

Policy Brief

Access to Government Procurement Opportunities and Women Empowerment in Kenya: Policy interventions to bridge Information Gaps

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1. Executive Summary

Public Procurement constitutes a strategic element of any economy. The level of public expenditure, if adequately and strategically managed through a sound procurement process can produce greater economic and social outcomes and impact. The Kenya Government initiated Access to Public Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) programme to facilitate enterprises owned by women, youth and people with disabilities to participate in government procurement opportunities, to economically empower them. This Policy Brief highlights information gaps in the AGPO programme that have undermined its uptake. It presents key findings of a research project that focused on the *effectiveness of the AGPO initiative in enhancing women's participation in public procurement and promoting their economic empowerment*² conducted in 25 counties. A key finding of the research was that the AGPO programme does contribute to women's empowerment. However, there are information gaps and/or misinformation, that prevent many women entrepreneurs from participating in the programme. The Policy Brief offers recommendations on how these gaps can be addressed.

2. Introduction

The role of progressive legislation to empower women to access public procurement opportunities has proven successful worldwide (Orser et al. 2021). The World Bank Report (2022) indicates that many governments practice gender mainstreaming when designing national budgets to ensure national economic planning pays adequate attention to the unique challenges of women's economic empowerment. In Kenya, the AGPO program was initiated in 2013 to economically empower women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) by allocating 30 per cent of all public procurement budget to them (Republic of Kenya, 2015). However, this gender responsive procurement program is yet to reach the 30 per cent target (Hivos, 2017).

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Extant literature has identified several reasons why gender mainstreaming may not achieve its intended objectives. Policy analysts such as Liao et al. (2017) and Loader (2005) argue that small firms are not aware of opportunities to supply to the public sector and have difficulties in finding the information or the right contact person. Loader (2005) adds that small firms often lack knowledge about the tendering process and the correct bidding procedures. This lack of knowledge can lead to women entrepreneurs not only missing out on procurement opportunities but also developing negative perceptions about the public procurement ecosystem *due to misinformation*. Additionally, women entrepreneurs suffer from a lack of feedback on unsuccessful tender bids *which they could use to improve on subsequent tender bids* (ITC, 2014).

3. Study Methodology

The study focused on three categories of women entrepreneurs in 25 counties in Kenya: (i) those registered for AGPO and had been awarded tenders; (ii) those registered and had not won any tenders, and (iii) those who were eligible to register but had not registered for AGPO. The research used a sequential mixed method. The first phase of the study involved a survey of 1591 women entrepreneurs. This was followed by focus group discussions (FGD) with 370 women entrepreneurs to corroborate some of the findings from the quantitative research.

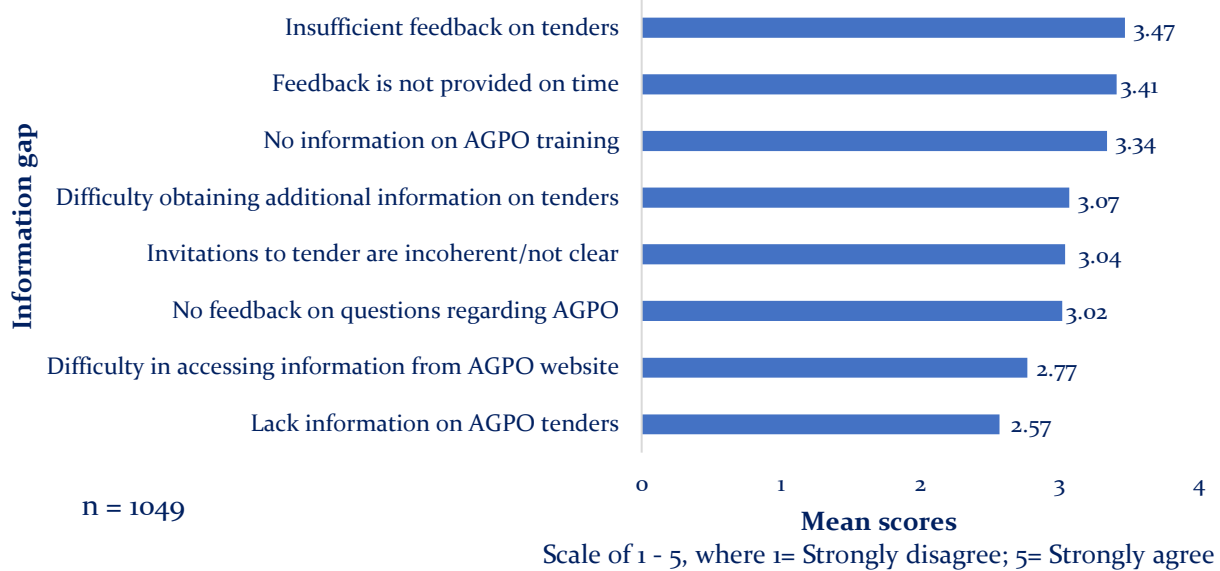
4. Description of the information gaps

The findings showed that one of the key barriers that prevented women entrepreneurs from participating in the AGPO programme was information gaps on tender opportunities and processes (for the AGPO-registered enterprises), and lack of awareness and/or misconceptions about AGPO (for the non-AGPO registered enterprises). The information gaps are summarised below.

4.1 Types of information gaps for AGPO registered women entrepreneurs

The survey findings indicate that for the AGPO registered women entrepreneurs, the information gaps were largely related to insufficient information on the tender opportunities and/or processes. These are summarised in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Types of information gaps for AGPO



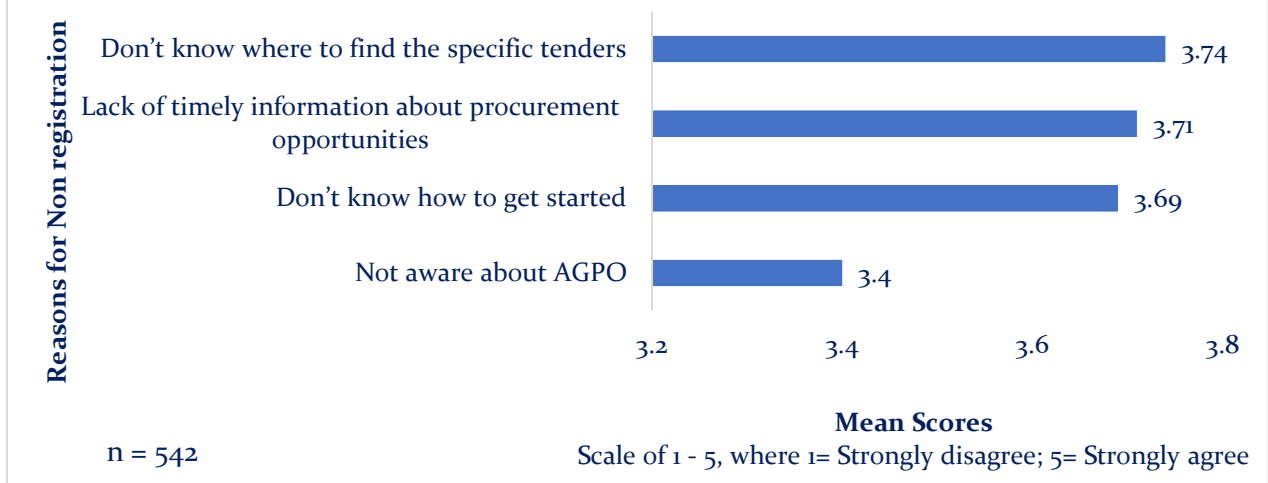
These findings were corroborated by qualitative findings from FGDs:

When you apply for tenders, some institutions respond while others don't. And when they don't respond, you don't know how you fared or what you could improve on next time. When you ask for feedback, they tell you to check in the system. But the system doesn't indicate the reasons why you have not been awarded a tender. It only shows how the bidders were ranked (Busia).

4.2 Information gaps for non-AGPO registered women entrepreneurs

From the survey findings, non-registered women entrepreneurs cited several reasons why they had not registered with AGPO were divided into two categories: lack of awareness and misconception about AGPO. The reasons for not registering due to lack of awareness are summarised in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Non Registration due to lack of information



These findings were corroborated by qualitative findings from FGDs:

I have heard of AGPO but I do not know much about it. I don't even know the opportunities there are, or how I can benefit. I have tried to find out what AGPO is, but whatever they told me I didn't quite understand. So, I just forgot about it (Kisumu).

The reasons for non-registration due to misconceptions about AGPO are summarised in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Reasons for non registration due to misconception

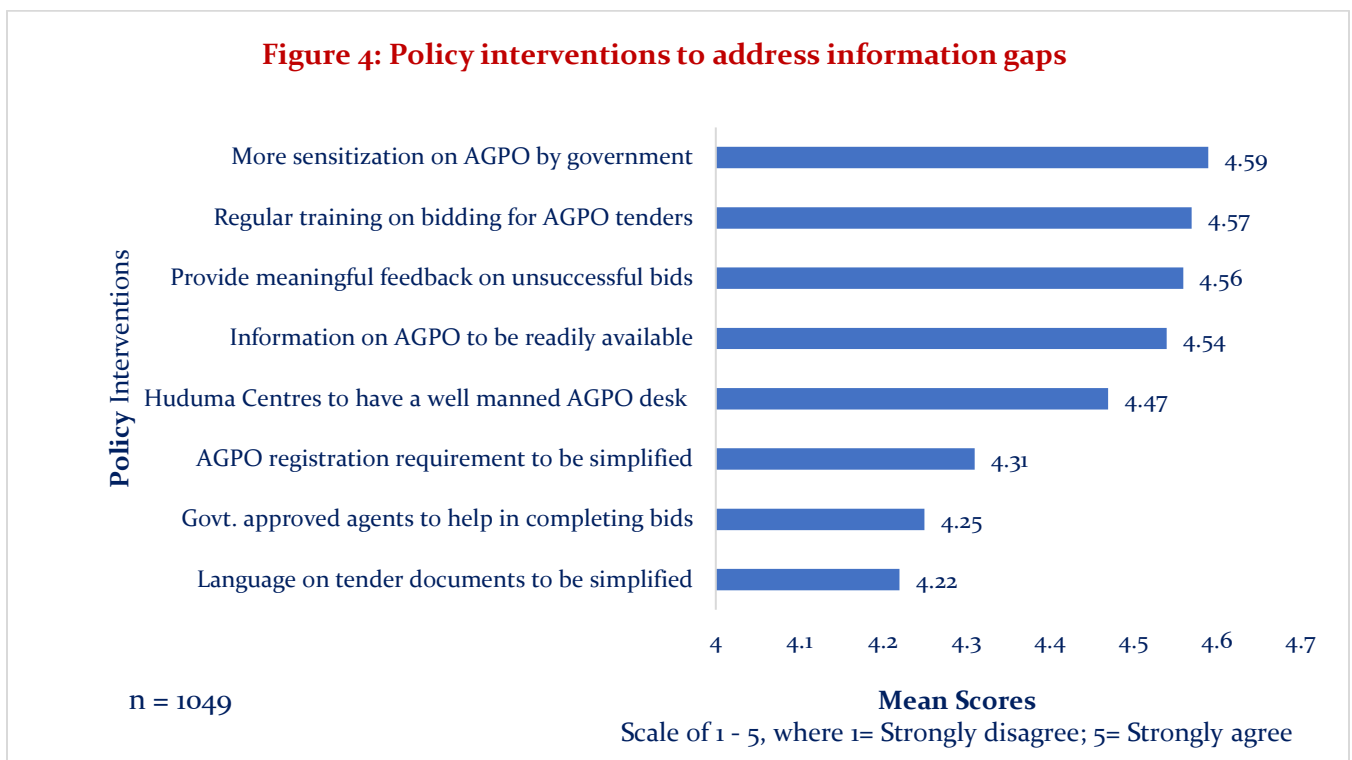


These findings were corroborated by qualitative findings from FGDs:

Although I heard about AGPO in 2017, the stories from my friends discouraged me from registering. They complained a lot about those tenders; that they are not paid on time and have to follow up payments in government offices. So, I opted not to be registered (Trans Nzoia).

5. Policy interventions to address information gaps

Several policy interventions were identified. The most important ones were the *need for more sensitisation campaigns on AGPO by the Government, the need to provide regular training on bidding for AGPO tenders, and the provision of meaningful feedback to unsuccessful bidders*. These findings are summarised in Figure 4 below:



These findings were corroborated by qualitative findings from FGDs:

The procuring entities should give feedback to unsuccessful bidders, so that we can use the information to improve (Kitui).

The government should create more awareness so that we get to know about AGPO. Not all women go to Huduma Centres³. Communication channels like radio, television and seminars can be effectively used to create awareness about AGPO. They could also

³ A Huduma Centre is a Government of Kenya multichannel public service delivery centre that seeks to enhance provision of government services efficiently through a one stop service outlet. There are 52 centres in the country.

use posters or forums like chiefs' barazas and churches to pass on the information (Kisii).

6. Conclusion

Evidence from the research showed that many women entrepreneurs have benefitted from the AGPO programme. However, the findings also showed that others were not registered for AGPO either because they did not have information at all or had inadequate or inaccurate information. For instance, some did not know who was eligible to register, how to register, the tendering process, or the benefits of AGPO. The misconception and/or lack of information about AGPO by a large majority of non-AGPO registered women entrepreneurs suggests the need for the government to sensitise this special group and correct the misinformation thereof. Information on the platform should be available both in English and Kiswahili.

7. Further Reading

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