the procurement department and officials from each of 13 listed vulnerable groups in Laikipia County. Quantitative techniques were used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics used included mean, frequency and percentages. This was done with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The results were presented in tables and graphs for ease comprehension followed by interpretation and discussion of findings. The study concluded that improved information techniques mostly through the internet for buying goods and services using modern quality standards and business practices in the government can help improve the efficiency of special group's suppliers as they compete for government contracts with big players. The study recommends that accountability should be there to ensure government is held responsible for its decisions and actions.*

Keywords: *Tendering, Vulnerable group, Youth, Target group, Reservation, Uptake of Government Procurement Opportunities, Vulnerable Groups, County Governments, Kenya, Laikipia County*

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I. Introduction

Participation of vulnerable groups in public procurement is an important function of any government (Baker, 2011). The sheer magnitude of vulnerable groups in procurement outlays has a great impact on the economy and needs to be well managed. Indeed, in all countries, estimates of the financial activities of government procurement by the youth are believed to be in the order of 10%-30 % of gross national product (Routledge & Lomdon, 2014). Many governments now practice gender mainstreaming when designing national budgets to make sure national economic planning pays adequate attention to the unique challenges of women, youth and persons living with disabilities for economic empowerment. In an acknowledgment of the fact that expanding entrepreneurial activity among all sections of society is a key driver of economic growth, many international development banks are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial in their outlook and channeling an ever increasing proportion of their portfolios through enterprise funds and soft loans to commercial banks for lending to youth and women, rather than through traditional development grants (Ketchen, 2014). The role of progressive legislation in empowering women in accessing public procurement opportunity has proven successful around the world (Ketchen, 2014). Governments in the 21st century are under increasing pressure to use more effective and efficient social procurement practices to deliver services and achieve development goals. Empowerment programmes organized at the national and international level are increasingly targeting the youth and women to make sure national economic planning pays adequate attention to the unique challenges of vulnerable groups (Mentzer, 2011). These vulnerable populations are more likely to be overlooked by government programmes, less likely to receive training in business skills (Ketchen, 2014). In acknowledgment of the fact that expanding entrepreneurial activities among all sections of society is a key driver of economic growth, many international development banks are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial in their outlook and channeling an ever increasing proportion of their portfolios through enterprise funds and soft loans to commercial banks for lending to youth and women, rather than through traditional development grants (Ogola, 2008). The growing social entrepreneurship sector which taps practical and creative business approaches in solving pressing social and development problems have been equally instrumental around the world in creating

opportunity for women, youth and the vulnerable (Ogula, 2008). In this era of globalization, generating economic growth in countries, while reducing poverty is a fundamental development challenge (Thai, 2009).

To ensure that the contribution of micro enterprises to key sub sectors and national economies is maximized and to ensure the poor are not left out of the market development, access to finance, business services, improved inputs, a conducive enabling environment that facilitates rather than inhibits participation in public procurement is crucial. The Youth have the potential to accelerate productivity growth, but left idle, can represent a risk to social stability and in the longer term a risk to development of the nation's economy. Ensuring that youths are successfully integrated into the economy through procurement will improve Kenya's competitiveness, raise household incomes, reduce poverty, and create a circle of investment and growth (Ketchen, 2014). Women are the backbone of rural economies in Kenya and Africa as a whole. To fight poverty in Kenya, women need to be accepted and supported through funds like Uwezo and provision of capacity building and training in functional business areas with the ultimate goal of promoting the social and economic status of women, as they constitute a vulnerable social category that is critical in sustainable development endeavors. Unequal procurement opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty and gain more options to improve their lives.

Research shows that, regardless of inequalities that persist in the way paid and unpaid work is divided between women and men, women remain the sole caregivers despite limited access to resources (Fernandez, 2014). In fact women's empowerment in public procurement is a matter of advancing women's human rights (Ketchen, 2009). Lack of employable and entrepreneurial skills, are some of the most crucial problems facing communities of people with disability and society at large to be included in public procurement. As a result people with disability are generally excluded from public procurement thereby hampering their overall economic independence. Though there exist various programs initiated by government and corporate organization for improving the skills levels of the general work force, little attention has been given to the benefit of empowerment particularly through public procurement. Some who have acquired vocational training are not equipped with the right entrepreneurial skills required to enhance competitiveness for decent employment, job creation, social inclusion and poverty reduction spurring economic and professional independence while making optimum use of available resources (Fernandez, 2014).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The youth constitute the generation that has lived through the greatest social, political, intellectual, scientific and technological transformation in modern history (McWilliams & Siegel, 2009). This exerts its own unique pressures, which, coupled with crime, drug abuse and moral corruption creates a series of challenges (Maloni & Brent, 2000). However, it has been recognized that established small youth and women enterprises have faced unique tendering problems, which have affected their growth and profitability, hence diminishing their ability to contribute effectively to sustainable development through public procurement policy that caters for all groups in society to ensure a level play-ground for potential suppliers (Knudsen, 2013). Provisions of the PPDA Act have failed to meet the anticipations set by the government whereby few groups have benefited from the plan. Additionally, a number of problems have, been cited by the special groups. These include lack of access to information, lack of funding, poor tendering process and lack of training. The success of public procurement is highly influenced by policies undertaken by the government. An inefficient regulatory and inappropriate institutional structure has also been a major constraint to tender accessibility. Gituro and Awino (2014) noted that the government policy of allocating at least 30% of all public tenders to vulnerable groups had not been realized especially at county level. They recommended for a study on why such groups were not able to access tendering opportunities. The Kenyan government implemented PPDA Act whereby 30% of government procurement budget was preferred for youth, women and persons with disabilities. Therefore, this study sought to determine the factors affecting access to procurement opportunities for vulnerable groups in County governments in Kenya.

1.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study were;

1. To examine the effects of information availability on accessibility of government procurement opportunities for vulnerable groups in Laikipia County Government.
2. To assess the effect of availability of funds on the accessibility of government procurement opportunities for vulnerable groups in Laikipia County Government
3. To identify how tendering process affects accessibility of government procurement opportunities for vulnerable groups in Laikipia County Government,
4. To determine the effect of training on the accessibility of government procurement opportunities for vulnerable groups in Laikipia County Government.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was based on two theories, namely the transaction theory and the agency theory.

2.2 Transaction cost theory

Transaction cost theory tries to explain why companies exist and expand or source out activities to the external environment. The theory supposes that companies try to minimize the costs of exchanging resources with the environment, and that companies try to minimize the bureaucratic costs of exchanges. Companies are therefore weighing the costs of exchanging resources with the environment, against the bureaucratic costs of performing activities in-house. The theory sees institutions and market as different possible forms of organizing and coordinating economic transactions. When external transaction costs are higher than the company's internal bureaucratic costs, it will grow because it is able to perform its activities more cheaply, than if the activities were performed in the market. However, if the bureaucratic costs for coordinating the activity are higher than the external transaction costs, the company downsizes. According to Williamson (2009) a transaction cost occurs when goods or services are transferred across a technologically separable interface. Therefore, transaction costs arise every time a product or service is being transferred from one stage to another, where new sets of technological capabilities are needed to make the product or service.

2.3 Agency theory

According to Ogola (2008) agency theory explains how to best organize relationships in which one party determines the work while another party does the work. In this relationship, the principal hires an agent to do the work, or to perform a task the principal is unable or unwilling to do. For example, in corporations, the principals are the shareholders of a company, delegating to the agent, that is, the management of the company, to perform tasks on their behalf. Agency theory assumes that both the principal and the agent are motivated by self-interest. This assumption of self-interest dooms agency theory to inevitable inherent conflicts. Thus, if both parties are motivated by self-interest, agents are likely to pursue self-interested objectives that deviate and even conflict with the goals of the principal. Yet, agents are supposed to act in the sole interest of their principals.

2.3 Empirical Review

Procurement essentially encompasses the whole process of acquiring property and or services. It begins when an agency has identified a need and decided on its procurement requirement. Procurement continues through the processes of risk assessment, seeking and evaluating alternative solutions, contract award, delivery of and payment for the property and or services and, where relevant, the ongoing management of a contract and consideration of options related to the contract. Procurement also extends to the ultimate disposal of property at the end of its useful life (Waters, 2004). Sound public procurement policies and practices are among the essential elements of good governance. Otieno (2004) notes that irregular procurement activities in public institutions provide the biggest loophole through which public resources are misappropriated. Thai (2009) argues that the basic principles of good procurement practice include accountability, where effective mechanisms must be in place in order to enable procuring entities spend the limited resources carefully, knowing clearly that they are accountable to members of the public; competitive supply, which requires the procurement be carried out by competition unless there are convincing reasons for single sourcing; and consistency, which emphasizes the equal treatment of all bidders irrespective of race, nationality or political affiliation. Government procurement can be a politically sensitive process. The size of the government bids coupled with the fact that it involves public funds means that the citizens of any country should share these bids equitably (Brent, 2014). In Kenya, the government has allocated financial resources to empower youth and women. The principles of Uwezo Fund are representation, accountability, accessibility and spurring of economic growth. Representation ensures that the inclusion of all Kenyans including women, youth and persons with disabilities, elected parliamentary representatives and respective government officials. Accountability ensures government is held responsible to the citizens for its decisions and actions. It also aims at guaranteeing accessibility at the lowest level of engagement and for the largest category of recipients using a simple, structured and least cost approach. Effective public procurement systems are systems that are defined as offering a high level of transparency, accountability and value for money in the application of a procurement budget. They are critical to poverty reduction. Hence, all parties in the development process must have a vested interest in promoting this critical pillar of good governance: and to do so, in the context of an open macro-economic framework that promotes open competition, the free functioning of markets and the allocation of resources based on comparative advantages (Thai, 2009). To ensure the contribution of micro enterprises to key sub sectors and national economies is maximized and to ensure the poor are not left out of the market development, access to finance, business services, improved inputs, a conducive enabling environment that facilitates rather than inhibits participation in public procurement is crucial. The Youth have the potential to accelerate

productivity and growth, but if left idle, can represent a risk to social stability and in the longer term a risk to development of the nation's economy. Ensuring that youths are successfully integrated into the economy through procurement will improve Kenya's competitiveness, raise household incomes, reduce poverty, and create a circle of investment and growth (Ketchen, 2014). To fight poverty in Kenya, women need to be accepted and supported through funds like Uwezo and provision of capacity building and training in functional business areas with the ultimate goal of promoting the social and economic status of women, as they constitute a vulnerable social category that is critical in sustainable development endeavors. Unequal procurement opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift them from poverty and gain more options to improve their lives. Research shows that, regardless of inequalities that persist in the way paid and unpaid work is divided between women and men, women remain the sole caregivers despite limited access to resources (Fernandez, 2014). In fact women's empowerment in public procurement is a matter of advancing women's human rights (Ketchen 2009). Lack of employable and entrepreneurial skills are some of the most crucial problems facing communities of people with disability and society at large to be included in public procurement. As a result people with disability are generally excluded from public procurement thereby hampering their overall economic independence.

2.2.1 Information availability

Most public procurement systems address in one way or another issue of how to provide information support for the domestic supplier base (Lavassani, 2008). Improved information techniques mostly through the internet for buying goods and services using modern quality standards and business practices in the government can help improve the efficiency of special group's suppliers as they compete for government contracts with big players. Such improvements in information access can enhance trade prospects by making these suppliers more acceptable vendors to global business partners (Murray, 2017). Information and communication technology has been increasingly used by governments in the acquisition of goods and services, the allocation of contracts to bidders and in contract management. The benefits of information and communication technology are many and include improvements in market access and competition, promotion of integrity, reduced information costs; easier access to information, and increased transparency and accountability, among others. In this context, information availability also has the capacity to prevent and reduce the opportunities for corruption in the different stages of public procurement. For these contract arrangements to operate successfully, the participating procuring entities must have ownership and commitment to the process. This can best be achieved by their involvement in all contracting activities: from production of specifications through to contract award and performance monitoring. In practice for each contract, only one entity was responsible for letting the contract. This will usually but not necessarily be the largest purchaser. Whoever undertakes the process must agree on the contracting decisions with the other participants. For the framework arrangements an estimated quantity of requirements to be purchased during the contract period must be made known to the tenderers. Also, there should be a facility for the contract/arrangement to provide choice of product or service if this is required by individual procuring entities. The process will not work well if standards are dictated to individual purchasers. Variable prices for different purchase quantities, different geographical locations and different service levels may be established. However, for this arrangement to work there must be a clear commitment to use the contracts by the participating entities.

2.2.2 Availability of funds

The development of small and medium enterprises run by specialized groups is very important to the national economy. Public procurement can be an important source of business for vulnerable groups (Mudscap, 2017). However, access to public sector contracts by smaller entities is often seen as a problem, at national and global level, for many in the sector. While sustaining development impacts is key, it is the majority at grassroots that accelerate and sustain poverty reduction efforts (Ogola, 2008) hence the need to target the rural poor to achieve overall economic growth by funding them to be able to access public procurement. Snider (2014) argues that the high proportion of women in the poverty group in the third world makes efforts at development fruitless. This is because the investment threshold for the third world has pushed far above the current levels of funding to a point where local level development is the only feasible alternative solution (Gomez, 2009) development efforts that centre on sustainability must target the grassroots majority. The Kenyan government has had an uphill task for youth and women groups to play in the big-ticket leagues of public procurement as they may not have the financial wherewithal. Fortunately, there are a host of financial instruments being offered by various institutions, including local purchase order financing and invoice discounting. There is also the Uwezo Fund and the youth and women enterprise fund, yet processing an invoice can take months. The best thing about getting a government contract is that you will get paid. The downside is it could take a while (Ogola, 2008). Government procurement can be a politically sensitive process. The size of Government bids coupled with the fact that it involves public funds means that the citizens of any country should share these bids equitably Brent (2014).

2.2.3 Tendering Process

Bodley (2017) defines a tender as an unconditional order made by one to another to enter into the contract or transaction of goods or services at certain specified cost. Various organizations issue notices for their needs of specified goods or services from other businesses that they would require in a certain period, which is known as Invitation to Tender. Tendering system refers to that process that defines the guidelines through which this the tendering activities are conducted and managed. Tendering is one of the core components of purchasing and supplies management which is used in sourcing and acquisition of the necessary goods and services. In an effort to enhance efficiency of the procurement function, organizations make use of the tendering system to reduce procurement cycle time and provision or quality management information. Tendering also enables organizations to be able to identify reliable suppliers who are able to meet the products or services required according to the specifications (Lysons & Farrington, 2014). There are two main methods that are used in tendering which are e-tendering and the tender box method. The bidding organization demonstrate their capability in handling the assignments indicated in the tender and their costing for each of them. The main criteria used in selection or the winning bid involves identifying who among the bidders is able to supply the required products or services according to the specifications and at the lowest cost. However, it is not always that the least bidder gets the job, in some circumstances, other factors are considered such as reliability and also previous assignments done are used as an influence (Brulhart & Trionfetti, 2009). The use of a tendering has a lot of benefits to the organization. One of the key benefits is that it provides fast and accurate pre-qualification and evaluation, which enables the rejection of suppliers that fail to meet the tender qualification. It also helps in reduction of labour intensive tasks of receipt, recording and distribution of tender submission (Evenett, 2015). The tendering process creates fairness for all parties and enhances transparency levels. Though the process is very bureaucratic, it encourages competition from the bidders and there is a high chance of getting the best offer and reliable supplier. Organizations in the retail sector also make use of the tendering system in identifying potential suppliers of the various products for resale purposes or provision of services. Finally, there are the public interest groups which perform a dual role of remote monitoring of procurement performance by procuring entities and a direct advocacy role for the adoption of best practices in public procurement. An efficient and effective system must develop institutional inter-linkages between all interested parties and structured mechanisms for periodic exchange of information on different aspect of systemic performance in order to continuously infuse the system with best practices.

2.2.4 Training

Public procurement policy makers recognize the importance of the role of vulnerable groups in the economy, including the importance of their participation in the public procurement market (McCrudden, 2015). Public procurement can help in the development of an effective and efficient vulnerable groups sector by providing appropriate opportunities for vulnerable groups which are mostly run by special groups to demonstrate their skills and capabilities, including the purchase of goods and services which allows vulnerable groups to develop and demonstrate innovative goods and services (McCrudden, 2015). In the past, procurement was considered mainly as an operational activity rather than as a key strategic function in the business planning process. Public purchasers concentrated on compliance with rules and procedures set down in guidelines, regulations or EU directives to seek value for money outcomes from procurement while observing necessary standards of probity and ethics (Thai, 2009).

2.3 Summary and gaps

Traditionally, procurement has relayed much on the established vendors, literature highly recognize procurement as an increasingly central instrument to ensure efficient tendering processes corruption-free management of public resources, strategic profession and ensuring that youths are successfully integrated into the economy through procurement rather than simply an administrative function but all this lack emphasizes to involve special groups in the procedures and its importance. Organizations need information to be able to take risks and apply for public tenders; they should react quickly to changes in the environment. There is no study which has been comprehensively done to determine the factors affecting vulnerable groups' ability to access public tenders especially at county government level. Therefore, knowledge gap existed which the findings of this study bridged.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

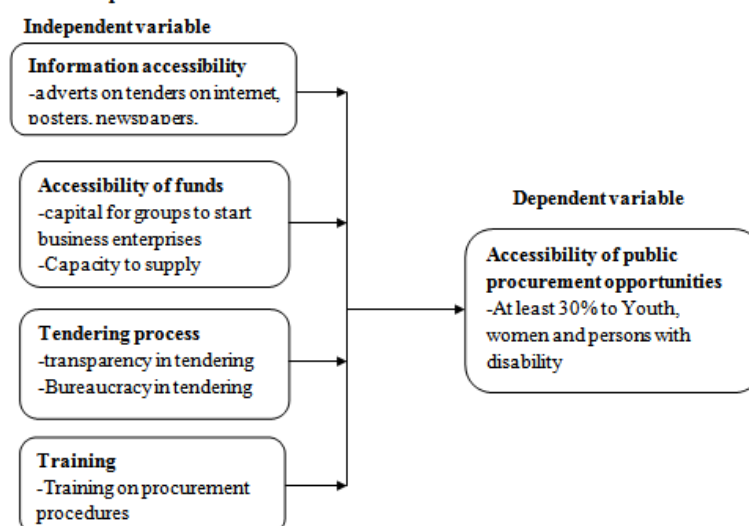


Figure 1 Uptake of government procurement opportunities to vulnerable groups

III. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study used descriptive design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) descriptive design was appropriate because it will entail collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of subjects of the study. Kothari (2004) notes that descriptive design is concerned with describing, recording, analyzing and reporting conditions that exist or existed. The importance of descriptive study is that it provided information which could be used as basic for important decision that is to be made; it also provides an essential facts and understanding about the nature of anything.

3.2 Target Population

The study targeted 7 employees in the procurement department of Laikipia County Government Nyahururu office, 3 officials from each of the 13 list of suppliers under the category of vulnerable groups making a total of 46 respondents

Table 1 Target population

Department	Population
Procurement staff	7
Women groups	18
Youth groups	15
Groups for persons with Disability	6
TOTAL	46

Source: Laikipia County Government office, Nyahururu (2017)

3.3 Sampling Technique and sample size

The study employed census sampling procedure. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) where the population is small, then it is not be advisable to sample and introduce sampling errors but the researcher should adopt a census. According to Kothari (2004) sampling is the process by which a relatively small number of individuals, objects or events is selected in order to find out something about the entire population from which it was selected. Census fulfills the requirements of efficiency, representativeness, reliability and flexibility. In this stud all the 46 respondents were involved in the study.

3.4 Data collection procedures

The main research instrument used in the study was closed ended questionnaire. This enabled the researcher to obtain needed information on the study objectives. In addition, secondary data was obtained from journals, reports and other resourceful material. Validity of the instrument was established by seeking consultation with the supervisor who checked the framing and construction of the questions. Reliability was achieved by piloting the questionnaire at Nyandarua Sub-county office, Oljororok. The researcher randomly identified 5 employees at the procurement section and administered the questionnaire during piloting. A brief

introduction was made to the respondents before administering the questionnaires with the aim of explaining the questionnaires. Confidentiality was assured to the respondents through the letters of transmittal that was attached to the questionnaires.

3.5 Data analysis procedure

Primary data was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaire was closed ended. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) the closed or structured questions are usually easier to analyze. The quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using the excel computer package. The descriptive statistics format was used to summarize and organize the data in order to generalize and infer relationships.

IV. Results And Findings

4.1 Accessibility to information

The study sought to ascertain whether the county government tendering information was accessible to the vulnerable groups willing to supply. The findings show that 98% of the respondents indicated that county government tendering information was easily accessible to the potential suppliers from the vulnerable groups. This revealed that tendering information of Laikipia County government was readily available to the suppliers. It was also established that 56% of the respondents said county government tendering information was available and the information on county government open tenders was generally available to the vulnerable groups that wished to be suppliers but met the requirements as outlined in the PPDA (2015) Act provisions. It was further revealed that 60% of the open tenders for the county government were posted in the newspapers, 14% on the county website, 5% using posters, 9% in the social media while 12% of the open tenders were broadcast in public barazas. Therefore, the county government had various channels for communicating the information on open tenders to not only the vulnerable groups but also to the other potential suppliers. Results on the extent to which the vulnerable groups were able to access information on the county government open tenders showed that 53% of the respondents reported that information on open tenders was accessible to a moderate extent. Generally, the vulnerable groups were accessible to county government tender information. Moreover, majority of the respondents comprising 55% of the total agreed that the county government had to a moderate extent put in place measures to ensure that the central government directive of giving 30% of all public tenders to vulnerable groups was adhered to. Therefore the information on county government open tenders was generally available to the vulnerable groups that wished to be suppliers and met the requirements as outlined in the PPDA (2015) Act provisions. Lavassani (2008) noted that poor accessibility to tender information by the vulnerable groups affected their ability to access tenders. They further noted that information was an essential tool for the groups wishing to compete for the few tenders on offer.

4.2 Accessibility of Funds

The researcher sought to establish whether the vulnerable groups that were potential suppliers to the county government were required to have minimum cash requirements before being considered for county government tenders. The study findings revealed that the county government required all the suppliers including the vulnerable groups to have a given minimum cash requirement as was indicated by 50% of the respondents compared to 27% who said there were no such requirement and 23% who were not sure of such a requirement. This implies that the county government suppliers including the vulnerable groups were supposed to meet the minimum capital requirement for certain groups of tenders. If the groups did not meet the condition then they could be deemed unable to supply goods, provide services. It is also evident that the youth groups were accessible to the youth fund and loans or the women groups and persons living with disability groups were accessible to loans and financial aid from Uwezo fund to enable them meet the required capital requirement so that they could qualify for county government tenders. 52% of the respondents agreed that the vulnerable groups were accessible to the youth and Uwezo funds which they could use as capital for their groups and be in a position to meet the minimum tendering requirements. Therefore, the vulnerable groups were found to be in a position to raise sufficient capital to be able to meet any capital base requirement for them to qualify for county government tenders. Moreover, the vulnerable groups were protected from competition by the government directive of allocating 30% of public tenders to them and as such the competition with the large, established and non-vulnerable suppliers existed to a very large extent. Therefore, the government directive was found to be effective in cushioning the vulnerable groups' suppliers to the county government. Also 80% of the respondents said that the accessibility to funds from sources like Uwezo fund, Youth fund and others affected their accessibility to county government tenders to a very large extent. Therefore, the researcher observed that without funds from Uwezo and Youth fund, it was difficult for the vulnerable groups to qualify for public tenders where they were required to meet a minimum capital base requirement. Mudscap (2017) in their study established that poor accessibility to funds for vulnerable groups hindered their access to government tenders to a large extent.

4.3 Tendering procedures

The researcher investigated whether the county government had in place effective tendering procedures. 59% of the respondents concurred that the county government had in place effective tendering procedures. This implies that there was a tendering procedure which was being followed by the county government and catered for the needs of vulnerable groups. The findings also show that 61% of the said that county government followed the tendering procedure to award tenders very often. The implication was that the county government had in place a tendering procedure which was followed in the award of public tenders. However, 73% of the respondents pointed out that tendering procedure ranging from tender reception, opening of tenders, evaluation and award affected the vulnerable groups in accessing county government tenders. The findings implied that the accessibility of county government tenders by vulnerable groups was largely affected by the tendering procedures adopted. It is further pointed out that the procurement procedures affected the vulnerable groups to a very large extent. These findings agreed with Bailey (2017) who established that the tendering procedures determined the accessibility to tenders of some groups.

4.4 Training on procurement requirements

The study investigated whether the county government provided suppliers with confidential information pertaining to the supply need. The findings show that 93% of the respondents said that the suppliers among them vulnerable groups were trained on procurement requirements and regulations. In addition, 66% of the respondents observed that the county government occasionally trained the vulnerable groups that supplied to the county government. Therefore, supplier training on the procedures and regulations affecting the procurement/tendering process was done by the county government to ensure they were able to supply as required. Moreover, 53% of the respondents observed that the vulnerable groups were trained on business management. This implies that the majority of vulnerable groups were trained on how to run their groups and manage finances as well as keep records. This gave them ability to compete and acquire public tenders like other suppliers. The researcher required the respondents to indicate the extent which training of vulnerable groups made them have a competitive advantage over other suppliers in competing for tender from the county government. The findings further showed that 61% of the respondents concurred that training the vulnerable groups gave them a competitive advantage to a large extent in acquiring tenders from the county government. The findings implied that training the vulnerable groups was one way of enhancing their capacity to supply as per the county government requirements. Moreover, 65% of the respondents felt that procurement related training to the vulnerable groups enhanced their accessibility to county government tenders to a very large extent. Therefore, accessibility to public tenders can be enhanced by training the suppliers from vulnerable groups. These findings are in agreement with Crudden (2015) whose findings stated that training on how to win government contracts gave the suppliers an edge in getting tenders and other supply contracts.

V. Conclusions And Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the results, the study concluded that improved information techniques can help improve the efficiency of special group's tenderers as they compete for government contracts with big players. Such improvements in information access can enhance trade prospects by making vulnerable suppliers more acceptable vendors to global business partners. Information and communication technology has been increasingly used by county governments in the acquisition of goods and services, allocation of contracts to bidders and in contract management. The benefits of information and communication technology are many and include improvements in market access and competition, promotion of integrity, reduced information costs; easier access to information, and increased transparency and accountability, among others. A high proportion of vulnerable groups make efforts to access funds from Uwezo and Youth fund to enhance their ability to obtain tenders from the county government. This is because the investment threshold for these groups has been pushed far above the current levels of funding to a point where local level development is the only feasible alternative solution. The study also concludes that the tendering process is a core component of purchasing and supplies management which is the vulnerable group can use in sourcing and acquisition of the necessary goods and services. In an effort to enhance efficiency of procurement function, the county government of Laikipia makes use of the tendering system to reduce procurement cycle time and provision of quality management information. Tendering also enables the county government to identify reliable suppliers who are able to meet the products or services required according to the specifications of the public procurement policy. It is also concluded that training the vulnerable groups on procurement procedures, including the importance of their participation in the public procurement market. Public procurement training can help in the development of an effective and efficient procurement sector by providing appropriate opportunities for vulnerable groups to demonstrate their skills and capabilities.

VI. Recommendations

From the findings, several recommendations are made. The size of government bids coupled with the fact that it involves public funds means that the suppliers should share these bids equitably. Accountability should be there to ensure government is held responsible for its decisions and actions. All parties in the development process must have a vested interest in promoting this critical pillar of good governance. The role of progressive legislation in empowering women in accessing public procurement opportunity has proven successful around the world. These vulnerable populations are more likely to be overlooked by government programmes, less likely to receive skills, training and therefore at greater risk of being unemployed and having no source of livelihood. Gender mainstreaming should be practiced when designing budgets to make sure economic planning pays adequate attention to the unique challenges of vulnerable groups' economic empowerment.

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