

Networking Behaviors of Women Entrepreneurs in Public Procurement in Kampala, Uganda

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ABSTRACT:

Women entrepreneurs play an important role in economic growth and development of a country. Networking behaviors can enhance the participation of women entrepreneurs in public procurement. This paper examined the networking behaviors of women entrepreneurs with regard to public procurement in Kampala, Uganda. A mixed methods approach was adopted using a cross-sectional and survey design, in which 168 survey respondents (managers or owners, or CEOs or any other top administrators of fully or partially owned businesses of women) were reached, as well as 12 key informants representing various associations and agencies responsible for procurement. Results revealed that only 37% of the women entrepreneurs subscribed to membership and business organizations, with those that were not citing lack of information about the organizations and subscription fees among others. Nonetheless, women entrepreneurs were networking with some private sector players about public procurement. Also, only 41% of the female business owners said they had been trained (mainly by PSF, UMA, UWEAL) and connected to new markets. There is need to sensitize women entrepreneurs on the importance of networking, particularly subscription to membership organizations and access to markets so that they benefit more from participating in public procurement in Uganda.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Networking Behaviors, Public Procurement in Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, women represent one third of entrepreneurial activities (Meunier et al., 2017). Women in developed economies own more than 25% of all the business and women businesses in Asia, East Europe, Latin America and Africa are growing rapidly thus women contribute significantly in the worldwide expansion of entrepreneurship (Roy, 2015). Women involvement in entrepreneurship creates new market opportunities for the customers and suppliers as well as creating employment opportunities, supplementing household income and contributing to national economies (ITC, 2014; Roy, 2015). According to the (Hallward-Driemer, 2013; World Bank, 2014a), female owned businesses are usually informal and operate within conservative sectors and female entrepreneurs are largely into small or medium firms (World Bank, 2014a). Although previous studies show a persistent gap between men and women in the level of entrepreneurial activity (Meunier et al., 2017), this gap reduces more with lower income per capita regions. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest gender gap as well as the highest rate of entrepreneurial activity (World Bank, 2014). These high entrepreneurial rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are likely explained by the lower entry costs especially for women into labor market. However, deeper investigations show that a larger share of female than male entrepreneurs tend to be necessity entrepreneurs driven to entrepreneurship due to unemployment (World Bank, 2014).

Much as attempts have been made by governments and policy makers to reduce the gap between male and female entrepreneurial activities, it is still a persistent problem in many countries (Malende et al., 2017).

Some studies on personality attributes blame this imbalance on women's low scores in entrepreneurial characteristics of risk taking, innovativeness, opportunism, self-efficacy, willingness to try and fail, self-confidence (Minniti et al., 2010). Reports by the OECD (2017) and UNCTAD (2018) on female entrepreneurship have emphasized that weak social position and inadequate connection to support networks negatively affect women's entrepreneurial activity. According to Timmons (1999); Timmons & Spinelli, (2009), there is a common understanding that the entrepreneurial networking is a key issue in firms with one to two employees and are unable to achieve their goals alone. There is a need for different kinds of additional resources, social relationships, and interactions among organizations. They need support and resources from external actors such other firms and relatives and friends.

Increasing women and women enterprises participation in public procurement is identified as key transformative avenue for women's entrepreneurship growth, particularly as platform for accessing government markets (BC Basheka & CJ Auriacombe, 2020; UN Women, 2017). This 'baptism' in developed and developing countries is influenced by the global declarations and the drive towards realization of the sustainable development Goals (SDGs) especially the SDG 8 (on decent work and economic growth). Governments worldwide spend \$ 15 trillion dollars in public procurement (ITC, 2014), which is approximately one fifth of global domestic product (GDP). However, despite the availability of public procurement markets, women entrepreneurs still face challenges in accessing procurement contracts and procurement processes tend not to ease successful end results for women (Mohammed, 2019). 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 (ITC, 2014; UN Women, 2017).

Women entrepreneurs are women who start enterprises or business and tactfully and independently manages it, takes risks and boldly faces the challenges with a will to succeed (Santha, 2013). Women entrepreneurship refers to an economic activity of those women who think of a business enterprise, initiate and organize by bringing together a set of factors of production to operate and manage a business enterprise (Santha, 2013).

Historically, women have been associated small scale and home-based businesses to support their husbands in their household incomes. In the recent times, women have given up their jobs to become entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors of several economies across the globe (Roy, 2015). The importance of women entrepreneurship towards economic development has been widely recognized through numerous studies (Meunier et al., 2017).

In the past two decades, research has developed considerably on women entrepreneurs and their networking relations specifically on the social networks. Competition between home responsibilities and business matters, cultural expectations and operating home based enterprises were identified to have an influence on women entrepreneurial networking behaviors (Surangi, 2018). Women entrepreneurs networking enables the intended female entrepreneurs to overcome barriers like cultural, legal, religious and social which are faced by women entrepreneurs. Networking supports women entrepreneurship and improves business management of most young women entrepreneurs (Mushtaq Ahmad & Naimat, 2011).

Despite the several attempts by governments, partners and policy makers to increase female entrepreneurship and its influence on job creation and economic development, there still exists a large gap between male and female entrepreneurs. Several researches have linked weak social position and support networks to low participation of women entrepreneurs in the business fraternity. Women entrepreneurs who have made it in business have taken advantage of the available strong-ties and weak-ties to acquire knowledge and business support (Malende et al., 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

According to Neuman (2014, p.96), a scientific paradigm is ‘a whole system of thinking that includes basic assumptions, the important questions to be answered or puzzles to be solved, the research techniques to be used, and examples of what good scientific research is like’. Creswell (2014), refers to paradigms as ‘worldviews’ or general philosophical orientations about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study.

Based on the previous chapters and the literature that was reviewed, this study was guided by the pragmatism research paradigm. As Creswell (2014) notes, pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality and therefore relies on mixed methods research so as to draw liberally from both quantitative and qualitative assumptions. This means that both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to investigate participation of women entrepreneurs in public procurement in Kampala, Uganda.

Research Approach

This study employed a mixed methods approach, which uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2008, 2014). Statistics were used to measure the nature, behaviors and participation of women entrepreneurs in public procurement in Kampala, Uganda. The qualitative approach enabled the study to derive meaning and make sense of the problem by gathering data through for example key informant interviews and interpreting it for further understanding (e.g., Neuman, 2014).

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional research design, which data was collected ‘at one point in time (Dikko, 2016, Creswell, 2014). This design also allowed the collection of data from different groups of people, using both quantitative methods for generalizability and qualitative methods so as to reveal individuals subjective meanings of their experiences, expressed as words, images, or objects (Neuman, 2014) in as far as women’s participation in public procurement is concerned.

Study Population

This study’s population was composed of women owned enterprises in Kampala district. These companies were subdivided into two categories with a total of 321. The first category was composed of 71 fully owned businesses by women entrepreneurs, and the second category were 250 partially owned businesses by women entrepreneurs. This is according to the register of providers by public procurement and disposal of assets authority (PPDA) website. The participants involved managers, owners, CEOs and any other top administrators that were in position to provide information, at least one of them representing their own company or business.

RESULTS

This study’s objective was to examine the networking behaviors of women entrepreneurs with regard to public procurement in Kampala Uganda. For this to be achieved, respondents were asked questions on networking and the results are presented in the sections hereunder.

Subscription to membership organization

First, respondents were asked on whether their company ever subscribed to any membership organization and the results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Whether a Company Ever Subscribed to any Membership Organization

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	63	37.5
	No	105	62.5
	Total	168	100.0

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results in table 1 above indicate that 63 companies had subscribed to some membership organizations which represented 37.5% of the respondents, while 105 companies (62.5%) were not subscribed to any membership organizations.

Results in Table 1 indicate that majority of the enterprises that participated in this study had never subscribed to any membership organization. To further understand this, the 68 companies were asked to state the membership organizations that they had subscribed to. The results are presented in table 2.

Networking with other organizations

Respondents were requested to give their opinion and share with the researcher on how they were networking with other organizations and what kind of organizations that they were networking with. Results are presented below:-

Table 2: Showing Membership Organizations subscribed to by Women Enterprises

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
<i>Membership Organization</i>		
Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA)	11	16.2%
Uganda Insurers Association (UIA)	2	2.9%
Private Sector Foundation (PSF)	22	32.4%
Association of Uganda Oil and Gas Service Providers (AUOGSP)	1	1.5%
Association of Uganda Tour Operations (AUTO)	1	1.5%
Uganda Women Entrepreneurs' Association Limited (UWEAL)	7	10.3%
Business subscribed to – Others specify	24	35.3%
Total	68	100

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results in table 2 indicated that of the 68 companies that had subscribed to membership organizations, 32.4% were members of PSFU, 16.2% had subscribed with UMA, and 10.3% had subscribed to UEAL, 2.9% had subscribed to UIA, 1% were members of AUOGSP and 1% had subscribed to AUTO. 24 companies which represented 35.3% of the companies that had subscribed to membership organizations revealed that they were members in other membership organizations that had not been captured by this study, the other membership organizations include “*Business and professional women international, Business incubators satanic bank, Chinese Association in Uganda, Uganda wildlife Authority, Engineering association of Uganda, ERA, HR Membership Organization, National Suppliers Database, FFP, KUSTAWI Africa, Kampala stationary owners association, NITA, Security organization, Solar Uganda limited, The vibrant social club, Uganda Driving School Operators and Owners Association, Uganda law firms association, Uganda law society, Uganda national association of building and civil engineering contractors and Women in business enterprise*”.

For respondents who said that they were not subscribed to any membership organization, this study went ahead to find out why they had not subscribed to any membership organization and results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Showing why Enterprises are not subscribed to any Membership Organizations

Items	Responses	
	N	Percent
subscription – Subscription fee	12	9.4%
Lack of information about membership organizations	84	65.6%
Others (specify)	32	25.0%
Total	128	100.0%

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results revealed that of the 128 companies that were not subscribed to any membership organizations, 84 companies which represented 65.6% were not subscribed because they lacked information about membership organizations. 12 companies were not subscribed to any membership organization because of subscription fees, whereas 32 companies which represented 25% of the companies that were not subscribed to any membership organizations had other reasons that explained why they were not subscribed to any membership organization.

Since it was revealed that majority of the companies listed by PPDA as service providers were not subscribed to any membership organizations, this research moved to find out whether the companies were networking with other organization or bodies and results are presented in figure 1 below.

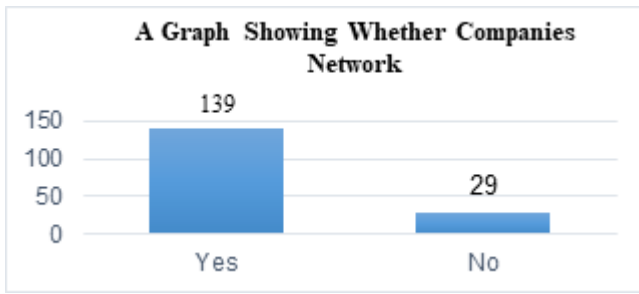


Figure 1: Whether companies network with other bodies or organizations

Results revealed that 139 companies were networking with other bodies and organizations, while, 29 companies were not networking. This finding indicated that most of the women enterprises as listed as service providers by PPDA were networking at 82%, same as 139 companies.

Prior to finding out that most of the companies were networking, the research investigated the organizations and bodies that the women enterprises were networking with and results are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Showing Bodies/Organizations that Women Companies network with

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
Government (specify)	64	25.7%
Private sector (specify)	86	34.5%
Business associations (specify)	24	9.6%
Business partners, community (specify)	75	30.1%
249		100.0%

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results in table 4 indicate that most women enterprises were networking with the private sector with 86 frequencies which represented 34.5%. The bodies that they were networking with included “*Banks, Business community, Companies, Hospitals, Hotels, NGOs, Schools, UMA, UMEME and UNHCR*”. This was followed by business partners and the community with 30.1% where 75 companies were networking with the business partners and community which included “*Business Associates, Business clients, Competitors and Other business partners*”. 64 companies were networking with the government and its agencies which represented 25.7%. By Government, the companies were networking with “*Districts, Electoral commission, Embassies, Government agencies, Government schools, Infectious diseases institute, Investment club, Judiciary service commission, KCCA, MAAIF, Makerere university, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of education and sports, Ministry of energy, Ministry of gender, Ministry of health, Ministry of ICT, Ministry of internal affairs, Ministry of justice, Ministry of lands, Ministry of local government, Ministry of trade, Ministry of transport, Ministry of Water and Environment, Ministry of Works and Transport, National Drug Authority, NEMA, NITA Uganda, PPDA, Public service commission, Uganda Aids commission, Uganda communication commission, Uganda police, Uganda Prisons, UNRA, WHO, Hotels, Mulago Hospital, National Planning Authority, National Water and Sewerage Corporation, UBOS, Uganda Electricity Regulatory authority, UNICEF, NARO, National gaming and lotteries board, Office of*

the president, OPM, UNRA and UWEC". 24 companies which represented 9.6% were networking with business associations which included "Airtel Uganda, Business competitors, Business owners, Clients, Companies, Hospitals and schools, Medical teams, NGOs, Uganda Red Cross and UMA". Generally, these results indicate that most companies were networking with the private sector, government and business partners and community as per this study's findings.

These findings were supported by key informant interviews below:-

Researcher: Do you know of any organizations that connect women entrepreneurs in or beyond Kampala? What are some of the organizations that you know?

Responses...

Interviewee 1: *...Yeah, I am talking from the background of my siblings who are there in the craft village, they have some organizations that bring them together, e.g. the national cultural center where most of them are members. But what I have realized is that many are not educated... so when you try to bring them together they usually do not get it and they end up not progressing. So they need a lot of capacity building by the government through training and encouraging them that they can progress if they do "ABC" then they can do better.*

Interviewee 2: *I know UWEAL so far. Others are microfinance institutions and SACCOs where women save every month and in future they can invest the money in any business like there is one which wants to invest in really estate.*

Interviewee 4: *Yes, FIDA is the one that I know that deals with women issues including their businesses and social challenges.*

Interviewee 6: *Yeah, several of them, e.g. the federation of SMEs, Uganda Small Scale industries, UMA itself, UWEAL etc., so the networking bodies are as many as you can imagine and they are free to subscribe to one or more bodies and you will find that they have subscribed to many other organizations because of the networking benefits that they get.*

Researcher: Do the women entrepreneurs network among themselves? If YES, How? IF NO, Why?

Responses...

Interviewee 2: *yes, that is what I was telling you. UWEAL is there, SACCOs.... People have come up with cooperatives seriously. Then we have mothers unions in churches to improve women.*

Interviewee 4: *Okay, to a limited extent they network through women bodies that connect women.*

Interviewee 6: *Yes, actually women entrepreneurs network more to do business than they would network to do any other Social activity. You will find them networked more businesswise than the other social aspects of life. They network through events like literacy meetings, business exhibitions, they are always willing to come out to talk about their products because of the market opportunities that they hope to get within these networks and platforms.*

Researcher: What are the benefits of women entrepreneurs in Kampala and beyond networking amongst themselves or with other relevant persons/institutions? How does networking improve their participation in public procurement?

Responses...

Interviewee 1: *They usually have and organize trade bazars like to display their businesses and their product; in the process they network since they come from different areas and sectors. That how they end up knowing that they are many and they realize that can bring out a bigger picture in their business. The benefit is that you can achieve more when you are a group, because many people cannot do much alone because of small capital. You grow when you are more than one in the process of working together.*

Interviewee 2: *Knowledge; you get to know, get information. You can also learn how to pull resources; you can also get contacts; you expand the area of operation.*

Interviewee 3: *Access to information that they would otherwise not have if they don't network, access to capital inform of either social or financial. But the biggest benefit is access to information to solve problems that they face.*

Interviewee 4: *Solidarity is one of the benefits that they get from networking among themselves.*

Interviewee 6: *Now, for most of the networking benefits, one of them is getting market for their products most of the time, and when you are given an opportunity to speak or introduce yourself at any platform, for us we always encourage our members to speak about their products, in this case you are trying to create word of mouth about your product. So, the benefit here is that the person you are speaking may not be the one in need, but the person can be able to speak to other persons that you may have not been able to speak to. At large, networking is basically for marketing linkages. In the confidence that your product is getting from networking, this gives women entrepreneurs the confidence that actually their product can compete for the 60% that the government gives to public procurement.*

According to the key informants in this study, women were networking with organizations like UWEAL, SACCOs, UMA and Uganda Small Scale industries associations. This confirmed findings of the survey by this study despite the challenges associated with networking. They included information gaps, mistrust, vulnerability, sex abuse and poor communication as per the qualitative results below.

Researcher: *What are some of the barriers/challenges that women entrepreneurs face in the process of networking with each other in Kampala and beyond?*

Responses ...

Interviewee1: *I think its culture in Uganda. When you try to network, you think that somebody doesn't like you... there is lack of trust. I think that's what stops people from networking, generally lack of trust and jealousy. If someone who is calling you to network is better off, you think that may be they want to get money from you or they want to ride on you. They end up saying that let them do their things and I also do mine... lack of trust.*

Interviewee 2: *Yeah, women are always vulnerable. Those who are married, they have to go by the orders of their husbands, if the husband is not comfortable for you to join a certain group or association, it becomes a challenge and sometimes they do not decide on their own. They also have a challenge of dependence, not every woman gets out to go and work, so if it is really to do something, they have to get money from their husbands and those who are not married and they are not working, they are limited by capital. Then also, some regard a woman as a weak sex.*

Some businesses, you might not find it easy to award it to a woman firm however entrepreneurial they might be. For example we have lady engineers now, including leadership by engineers, but do you think a lady engineer can apply to do road supervision and be considered? Women are seen as weak and cannot manage. So there is that perception and it is a challenge.

Interviewee 3: *They are not able to effectively communicate, as in they are not able to put up what they would wish to communicate in a proper manner about their needs. Access to information is also a challenge that women face in the process of networking.*

Interviewee 4: *The challenge is lack of honesty and integrity. Much as they are women trying to network with each other, others have self-catered interest. Women go to network thinking that they will get help, but they end up being defrauded by the women in their networks.*

Some women are mean at giving information thinking that by sharing with you good information will make one a competitor.

Interviewee 6: *Of course the biggest challenge is the information gap, not only information in terms of what you need to share, but also how do you put across the message for actually someone to understand what you are selling and talking about in the possible time.*

Training in Accessing New Markets

As a networking strategy, training in accessing new markets was investigated by this research study and results are presented below:-

Respondents were asked to disclose whether the “Female Owner” of the business has ever been educated, trained and connected as a female/woman business owner on how to access new markets. Results are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Showing Female Owner Has Been Educated, Trained and Connected On How to Access New Markets

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	69	41.1
No	67	39.9
Don't know	32	19.0
Total	168	100.0

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results in table 5 revealed that 69 women entrepreneurs (41.1%) had been trained and connected on how to access new markets, 67 women entrepreneurs (39.9) had not been trained or connected on how to access new markets. While 32 respondents (19%) revealed that they did not know whether the female owners had been trained or connected on how to access new markets. For those women entrepreneurs that had been trained or networked, they were further asked what they were trained in and results are presented in table 6.

Table 6: Showing what Women Entrepreneurs have been trained or Connected

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
Internet marketing	32	16.0%
Record keeping	49	24.5%
Tax compliance	49	24.5%
Business registration	59	29.5%
Others (specify)	11	5.5%
Total	200	100.0%

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results in Table 6 revealed that of the women entrepreneurs that had received training or networked, 29.5% had been trained in business registration, 24.5% had received training in record keeping, 24.5% had been trained in tax compliance, 16% had been trained in internet marketing and 5.5% had been trained in other fields which include “A lot of experience, Business management, Commerce, Finances, Financial literacy or Management, Financial management, Occupational safety and environment, Orientation and the whole business entrepreneurship”.

The respondents were also asked about who had conducted the training and results are presented in table 7.

Table 7: Showing who had Trained Women Entrepreneurs

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA)	10	13.5%
Private Sector Foundation (PSF)	15	20.3%
Association of Uganda Tour Operations (AUTO)	2	2.7%
Uganda Women Entrepreneurs’ Association Limited (UWEAL)	9	12.2%
Others specify	38	51.4%
Total	74	100.0%

Source: Primary Data 2021

It was revealed in table 7 that, 51.4% of the women entrepreneurs had been trained and networked by other bodies which included “Business and professional women international, Business courses online, Fellow business operators in same field, Coca Cola Company, Consultancy firms, Consultant, Did a business course, Federation of Uganda employers, From schedule, From university, From university and also went for computer stogies, Got training from school, Kampala stationary owners association, Medical trainings and camps, MUBS Nakawa, National water and sewerage cooperation, Consultancy firms, schools, training institutions, Peak performance organization, Prestige driving school, Private consultant and during school, Private firms, Safety solutions, SHE trades International, Solar Uganda limited, Stanbic bank, Through business schools, Through catering school, UCC, UMI, University in India, URA”. 20.3% had been trained and networked by Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), 13.5% were trained by Uganda Manufacturers Association, 12% had been trained by Uganda Women Entrepreneurs’ Association Limited, and 2.7% had been trained by Association of Uganda Tour Operations. This implies that many bodies have been involved

in training and networking of women enterprises. It has not been a sole responsibility of one body but an effort by several bodies and organizations.

Respondents were asked on whether the training has been helpful to them as women owned enterprises and results are presented below in figure 3.

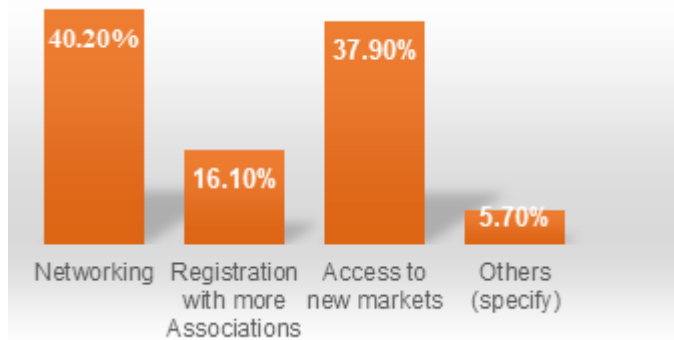


Figure 2: Showing How Training Helped Women Entrepreneurs

Figure 2 reveals that most women who had received training had been helped in networking with 40.2%, access to markets was another help that women entrepreneurs were getting from trainings attended with 37.9%, also through trainings, 16.1% of the companies were able to network with other associations. While 5.7% of the companies were helped in other ways which included “*Getting a marketing plan, policy formulation, risk management, Good relations, increased my business skills, she’s so innovative, creating new businesses frequently*”.

Respondents were asked as to why the female business owner had not educated, trained and connected as a female/woman business owner on how to access new markets and results are presented in table 8.

Table 8: Showing why Some Women Entrepreneurs have not been trained or networked

Item	Responses	
	N	Percent
No need for training	33	33.0%
Don’t know where they train from	17	17.0%
Not a member to any Association	26	26.0%
No funds to training	3	3.0%
I Don’t Know	10	10.0%
Others (specify)	11	11.0%
Total	100	100.0%

Source: Primary Data 2021

Results in table 8 indicated that some women enterprises had not received any form of training because according to them, “there is no need of training” (33%); they are not members of any association (26%); and they “Don’t know where they train from” (17%).

DISCUSSIONS

Networking between women entrepreneurs is seen to help women entrepreneurs to overcome Cultural, social, legal and religious challenges which affect them (Surangi, 2018). According to this study, 37.5% companies had subscribed to some membership organizations which represented and 62.5% companies that were not subscribed to any membership organizations. Majority of the enterprises that participated in this study had never subscribed to any membership organization. For those that had not subscribed to any membership organization, majority indicated that it was due to lack of information. This implies that with a low networking behavior, women enterprises still have a challenge to addressing the barriers that face them and differentiate them from their male competitors in the industry. Low participation of women entrepreneurs in business and public procurement specifically is linked to weak support networks (e.g., Malende et al., 2017), which explains why most women enterprises do not grow. In this study though, 82% of the women enterprises listed as service providers by PPDA were networking with most of them networking with the private sector.

CONCLUSIONS

Accordingly, this study examined the Networking Behaviors of Women Entrepreneurs in Public Procurement in Kampala Uganda and concludes as follows:-

1. Most women entrepreneurs in Uganda were not subscribed to membership organizations due to lack of information about the membership organizations and their relevance to women owned businesses as far as public procurement was concerned.
2. As much as most businesses were not registered with any membership organizations, most women entrepreneurs were networking with other private sector players, and had been trained in various areas concerning public procurement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As per this study's findings, women entrepreneurs ought to be sensitized on the importance of networking with much emphasis on subscribing to membership organization and its role towards participation in public procurement.

The Government of republic of Uganda and other stakeholders such as membership organizations should consider putting in place avenues where women entrepreneurs can get information that is required about membership organizations.

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