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Contribution of Public Procurement to the Success of Small and Medium Enterprises: A Case of SMEs in Moshi Municipality

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Abstract:

This study was carried out to examine the contribution of Public Procurement on SMEs development. Specifically, this study intended to assess SMEs' awareness and participation in public procurement opportunities, to determine the extent of SMEs participation, winning rate and its awareness on public procurement opportunities, to assess whether technical condition, financial conditions and evaluation criteria are fair for SMEs to participate in public procurement and win tenders. Cross sectional research design was used to undertake the study where Moshi Municipality as a study area. Purposive sampling technique was used to pick a sample of 50 SMEs owners selected from SMEs operating in Moshi Municipality. Data were analyzed through applying interpretive and reflexive qualitative approaches while quantitative techniques involved utilization of descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that that, SMEs owners are aware of public procurement opportunities and they also participate in applying for these opportunities despite the fact that the winning rate is very low. It was argued that the low winning rate was due to unfavorable technical conditions, unfavorable financial conditions, as well as unfair evaluation criteria demanded by the Tanzanian Public Procurement Act 2011.

Keywords: Public Procurement, Small and Medium Enterprise, Public procurement Act

1. Introduction

The initiatives of empowering SMEs to participate in public procurement started with the SMEs Development Policy (2003) which strategized at improving the legal and regulatory framework including review of government procurement procedures to facilitate SMEs participation in public procurement. Not only that but also the Public Procurement Act 2011 (PPA, 2011) has established a mechanism through which SMEs can access public procurement opportunities and develop their enterprises. In order to establish a fair ground of participation, Section 6 (2) (e) requires the Public Procurement Policy Division (PPPD) to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate mechanism for involvement of SMEs in public procurement markets.

Despite of the government efforts to harmonies the legal framework and support SMEs participation in public procurement, still SMEs are facing a number of challenges this hinders its active participation (Nkongwe, 2003). Former researches have already recognized some challenges SMEs face during the public procurement process, most of which are somehow resource related (GHK 2010; Fee et al. 2002; Karjalainen and Kemppainen 2008). The identified challenges include administrative issues (procedural bureaucracies), cancelled tenders and exclusive contract conditions which hinders SMEs participation and development in return. Furthermore, it has been observed that government procurement tenders are mainly undertaken mostly by larger firms, both local and international and not SME because of inadequate supportive institutional arrangement (URT, 2012), discriminative technical and financial requirements and contract conditions. This limits SMEs chance of winning contracts and accumulate capital for developing the enterprises.

Therefore, regardless of the efforts of the procurement system in one way or the other to address the problem of increased participation by SMEs by providing support for the domestic supplier base, support for this sector has remained weak and the actual participation of SMEs in public procurement continue to be limited (URT, 2012). Given the fact that SMEs can be enabled to grow into bigger enterprises and that they constitute a substantial section of the national economic management it led the researcher to carry out this study.

2. Study Objectives

In order to study and understand the problem, the study had a general objective of examining the contribution of public procurement in the success of SMEs. However, the specific focus was to find out the extent of SMEs awareness and participation in public procurement opportunities as well as to establish whether evaluation criteria are fair for SMEs to participate in public procurement opportunities.

3. Literature Underpinnings

3.1. The Concept of Public Procurement

Public procurement can be defined as the supply chain system for the acquisition of all necessary goods, works and services by the state and its organs when acting in pursuit of public interest (Bovis, 1998) or Public procurement means procurement of goods, services and works on behalf of a public authority. Public institutions include for example state and municipal authorities, joint municipal authorities, and state enterprises. In terms of national economy, the share of public procurement is high. In 2010 the amount of public procurements in Finland was approximately 35 billion Euros, representing 19.4 per cent share of GDP (European Commission 2011). There is no accurate statistical information about Municipal procurements account for a significant share of the total amount of public procurements, procurement for services accounting for a remarkable share in almost all sectors within municipalities (Lith 2012).

3.2. Open Procedure Tendering

Open procedure is applied to standard, every-day procurements and it is a simple, easy to use procedure. In open procedure procurement, the procurer publishes a contract notice and all interested suppliers may submit a tender. In addition, the procurer may also send invitations to tender to suppliers which it deems appropriate; this process of open tendering procurement is divided into three phases: planning and preparation, competitive tendering, and contract implementation and follow-up (Patajoki, 2013).

To begin with, small businesses have to be willing to take part in public tendering (planning and preparation phase). In this phase, the objective is to find out which factors make public tendering attractive in the first place or why small businesses decide not to participate. In the next phase (competitive tendering), the aim is to recognize the reasons behind small businesses' successes or failures in competitive tendering. Finally, factors that affect the performance and success of small businesses during the actual contractual relationship (contract implementation and follow-up) are investigated (ibid).

3.3. Public Procurement Principles and Practices

Public procurement differs from private purchasing in terms of legislation. The objective of public procurement regulation is to ensure that public funds are used effectively and that all renderers are treated in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. Essentially, tendering gives all potential suppliers a possibility to compete for the right to produce public services. The general principles of public procurement are competition, equal treatment and non-discrimination, transparency, and proportionality. These principles concern not only the competitive tendering phase but the procurement process as a whole (Arrowsmith 2010 and Patajoki, 2013).

3.4. SMEs in Public Procurement

SMEs play an important economic role in many industrial countries (Walker and Preuss 2008) and their limited market access in public procurement is a recognized issue (GHK 2010). Encouraging SMEs' participation in public procurement could generate a mutually beneficial situation for both procurers and SMEs, as well as for other stakeholders (Fee et al. 2002). By contracting SMEs, public organizations may, for example, foster innovativeness, encourage entrepreneurship, and contribute to job creation and economic development (Reed et al. 2004; Walker and Preuss 2008). SMEs, in turn, could invest and expand their operations while relying on public organizations. Public entities, including municipalities, have a duty to produce certain services regardless of for example economic conditions, which makes them stable partners (Purchase et al. 2009). Collaboration with the public sector may also be an important reference for future. Loader (2005) also recognized certainty of payment, speedier payment, and security over long term as benefits to SMEs supplying public sector organizations. Public organizations, too, may benefit from contracting with SMEs. SMEs are expected to be more innovative and more flexible than larger companies, and to respond more quickly to changes. SMEs are argued to have a better client focus, meaning customized solutions and better quality. Because of lower hierarchy, personnel and management of SMEs are usually more accessible compared to large organizations, which makes communication easier. Active participation of SMEs also increases competition and guarantees that the procurer will not be dependent on a few large companies only. (Blomqvist et al. 2005; GHK 2010; Karjalainen and Kempainen 2008; Loader 2005; Reed et al. 2004; Walker and Preuss 2008)

3.5. Procurement Opportunities and Areas of Participation by SMEs

There is certainly a strong case to be made for SMEs as suppliers in public procurement. But benefits go both ways-the volume of public sector procurement of goods and service from third parties offered considerable opportunities for SMEs as government suppliers. In fact, public procurement is one of the critical areas for development of Small and medium business according to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. SMEs can participate in procuring of stationary and office supplies, office equipment and consumables, furniture and fittings, cleaning service, catering service, conference and related services as well as minor works like Painting and construction of bridges. Open tendering is the preferred competitive procurement method used for acquiring goods, service, infrastructure and works. Kaspar *et al.* (2012) presented a list of challenges facing SMEs in different stages of public procurement cycle such as in pre-bidding phase there is lack of clear regulatory framework and guidelines open to public scrutiny and supported by adequate enforcement mechanism; in finding out about contract opportunities, there is a poor accessibility, inadequate advertisement; in applying for contract opportunities there is excessive bureaucracy and documentation, lack of capability on the procedures' side and unclear selection criteria; in winning contract there is a lack of competition/corruption, preference for larger bidders (putting price before quality), lack of capability on the procedures' side and in post-bidding/review of awards and appeals there is lack of clear regulatory framework open to public scrutiny and supported enforcement mechanisms, absence of rationale for awards (based on defined set of selection criteria).

4. Methodology

Cross sectional research design was used to undertake the study whereby 50 SMEs located in Moshi Municipality were selected. Moshi Municipality is the Kilimanjaro Regional Headquarters located under the Southern slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro which lies approximately 3°18 south of Equator and 37°20 easts of Greenwich The selected SMEs engage themselves in the supply of various goods, works and services to different buying companies in Moshi Municipality. The design involved intensive analysis of the phenomenon in the selected SMEs within a specified time. Purposive technique was used to pick a sample of 50 SMEs owners from different 50 SMEs. Multiple approaches including questionnaire, interviews and documentary review were used to gather both primary and secondary data which enabled the researcher to do cross-data validity checks. Data were analyzed through applying qualitative techniques that involved the use of interpretive and reflexive approaches while quantitative techniques involved utilization of descriptive statistics

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Public Procurement Opportunities for SMEs to Participation and win

The researcher wanted to know if SMEs owners are aware of the public procurement opportunities available for them secondly the researcher wanted to know the extent of SMEs participation in public procurement and lastly to know the extent of winning after participating in public procurement.

5.2. Public Procurement Opportunities Awareness for SMEs

In knowing if the SMEs are aware of procurement opportunities finding in Table 1 revealed that about 82% of SMEs are aware of the public procurement opportunities available for them and only 18% are not aware. This is an indication that the large percent of SMEs (82%) are aware of the availability public procurement opportunities for them.

| S/N | Public procurement opportunities awareness for SMEs | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----|---|-----------|----------------|
| 1 | Aware | 41 | 82 |
| 2 | Not aware | 9 | 18 |
| | Total | 50 | 100 |

Table 1: Public procurement opportunities awareness for SMEs

5.3. SMEs Participation in Public Procurement

Findings in table 2 shows that about 78% of respondent participated in public procurement and 22% did not participated in public procurement this implies that large percent of SMEs participated in public procurement although the question of winning still stand as other aspect. The government through PPA, 2011 and its regulations has provided opportunities to SMEs to participate in tenders floated by procuring entities and to apply national preferences and exclusive preference schemes; where margin of preference basing on input of local firms in association with foreign firms are provided during evaluation of tenders and only local firms are allowed to participate in contracts not exceeding a certain value

| S/N | SMEs participation in public procurement | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----|--|-----------|----------------|
| 1 | Participated in public procurement | 39 | 78 |
| 2 | Not participated in public procurement | 11 | 22 |
| | Total | 50 | 100 |

Table 2: SMEs participation in public procurement

5.4. Public Procurement Opportunities Winning Rate for SMEs

The researcher wanted to further know the winning rate for these SMEs which are participating in public procurement. Where by finding shows that 74.4% participated in public procurement have not won and only 25.6% have won the opportunity to participate in public procurement, this shows larger number of SMEs (74.4%) lacks the necessary criteria required to win these opportunities, mostly financial requirements are a major setback for many SMEs in winning these opportunities. Therefore, for SMEs to participate on public tenders and win more effort is needed to review public procurement procedures that will provide more opportunities to public tenders. As providers of goods and services to the procuring entities SMEs are supposed to have financial and technical capabilities to enable them deliver accordingly

| S/N | Public procurement opportunities Winning Rate for SMEs | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----|--|-----------|----------------|
| 1 | Participate and Won | 10 | 25.6 |
| 2 | Participated and not Won | 29 | 74.4 |
| | Total | 39 | 100 |

Table 3: Public procurement opportunities Winning Rate for SMEs

5.5 .Technical Conditions, Financial Conditions and Evaluation Criteria that allows SMEs to Participate in Public Procurement

The researcher established level of challenges that SMEs are facing during participation in public procurement opportunities including unfavorable technical condition, limited financial and unfair evaluation criteria.

5.6. Unfavourable Technical Condition in Public Procurement for SMEs

Findings show that 64% argued that unfavorable technical conditions are a setback for SMEs to participate in public procurement opportunities and win, while 26% respondent agreed to the statement, and only 10% respondent disagreed to the statement. This implies that Unfavorable technical condition is an obstacle for SMEs to participate in public procurement, they argued that Parliament and all responsible organizations involved in formulation of Procurement Act and regulations to take SMEs in consideration while formulating technical conditions

| | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Unfavorable technical condition in public procurement for SMEs | Strongly agree | 32 | 64 |
| | Agree | 13 | 26 |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0 |
| | Disagree | 5 | 10 |
| | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |

Table 4: Unfavorable technical condition in public procurement for SMEs

5.7. Unfavorable Financial Condition of SMEs

Findings in Table 11: shows that about 68% strongly agreed that unfavorable financial condition is an obstacle for SMEs to participate in public procurement opportunities, 26% agreed to the statement while 6% disagreed to the statement. This entails that SMEs does not have enough fund necessary to facilitate them to participate in public procurement opportunities and this is because they have limited access to finance from different sources mostly from Banks because they don't have appropriate collateral required by banks.

| | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Unfavorable financial conditions of SMEs | Strongly agree | 34 | 68 |
| | Agree | 13 | 26 |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0 |
| | Disagree | 3 | 6 |
| | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |

Table 5: Unfavorable financial condition of SMEs

5.8. Unfair Evaluation Criteria in Public Procurement for SMEs

Findings in Table 12: shows that about 78% respondents strongly agreed that unfair evaluation criteria are another factor which hinders SMEs participation in public procurement, 12% agreed to the statement while 10% disagreed to the statement. The Public Procurement Act (2011) section 51 has divided the criteria into general qualifications, adequacy for the assignment and experience of SMEs in public procurement opportunities participation, most SMEs fall short in some of the criteria's, some are disqualified because of experience without considering the fact that giving them the opportunities will boost their experience.

| | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Unfair evaluation criteria in public procurement for SMEs | Strongly agree | 39 | 78 |
| | Agree | 6 | 12 |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0 |
| | Disagree | 5 | 10 |
| | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |

Table 6: Unfair evaluation criteria in public procurement for SMEs

6. Conclusion

Based on the evidences provided by the research findings it was concluded that, SMEs owners are aware of public procurement opportunities and they also participate in applying for these opportunities despite the fact that the winning rate is very low. It was argued that the low winning rate was due to unfavorable technical conditions, unfavorable financial conditions, as well as unfair evaluation criteria demanded by the public procurement Act 2011

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