

Empowering
women through
public procurement



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A woman with dark skin is smiling broadly while looking at a laptop. She is wearing a vibrant orange headwrap with a blue and white patterned band, a pink and white plaid shirt, and a dark skirt with a white polka-dot pattern and a bright pink ruffled hem. She is seated outdoors in front of a wall made of rough, layered wood or bark. The text 'Empowering women through public procurement' is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Empowering women through public procurement



ABSTRACT

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This guide provides governments, procuring entities and other stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women-owned businesses to participate in public procurement markets - offers tools to address these challenges and stimulate increased entrepreneurial activity by women-owned businesses; provides a brief overview of the public procurement objectives of public procurement systems; highlights common challenges faced by women-owned businesses in public procurement markets and discusses techniques to address them; reviews affirmative action policies and programmes to build the capacity of women-owned businesses and to encourage their participation in public procurement; discusses metrics, monitoring and evaluating progress towards policy objectives, as well as enforcing compliance with preferential procurement policies; includes bibliographical references (pp. 64-65).

Descriptors: **Women Entrepreneurs, Public Procurement, Millennium Development Goals, Gender, Developing Countries.**

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Foreword

Government procurement offers a unique, fiscally responsible route to empower women, combat poverty and promote inclusive economic growth. Public procurement accounts for as much as 10–15% of gross domestic product (GDP) in developed countries and over 30% of GDP in developing countries. This translates into trillions of dollars of government spending annually.

To date, however, women entrepreneurs have been largely excluded from this sizeable market due to lack of access to information on bids, understanding of procedures and ability to meet requirements. As both market regulators and participants, governments are in a unique position to change this and benefit from enlarging the pool of potential suppliers.

Investing in women-owned businesses pays dividends in terms of creating jobs and development. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the engines for job growth in the world economy, accounting for nearly 80% of jobs worldwide. Increasing their competitiveness increases their likelihood of success, expansion and job creation. Women entrepreneurs tend to reinvest up to 90% of their earnings in their families and communities, which links inclusive economic growth directly to development.

Inclusive economic growth has proven to be a prerequisite to achieving development goals. In his report, 'A Life of Dignity for All', the United Nations Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon observed, 'Inclusive economic growth with decent employment and decent wages has proven to be a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 1, on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.' Data collected by the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report confirms this observation, showing a positive correlation between women's empowerment, GDP per capita, and human development.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are set to be a cornerstone of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, increasing the relevance of pursuing options through procurement to deliver on development commitments.

Recognizing these important linkages, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and its partners established the Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors in 2010. The Global Platform is a network of policymakers, international organizations, buyers, trade support institutions, women's business associations and women-owned businesses. Network members share the objective of increasing the amount of corporate, government and institutional procurement secured by women vendors, in order to bring greater economic benefit to women and their communities.

As part of the Global Platform, ITC drafted a guide to assist governments with public procurement reform, in order to sensitize them and other stakeholders to the issues women entrepreneurs face in those markets. In December 2013, ITC presented a draft outline of the guide to a group of public procurement experts, women entrepreneurs and representatives of women's business associations who were attending the Africa Regional Workshop: Fostering the Participation of Women Vendors in Procurement Markets. During this meeting, participants provided valuable feedback to ITC on the draft outline and shared many of their experiences with us, all of which helped shape the final draft of this guide.

This guide aims to assist governments and procuring entities conceptualize, develop and implement policies and programmes that will enable women entrepreneurs to participate more fully in public procurement markets. It begins by examining some very basic, but often overlooked questions: What is a women-owned business? How do we identify those businesses? The guide then examines the many barriers and challenges that prevent or discourage women entrepreneurs from entering the public procurement market and presents a range of best practices for overcoming them.

In doing so, the guide calls attention to a very salient point: businesses owned by men and women are different. As a result, to be effective, governments must tailor their procurement reforms accordingly.

Access to public procurement markets is only half the story. Women-owned businesses also require more targeted assistance to help them overcome a history of discrimination and marginalization and succeed in the marketplace. The guide discusses strategies such as margins of preference, reservations and capacity-building programmes used by governments around the world to stimulate participation by women entrepreneurs and other marginalized groups.

This guide draws on a wide range of research, commentaries, treatises, and case studies in the field of public procurement including from Brazil, Chinese Taipei and the European Union, as well as from Africa, where consultations were held.

This guide is part of ITC's work to promote the participation of women entrepreneurs and producers in global value chains and to ensure they enjoy greater economic benefits from international trade. I hope the guide will encourage and assist governments to use public procurement to facilitate the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in their countries.



Arancha González
Executive Director, International Trade Centre

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Keric Chin, a private practice lawyer and legal consultant, is the author of this guide. He based it on his 20 years of cumulative experience as an acquisition professional in the United States Air Force and as a government contracts attorney in both the federal government and private practice. He has advised clients on all facets of government contracts formation, administration, and compliance issues, litigated contract disputes and bid protests, and managed government research and development projects. He recently completed a review of New Zealand's public procurement system for Transparency International New Zealand.

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Meg Jones, ITC Senior Programme Officer, Women and Trade, supervised the writing of this guide, with Vanessa Erogbogbo, ITC Programme Officer Women and Trade. Natalie Domeisen was responsible for editorial management and promotion, Dianna Rienstra acted as editorial consultant, Kristina Golubic created the design and artwork, and Iva Stastny-Brosig conducted the layout. Digital printing was done by Serge Adeagbo and Franco Iacovino.

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------|
| Foreword | v |
| Acknowledgements | vii |
| Abbreviations | xii |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | xiii |
| Promoting gender equality is 'smart economics' | xiii |
| Public procurement – a powerful tool | xiii |
| Defining and understanding the target community | xiv |
| A checklist for action | xiv |
| Stimulating entrepreneurial activity | xv |
| Capacity-building programmes | xvii |
| Measuring progress towards policy objectives | xvii |
| Chapter 1 | |
| PUBLIC PROCUREMENT, A TOOL TO SHAPE SOCIETIES | 1 |
| Why government purchasing affects markets | 2 |
| Competition laws and social regulations shape markets | 2 |
| Purchasing is worth 10–40% of GDP | 3 |
| Public procurement for women – 'smart economics' | 3 |
| Support women, boost national competitiveness | 3 |
| Policies must be gender sensitive | 4 |
| About this guide | 5 |
| Chapter 2 | |
| PUBLIC PROCUREMENT SYSTEMS | 7 |
| An overview of the process | 8 |
| Acquisition planning | 9 |

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

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