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Exploration of the Obstacles Hindering Access to Government Procurement Opportunities by Youths in the County Government of Kisumu, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Government procurement offers a service that is fast and direct to empower women, youth, and the disabled and combat poverty. However, all over the world, challenges facing public procurement are less inclusive due to the low number of youths accessing government procurement opportunities. Despite the legal, policy, and institutional reforms undertaken so far in the public procurement sector in Kenya, youths still find it hard to effectively access procurement opportunities in the public sector in Kenya. The main study objective was to explore the obstacles that hinder Access to Government Procurement Opportunities by youths in the county government of Kisumu. The specific objectives were to determine how procurement procedures affect Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) by youths in the county government of Kisumu; how government sensitization affects AGPO by youths in the county government of Kisumu, and how financing affects AGPO by youths in the county government of Kisumu. The study adopted a qualitative approach, which is non-numerical in nature, to gain an in-depth understanding of why the youths are not in a position to access government procurement opportunities despite the government setting aside 30% for women, youths, and people with disability. This study used a case study research design by selecting Kisumu County. The study also adopted interviews, document reviews, and observations as the data collection methods and used thematic data analysis techniques. Purposive sampling was used on both the procurement officer and the seven youths from seven sub-counties within the county of Kisumu, since they had the knowledge and skills on procurement, totaling to eight participants. The interview protocol was used to collect qualitative data from the participants. The data collected was presented through text, narration, and verbatim. The results indicated that procurement procedures, government sensitization, and financing had significant effects when it comes to AGPO for youths. Therefore, procurement procedures must be efficient and accessible to all youths; government sensitization must be done adequately for youths to be more empowered on how to access information, and finance should be made accessible to the youths to encourage participation. The results of the proposed study will be important to policymakers, scholars, and other stakeholders for purposes of policy formulation and decision-making regarding the exploration of the obstacles that hinder AGPO by youths in the county government of Kisumu and the entire Kenya.

Keywords: *AGPO, Procurement, Youths, County government of Kisumu*

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INTRODUCTION

Youths are among the most disadvantaged groups in many developing economies. According to Blome and Schoenherr (2011), the participation of special interest groups in public procurement is a very important function of governments across the world. The Public Procurement and Disposal (Amendment) Bill, 2013, was brought to parliament to amend the Public Procurement and Disposal Act of 2005. The amendment included section 3 of Act No. 3 of 2005, where the meaning of 'youths' was inserted to mean a person between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years and includes a company, association, corporate or incorporated where the proprietors or directors are between the ages of 18-35 years.

Public procurement is the purchase of goods and contracting of construction works and services if such acquisition is effected with resources from national budgets, and the items range from simple items or services to large commercial projects such as the development of infrastructure, such as roads, power stations, and airports. Public procurement systems are central to the effectiveness of development expenditure, and more often than not, budgets get translated into services largely through the public's purchases of goods, services, and works. (Mahmood, 2010). It is also estimated that 18.42% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent through public procurement (Mahmood, 2010). Public procurement is seen as an objective and efficient way of contracting between the government and private entities (Schooner, 2012) and is widely used to promote socio-economic development objectives of a nation, such as the economic development of preference and reserved groups (Arrowsmith, 2010).

Globally, public procurement attracts a lot of attention and according to Snider and Rendon. (2012), this is often because of the size, since most developed nations spend about 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on public procurement, while developing nations spend up to 50%. Most countries, both developed and least developed countries have instituted procurement reforms involving laws and regulations, such as compliance with procurement ethical issues. The World Bank (2010) indicates that many countries are yet to develop procedural frameworks that ensure: public procurement procedures are transparent and promote fair and equal treatment; public resources are linked to public procurement and in accordance with intended purposes; and lastly that the procurement officials are ethical and accountable.

Korir and Wanambiro (2017) state that the role of progressive legislation in empowering youths in accessing public procurement opportunities has proven successful around the world. However, the poor implementation of the policies has ensured that the most vulnerable people in society are more likely to be overlooked by government procurement and also less likely to receive the required skills and training. According to Ramsay and Croom (2008), the rapidly growing social entrepreneurs that tap practical and creative business approaches in solving pressing social and development problems have been equally instrumental around the world in creating opportunities for youths, women and people with disabilities.

Public Procurement and Assets Disposal Act (PPDA) 2015 defines 'preference' as the right or the opportunity to select tenderer from an identified target group that is considered more desirable than another and 'reservations' as exclusive preferences to procure goods, works and services set aside to a specific targeted group of tenderers within a specified threshold or region and the group includes youths, women and persons with disability for the purpose of access to government procurement opportunities (PPRA, 2015). The government must therefore ensure that the youths, women and persons with disabilities are successfully integrated into the economy through procurement so as to improve Kenyan's competitiveness, raise household incomes, reduce poverty and create a circle of investment and growth (Gitari & Kabare, 2014).

In Kenya, the government is always the biggest procurer since most of its expenditures go to

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public procurement. According to OECD (2019) public procurement plays a key role in the generation of country's wealth as it accounts for approximately 12% of most countries' GDP and 29% of government expenditure in OECD countries and governments are expected to curry out the procurement activities efficiently and with high standards of conduct to ensure high quality of service delivery and guard the public interest.

According to Nkoge (2013), despite having a legal framework in Kenya to help public procurement, Small and Medium Enterprises and AGPO group are sidelined from participating in public procurement despite their qualifications, sizes and level of production because of a lack of financial information and high levels of corruption. Hence, the stakeholders involved, such as suppliers, the procuring entities, funders and beneficiaries of the entire procurement process, are supposed to ensure an effective, efficient and transparent public procurement process.

According to the PPDA (2005) and Public Procurement and Disposal (Preference and reservation) Regulations (PPDR), (2011) Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) group which represents Women, Youths and People with Disabilities living in Kenya are legally required to have access to 30% of the government procurement opportunities at both the county and national levels and it was first launched on 16th October 2013. AGPO is found in the constitution of Kenya, 2010 Article 227 on the fair, equitable, transparent and cost-effective public procurement of goods, works, and services, and its main aim is to facilitate the enterprises owned by women, youths and people with disability to participate in government procurement opportunities and empower them by giving them more opportunities to do business with the government.

Over the years, the Government of Kenya has put in place several measures to help cub the barriers faced by the target group while doing business with the government under the AGPO initiative which include; Pre- qualification is automatic once business is AGPO Certified; Bid bonds are not required; There is an online tender portal on the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority(PPRA) website which is good platform since information about the tenders is easily available; PPRA has a section on its website that provides information about the market price and; Both the PPRA and National Treasury have developed tools and issued circulars to all procurement entities for use to file their returns. Public procurement entities are always required by the law to reserve for the AGPO group at least 30% of their annual procurement spend for goods, services and works in regard to: General supplies; Small works and engineering; ICT Services; Professional Services and Consultancy; Fresh produce and Agricultural products. The roles of PPRA under the AGPO Initiative include making a report to the parliament every 6 months for consideration by the relevant committee responsible for equalization of opportunities for target groups, and the reports obtained should include details of the procuring entities and how they have complied with the regulations and provisions of AGPO.

The Ministry of National Treasury and Planning was established following the reorganization of government on 14th January 2020 through the Executive Order No. 1 of 2020 and is made up of the National Treasury and the State Department for Planning. The AGPO Secretariat (National Treasury) is responsible for the implementation of the preferences and reservations under the PPAD Act which includes: Registration, prequalification and certification of the persons, categories of groups as provided for under Part XII of the Act; Training and capacity building of the target group; Providing technical and advisory assistance to procuring entities; Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the preferences and reservations under the Act. For an AGPO member to be able to set up a recognized business, they will need: a business registration certificate/ certificate of incorporation from the AG's office, a PIN/VAT Certificate and Tax compliance from the KRA. Reserve Company Name, Business Permit, and Registration with the National Construction Authority. In case it is a partnership kind of business, then the documents to be

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attached include: a copy of the partnership deed, a copy of the PIN certificate for the partners, National ID for the partners, a copy of the Tax compliance for the partners and the company incorporation. Through the acquisition of the AGPO Certificate, the Women, Youths and Persons with Disability are in a position to benefit from things such as waiver of tender securities, unbundling of procurement, 30% government procurement opportunities, budgetary reservation, and facilitation of funding and prompt payments.

Statement of the problem

In Kenya, Transparency International (2013) noted that AGPO (women, youth, and people living with disabilities) constitute over 85% of the entire population, yet they contribute to less than 10% of public procurement involvement, thus this hinders economic growth and achievement of Vision 2030. The AGPO group has cited many of their problems, including capacity building, lack of access to funds, inadequate skills, poor information, and lack of a proper legal regulatory framework (Brinkerhoff, 2014).

Despite the legal, policy, and institutional reforms undertaken so far in the public procurement sector in Kenya, youths still find it hard to effectively access procurement opportunities in the public sector in Kenya.

The government has in the past attempted to address youth unemployment in Kenya through different policies, programs and projects, but unfortunately, they have been faced by several challenges during the implementation process, such as high population growth among the youths, high inflation rates in the economy and lack of adequate resources to carry out the youth programs. With the AGPO initiative put in place, it comes with a number of challenges that face the youths such as; The youths are unable to get finances to start the registration process of getting a AGPO certificate, preparing proposal and financing the tenders; Delayed payments since the money is held up for long hence being a major discouragement to youths; Lack of transparency; Corruption and; Lack of coordination between the treasury and PPRA.

Objectives of the Study

General Objectives

To explore the obstacles that Access to Government Procurement Opportunities for youths in the County Government of Kisumu, Kenya.

Specific Objectives

i. To determine how procurement procedures hinder the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities by youths in the County Government of Kisumu.

ii. To investigate how government sensitization affects the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities by youths in the County Government of Kisumu.

iii. To determine how financing affects the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities by youths in the County Government of Kisumu.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Empowerment Theory

According to Tones and Tilford (2001), Empowerment theory was identified as a principal theory across various disciplines. It was adapted from Zimmerman's (1984) work, and Rappaport (1987) adapted it to community psychology studies, and ever since, the theory has found its way into social studies as a key concept in remedying inequalities and toward achieving a better and fairer distribution of resources for communities (Snider and Rendon, 2008), which underpins financing as a variable.

According to this theory, empowerment is the ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic, and political forces to take action to improve their life situations. It is also the process by which individuals and communities are enabled to take power and act effectively in gaining greater control and social justice in changing their own lives and that of their society by acting on issues they define as important. Zimmerman (2000), the originator of this theory, argues that empowered individuals

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have characteristics of very high self-esteem. Self-efficacy, control over their life, and increased socio-political and civic access. The Empowerment theory is a three-pronged approach which engages young individuals effectively in work, which gives them the challenge to increase their skills, gain critical awareness, and contribute to opportunities that are essential for creating change in the community (Ledford et al., 2013)

According to Maton and Salem (1995), empowerment is the process that enables people, through participation with others, to achieve their primary personal goals. Empowerment theory aims to get participants (youths) to a place where they can get greater access to government procurement opportunities. The Kenyan Government is dedicated to empowering the youth by being at the forefront in advocating for youth access to government procurement opportunities. The initiative was confirmed by the Presidential Directive on AGPO (PPOA, 2013). According to PPOA (2013), under the Regulation of Public Procurement Preference and Reservations Regulation, 2013, there is a National sensitization and recruitment drive on youth access to thirty percent of all government procurement opportunities. In this study, the Empowerment theory was relevant in understanding how youths can get empowered to be able to access the available funds set aside by the government, follow the set procurement procedures, and access the available information online

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Procurement Procedures and Youth Access to Government Procurement Opportunities

Procurement is the overarching function which describes the activities and processes used to acquire goods and services. Effective public procurement systems are systems defined as offering a high level of transparency, accountability and value for money when applying for a procurement budget and are critical to poverty reduction and effectiveness. According to OECD (2010), increasing the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of procurement systems is an ongoing concern of governments and the international development community. OECD (2007) notes that public procurement is progressively recognized as an instrument of government policy and a lever for a wider economic, social and environmental change. Several factors have been identified to contribute to women and youth participation in public procurement, and one of the factors is the legal and regulatory framework, which establishes the rules within which all the financial institutions, instruments and markets conduct procurement procedures in a given country.

In 2007, the PPDA came into force and established the Public Procurement Oversight Authority (PPOA) as a regulatory body for the development and oversight of the Kenyan Public Procurement System (Nyathore et al., 2023). The public procurement process is supposed to uphold integrity by mitigating all malpractices, inform decision-making that requires public bodies to base decisions on accurate information and ensure that the set requirements are being met (Trkman & McCormack, 2010). The World Bank (2013) emphasizes that there is a need for transparency to enhance openness and clarity when it comes to procurement policy and its delivery. Besides PPDA, Public procurement is governed by many legislations such as Public Procurement and Disposal Regulations (2020), Supplies Practitioners Management Act (2007), Public Procurement and Disposal (Public Private Partnership) Regulations (2009), Constitution of Kenya (2010), Public Procurement and Disposal (Preference and Reservations) Regulations (2013), and Public Procurement and Disposal (County Government) Regulations (2013).

Most of these legislations support the disadvantaged groups, under which the youth category falls, for example, one of the objectives of PPDA is to facilitate the promotion of local industry and economic development. Sec 39 of the Act stipulated provisions for Preference and Reservations for groups, and also Sec 227 of the Constitution of Kenya gave guidelines on the preference and reservations scheme. The Public

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Procurement and Disposal (Preference and Reservations) Regulations 2011 define a target group as a designated tenderer identified by the government who benefits from the preference and reservations scheme. Public Procurement and Disposal Preference and Reservations Amendment Regulations (2013) reserved 30% of the government tenders for the youth, women and persons with disability, and under the same regulations, the target groups have also been exempted from paying tender securities for government tenders (Government of Kenya, 2013).

The legislation has contributed greatly to the youth and women uptake of government tenders as most of youth and women entrepreneurs now find that the government is a better entity to trade with. Puddephatt and Kaspar (2012) asserts that in Egypt, where public procurement makes up a significant portion of the economy and has the potential to play a major role in incentivizing SME growth, collusive tendering corruption and in- transparency remains a serious obstacle for SMEs, and in developing countries where corruption is still a pervasive issue, transparency initiatives are critical to unlock many challenges facing SMEs in benefiting from the public procurement market especially those owned by youths.

Ngugi and Mugo (2020) examined the internal factors affecting the procurement process of supplies in the public sector in Kenya and concluded that it is essential that these activities be performed by a qualified staff with high professional and ethical standards using required procedures anchored in appropriate policies and regulations. They adopted a descriptive research design to be able to analyse the purchasing process in the healthcare industry. The findings revealed that accountability, ICT adoption and ethics affected the procurement process of health care supplies in the public sector to a great extent. The study recommended that adequate controls should be put in place to reduce opportunities for corruption.

Mahmood (2010) conducted a study on public procurement and corruption in Bangladesh, confronting the challenges and opportunities, and found that in Bangladesh, contract awards provide procurement opportunities; however, there are reports of wide-ranging corruption, political control, and pressure from trade unions in the procurement process and public trust in the entire procurement process is generally absent.

Kotoka (2012) assessed the level of compliance with public procurement in public entities in Ghana, and the study revealed that the Public Procurement Act, somehow, succeeded in harmonizing the process of procurement in public entities to secure fiscal transparency, efficiency, and increase competition among the local industry. However, the challenge of creating procurement structures and recruiting appropriate personnel to manage the procurement process limits the scope for efficiency and value for money.

World Bank (2018) indicated that many countries are yet to develop procedural frameworks that ensure; public procurement procedures are transparent and promote fair and equal treatment; the public resources linked to public procurement are used in accordance with the intended purposes; procurement officials' behaviour and professionalism are in line with the public purposes of their organization and systems are in place to challenge public procurement decisions, ensure accountability and promote scrutiny. In spite of all the measures put in place, public procurement is an ongoing process and has not been increasing in effectiveness, efficiency and transparency in the procurement systems. However, public procurement is an instrument of the government policy and a lever for wider economic, social and environmental change. In the above studies, the legal and regulatory frameworks which establish the rules have not progressively addressed challenges facing youths. Public procurement also faces integrity issues when it comes to decision-making and operations. Lack of transparency and accountability are considered as the major threats to integrity in public procurement; hence creation of awareness

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and access to information also contributes greatly to youth participation in government tenders.

Government Sensitization and Youth Access to Government Procurement Opportunities

To help fight poverty in Kenya, youths need to be accepted and supported through funds like Uwezo, which was launched in 2013 to provide both women and youths access to grants and free interest loans and also the provision of capacity building and training in functional business areas, with the ultimate goal of promoting the social and economic status of youths. Unequal procurement opportunities between the youths and other suppliers continue to hamper the youths' ability to fight poverty and gain more options to improve their lives. Therefore, the government has put in place empowerment programs both at the national and international levels, which are increasingly targeting the youth and women to participate in public procurement. The creation of awareness and easy access to information also contribute greatly to youth and women's participation in the government tendering process. Baron and Shane (2007) defined awareness as the competitive force, the most important force that an enterprise can have. To assess the systematic constraints to be able to access the market, focusing on youth and the process of procurement revealed that the technical capacity of the youth was a significant challenge since the 8-4-4 system of education, which was designed to focus towards imparting suitable skills to improve self-employment, ended up being ineffective. The training institutions were not only ineffective but also lacked the necessary technology and facilities to prepare youths for the market of challenging business market.

According to Rowe (2012), organizations should strive to ensure that the required information has been carefully identified, verified and shared with other relevant members for sound decision making, and the available information requires a channel of communication for it to be passed on between the involved parties. The government is in a position to sensitize the youths by ensuring they have easy access to information through different channels such as the use of print media like magazine and newspapers, use of television and radio, use of online platforms including websites and posters (Hayakawa & Ito, 2014). While some of these channels are cheap to access, others require some costs, like the use of the internet will require the supplier to subscribe to internet bundles or Wi-Fi in order to get access to information (Mohammed et al., 2015).

Wleh (2013) looked at the key factors that shape and predict accessibility of public procurement opportunities, focusing on the Ministry of Kenya, and the specific reference of the study was on youth-owned enterprises. The response was 83.33% and it showed that accessibility to information is a factor that affects participation in the government tendering process by the youths. Njeri and Getuno (2016) sought to bring out the key factors that shape and determine the ability of participants to access government tender opportunities using evidence from the judiciary.

Kipkoech (2015) focused on determining how implementing the AGPO program has enhanced SME growth with specific reference to the youth. The variables of the study included access to information, training, and competition for procurement opportunities and the provision of loan facilities. It was revealed that the respondents had awareness of the AGPO program and adequate information as obtained from the government agencies. The recommendations raised included the need for booklets and brochures for accessibility to government tenders, and also to strengthen the available information on the AGPO program. The study also raised the need to have in place digital platforms like social media for passing information about government tenders, which in turn increases the number of participants. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient education and training for women and youths is an obstacle for them to participate in entrepreneurial activities. Youth empowerment needs to be taken seriously, especially when it comes to tendering opportunities. In the studies, insufficient knowledge of the formal tendering

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process has not been adequately handled by AGPO and PPOA.

Financing and Youth Access to Government Procurement Opportunities

According to Orodho (2013), 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. According to Musgrave et.al. (2007), public procurement can be an important source of business for youth-owned SMEs. However, access to public sector contracts by smaller entities is seen as a problem at a national and global level for many in the sector. Hence, there is a need to target the rural poor to achieve overall economic growth by funding them to be able to access public procurement opportunities (Athanne, 2011).

According to the KNBS survey basic report on Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSME) (2016), funding is one of the major constraints of the medium, small and micro enterprises since the enterprises lack collateral for credit, high taxes, high license fees and very expensive loans. Rugiri and Njangiru (2018) conducted a study on the availability of finance and its role as far as project performance is concerned. The study focused on projects that are funded by the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in the context of Nyeri County. The results showed that the availability of finance and project performance are positively and significantly linked with each other.

Kipkoech (2015) focused on determining how implementing the AGPO program has enhanced SME growth with specific reference to youths and shared that there were some lending entities that assisted in financing of their Local Purchase Order (L.P.O). Access to finance is a challenge, especially for small businesses, given that they are required to pledge collateral in the form of assets which are not adequate. Mwangi et al. (2018) noted that, unlike larger firms, smaller firms face a challenge of increased costs with respect to accessibility to credit facilities since most lending institutions shy away from advancing credit facilities to small firms on the grounds that they are too risky when it comes to repayment of loans advanced to them. Small firms have inadequate savings, low securities and collateral and low experience and knowledge that limit their ability to access financial resources, including loan facilities from lending institutions.

Njeri and Getuno (2016) conducted a study to bring out the key factors that shape and determine the ability of participants to access government tender opportunities using evidence from the judiciary. The study revealed that financial resources are a key factor that inhibits youths from taking up government procurement opportunities since most of them were not in a position to raise capital for financing the entire tendering process. This study operationalised financial resources into accessibility to credit facilities, the payment period for tenders' accessibility to the youth enterprise fund and accessibility to the women enterprise fund.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a case study as the research design. A case study is a methodological approach that is used to generate an in-depth understanding of contemporary issues in a bounded system and is conducted on individuals or groups so as to gain understanding of a real-life phenomenon (Coombs, 2022). The main goal was to gain detailed information about the case subject and also generate new insights. An intrinsic case study was used since it focuses on the case itself, because the case presents a unique situation that resembles the focus of narrative research but maintains the analytic procedures of a case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Study Area

The study was carried out at the county government of Kisumu. The reason for carrying it out in Kisumu County is that it is one of the major cities in Kenya with a majority of the population studying being youths; hence, it was easy to gather information in regards to impediments AGPO by youths in Kisumu County. The county covers a total land area of 2009.5 KM2 and a population of

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1,155,574, and a population of 550 persons per KM2 according Kenya Bureau of Statistics national census (2019).

Sampling Method

According to Guetterman (2015), they opined that purposive sampling involves the selection of participants who have the knowledge and understanding of the research topic. Purposive sampling was adopted since the sample members were selected on the basis of their knowledge, skills, relationships and expertise regarding the research subject, and this criterion was chosen because of their relevance to the research questions (Bell et al., 2022). The research also adopted quota sampling, which relies on the non-random selection of a predetermined number. This is where the researcher chooses participants who are split into different segments and is conscious of the divisions of a population, but still ensures it gives deep insights into each stratum. The youths who are prequalified under AGPO in the county government of Kisumu are found in all the sub-counties within Kisumu County, which are seven in number (strata). From each sub county (strata), the researcher selected one participant (stratum) to represent the youths who are prequalified in the AGPO list within each sub county based on her judgement and they included seven youths who provided detailed information on the obstacles the hinder AGPO by youths and a procurement officer in the county government of Kisumu who is in the age bracket of youths to gain more insights as to why youths are not taking part in government procurement activities.

Data Collection Method

For this research, the researcher used interviews, Document Reviews and Observations.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected to carry out this research study since they allowed the participants to elaborate more and also provided flexibility. Semi-structured interviews permitted scope for individuals to answer questions on their own terms as compared to standard interviews, and also still provided a good structure for comparability over that of the focus group interviews. Kumar (2005) viewed the interview as the most suitable approach for studying complex and sensitive areas, as the interviewer has the opportunity to prepare a participant before asking sensitive questions and also explain the complex questions to them in person. Through the use of interviews, the researcher was in a position to gain in-depth information about what are the obstacles that hinder AGPO among the youths and how best they can be addressed. They are an integral part of research design since there are several data collection methods, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. The researcher interviewed a total of eight participants that including the procurement officer in the county government of Kisumu and the seven youths from the seven sub-counties within Kisumu County. The interview schedule was structured into the following sections: a) the procurement procedures that are supposed to be used, their efficiency and effectiveness, b) how the government is involved in the sensitization process of the youths and the kind of plans set in place, c) how accessible are the finances to the youths to enable them participate adequately in the tendering process.

The interviewer conducted a pilot interview prior to the commencement of the actual research. This process allowed the interviewee to express thoughts and feelings relating to the questions and also allowed the researcher to resolve any difficulties with the wording of the questions that would make the participant feel uncomfortable. However, the data collected in this interview were not included in the analysis.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was used in this study to analyse the existing documents, both printed and electronic, to see the obstacles that hinder AGPO by youths in the county government of Kisumu. The documents used included the PPRA and PPDA.

Observations

The study adopted participant observation where the observer is a part of the group under observation, and the observer is considered to be an attentive listener, recording and interpreting

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the behaviour of the participants under study. The researcher was able to observe how youths in a particular group were discussing the reasons they do not participate in the procurement activities and what they think the government should do.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity

The main goal of this research study was to accurately portray the information received during the interview process. Triangulation was utilized within the data sources, and since there was proper analysis of the data, convergent data from the participants validated the findings (Patton, 1999). In addition to comparing numerous scholarly articles throughout the study, the researcher used observations and interviews in the triangulation process. After the completion of interviews and observations, the researcher did follow up sessions by asking if the information received and transcribed was correct. There were 8 participants and 128 answers to the sixteen interview questions; hence, the time that was involved, the number of participants and the vigour in the number of interviews allowed for proper data triangulation to occur. Data triangulation involved numerous perspectives from a wide range of participants, which created a validation for the data collected, and also involved discussing the findings with participants. The interviews were completed so as to achieve validity, since it was a way to obtain feedback to be able to make any modifications that the participants may feel are required. Validity was achieved by ensuring that the questions and interview stay consistent and are phrased the same across the board with all participants; however, creativity and subjectivity are often argued to be a challenge within qualitative research when establishing validity because the researcher may find a bias (Cyperss, 2017).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of our study, the interview guide questions were presented for validation. The researcher ensured the identity of the respondents was protected by hiding their identity and made sure she had the skills of empathetic listening, understanding, patience and traits of acceptance. Trustworthiness is defined as the demonstration that the evidence for the results reported is sound, and when the argument made based on the results is strong (LaBanca, 2010).

Data Analysis Method

After the data was transcribed, it was coded, analysed, interpreted and verified. Transcribing the interviews helped the researcher to gain more understanding of the subject by repeatedly listening to and reading the transcribed interview. Coding is a qualitative data analysis strategy where some data is assigned a descriptive label, which allows the researcher to identify related content across the data (Farley et al., 2020). Coding was done once all the data was fully transcribed. The data was then analysed, categorized into themes and further sub-themes that emerged through the coding process. The next stage involved interpreting the data by identifying any recurring themes throughout and highlighting any similarities and differences in the data. The final stage involved data verification, which involved a process of checking the validity of understanding by rechecking the transcripts and codes again, so as to allow the researcher to verify or modify hypotheses already arrived at previously. The study adopted a narrower and deductive approach to coding.

Research Ethics

The research proposal was submitted to the researcher's supervisor for ethical approval to be granted by the supervisor prior to the commencement of the research. Kumar (2005) acknowledges that it is very unethical for a researcher to accumulate information without the participant's knowledge, their expressed willingness and informed consent. Hence, the researcher ensured that all participants understood that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher also ensured that there was informed consent from all participants and also advised that they were under no obligation to answer any questions that they were not feeling comfortable with. The participants were given

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advanced notice before the interview, a broad outline of the subject to be discussed, an indication of the type of information that was required of the participant, the reason why the research was being conducted and how the information gathered would be used. All participants signed a consent form stating that they are willing to participate in the interview while also ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results were presented according to the objectives of the study, which are to examine how procurement procedures hinder access to government procurement procedures by youths in the county government of Kisumu; how government sensitization hinders access to government procurement procedures by youths in the county government of Kisumu and how financing hinders access to government procurement procedures by youths in the county government of Kisumu.

The key themes that came up following the data analysis, as a result of obstacles hindering access to government procurement opportunities by youths, were: procurement procedures, government sensitization, and financing as a hindrance to access to government procurement opportunities by youths. All the themes were connected in a way, and from analysing the data, it emerged that access to government procurement opportunities is a major obstacle to the youth in the county government of Kisumu.

Procurement Procedures

Some of the participants felt that being able to access government procurement services was mainly brought about by long procurement procedures, which were not transparent and efficient enough. One of the participants described how there is a lack of adequate controls put in place to ensure procurement procedures are effective for the youths. She said:

> *Adequate controls by the government and procurement entities are still not in place to ensure procurement procedures are effective for youths who are prequalified under the AGPO program, since most of them have no technical know-how and expertise on the required legal processes and procedures for them to access government procurement opportunities (Participant 3).*

Another participant also commented on adequate control put in place to ensure that procurement procedures are effective for the youths:

> *I feel that the government has a long way to go to ensure that adequate control systems are put in place for the youths to have free and fair competition when it comes to bidding for goods and services. By doing this, the government will be able to curb corruption levels in the public procurement sector. So, with inadequate control systems, we as youths are not in a position to easily access the procurement procedures laid out by the government (Participant 2).*

The findings concur with Ngugi et al. (2020) who examined the impact of procurement activities on the operation and effectiveness of public sectors in Kenya and concluded that it is very essential that these activities be performed by qualified staff with high professional and ethical standards using required procedures anchored in appropriate policies and regulations and the study recommended that adequate controls should be put in place to reduce opportunities for corruption.

Accessibility

Some participants thought that if they could gain easy access to the set procurement procedures, they would be in a position to understand the procurement process. This will also have a positive effect on the procuring entities since they will have to be more efficient and transparent in their dealings, knowing that the suppliers know what takes place throughout the procurement process, right from the identification of need to payment.

> *Through gaining access to the set procurement procedures, we, as the youths, will be able to create job opportunities for ourselves and others as well and also have the required technical expertise for fair competition with others in the same category. In the long run, we will be in a position to make a profit by participating in the available procurement opportunities and reducing the level of*

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unemployment rates within Kisumu County. (Participant 3)

Another participant also stated that gaining access to the procurement procedures by youths is very advantageous to them. She said:

The procurement procedures in AGPO favour the youths compared to the suppliers under citizen companies in that some mandatory requirements are less strict compared to those prequalified under citizen companies. This is because the government set aside 30% of all procurement activities and it is fully left for the youth, women, and people with disability. Hence, I would like to encourage the youths to be more aggressive and take part in procurement activities. (Participant 8)

The findings collaborated with Kwening (2022), who assessed the level of compliance with public procurement in public entities in Ghana, and the study revealed that the Public Procurement Act, somehow, succeeded in harmonizing the process of procurement in public entities to secure fiscal transparency, accessibility, efficiency and increase competition among the local industry, which is the youths.

Integrity

Most of the participants thought that the procuring entities, such as the county government of Kisumu, should uphold integrity and ensure transparency in the procurement procedures set aside by the government. One of the participants responded by saying;

I strongly feel that the procurement entities can uphold integrity and ensure transparency in the entire procurement process by practising different kinds of activities such as publishing procurement policies; advance publication of the procurement plans; advertisement of tender notices; disclosure of evaluation criteria; publication of contract awards, and prices paid. By doing all these, we as the youths will have more confidence in the procurement procedures and start participating actively in the procurement activities to be able to make a difference to youths as a whole. (Participant 4)

The second participant also gave his idea regarding integrity in the procurement procedures. He said:

In my personal opinion, procurement entities can uphold integrity by ensuring that they adhere to the set procedures set by the government, such as the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPDA) and Public Procurement Regulatory Act (PPRA). By so doing, the level of corruption and biases will be reduced by a huge percentage, and we, as the youths, will be able to be treated fairly by the procuring entities and be granted more opportunities within the county government of Kisumu. (Participant 2)

This study is collaborated by Trkman & McCormack (2010) who argued that the public procurement process is supposed to uphold integrity by mitigating all malpractices, inform decision-making that requires public bodies to base decisions on accurate information, and ensure that the set requirements are being met. One of the participants also contributed to how regulatory frameworks, which are anchored on the tendering process, enhance youth participation in the procurement process. She said:

Some of the regulatory frameworks set in place by the procuring entity include: the tendering committee, evaluation committee, and Inspection and Acceptance committee, which handle all the processes from the tendering process, evaluation of tenders, and receipt of procured items, respectively. The members in charge of each of these committees are always prescribed in PPDA and PPRA, and this enhances free and fair competition for the youths. All youths who have not been participating in the procurement activities should not fear anymore because the procuring entity is ready to offer any form of assistance to them. (Participant 8)

The findings agree with the assertions by Nyathore et al. (2013), who argued that in 2007, the PPDA came into force and established the Public Procurement Oversight Authority (PPOA) as a regulatory body for the development and oversight of the Kenyan Public Procurement System. Other regulatory bodies put in place under public procurement to ensure the

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procurement process is followed strictly include; Public Procurement and Disposal Regulations (2020), Supplies Practitioners Management Act (2007), Public Procurement and Disposal (Public Private Partnership) Regulations (2009), Constitution of Kenya (2010), Public Procurement and Disposal (Preference and Reservations) Regulations (2013), and Public Procurement and Disposal (County Government) Regulations (2013). However, World Bank (2010) indicates that many countries are yet to develop procedural frameworks that ensure; public procurement procedures are transparent and promote fair and equal treatment; the public resources linked to public procurement are used in accordance with the intended purposes; procurement officials' behaviour and professionalism are in line with the public purposes of their organization and systems are in place to challenge public procurement decisions, ensure accountability and promote scrutiny. Despite all the measures put in place, public procurement is an ongoing process and has not been increasing in effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency in the procurement systems.

Government Sensitization

Some of the participants believed that if the government gets more involved and offers sensitization programs to all the youths, they will be in a position to gain more knowledge and be empowered on ways they can easily access government procurement opportunities.

One of the participants said that:

> *There is a lack of targeted and more tailored sensitization programs set aside by the government for the youths, which leads to low levels of awareness and understanding of the entire process and requirements. This makes most of us youths not take part in the procurement opportunities. (Participant 3)*

Another participant also gave his opinion on reasons why most of the youths are not involved in the government sensitization programs, such as training activities on matters related to AGPO, to be more empowered. He said: "Most of us youths don't go for those trainings that the government provides due to ignorance, lack of interest, and unwillingness to get involved in the activities due to formed opinion regarding AGPO debate" (Participant 1).

Regarding the same issue, another participant said:

> *We youths find it so tiresome to attend those trainings since there is a lot of bureaucracy, lack of money to go to the venue where the training is being conducted and we also think that there is nothing we are going to benefit from the training. Most of us also have no information on when and where the government training will be conducted. (Participant 5)*

From the findings, training the youths on how to access government procurement opportunities is a very important thing so that youths can be able to gain the required knowledge and skills to compete fairly. However, Talal (2014) asserted that to assess the systematic constraints to be able to access the market focusing on youths and the process of procurement revealed that the technical capacity of the youths was a significant challenge since the 8-4-4 system of education which was designed only focused towards imparting suitable skills to improve self-employment ended up being ineffective. The training institutions were not only ineffective but also lacked the necessary technology and facilities to prepare youths for the market of challenging business. This concurs with some of the reasons why youths do not go for the training set aside by the government.

The youths are required to be up to date with activities that are taking place within the county government of Kisumu especially when it comes to procurement activities. However, most of them feel like the government is not so much involved when it comes to sensitizing them on how best to access information and participate in various procurement activities:

> *Personally, as a youth, I am not in a position to access the information because of the following reasons; there is a lack of awareness as a result of non-proper advertisements, high level of corruption within the procurement entity, hidden charges in procurement activities, lack of finance to facilitate the required documents and sometimes I feel like*

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am wasting my time and the little resources I have because am not trained on how to access those information. (Participant 6)

Internet

Most of the participants felt that the lack of easy access to internet connectivity was a major cause why they could not access the information the government has set aside for them as youths to be able to participate in government procurement opportunities:

I have the desire to participate in the available procurement opportunities within the county government of Kisumu; however, the greatest challenge I am facing as a youth is that I do not have easy access to the information available online because of poor connectivity of internet within my area of residence. So, inasmuch as the government is trying to be transparent and give equal opportunities to everyone, it should also consider that there is a good internet connection in every part of Kisumu to increase youth participation in the procurement activities. (Participant 3)

It was apparent from the analysis of the data that when the internet connection is low within a specific region, most youths are likely to miss out on the procurement opportunities. However, some of the youths were also complaining of a lack of smartphones to be able to browse and access the information set aside by the government in regards to open tenders available to the public:

In this specific region, there is internet connectivity, but now the fact that I don't have a smartphone, I find it difficult to access the information available online, hence, I cannot be in a position to know if there are tenders that have been advertised or even the amended Acts and Regulations done by the government. This has made it very difficult for me to access government procurement opportunities, and also going to the cyber almost daily to check for any updates in the supplier's portal is time-consuming and expensive. (Participant 1)

The results differ from Hayakawa & Ito, 2014, who asserted that the government is in a position to sensitize the youths by ensuring they have easy access to information through different channels such as the use of print media like magazines and newspapers, use of television and radio, use of online platforms including websites and posters. However, (Mohammed et al., 2015) were of the contrary opinion that some of the channels provided by the government are not cheap to access, others require some costs like the use of internet will require the supplier to subscribe to internet bundles or Wi-Fi in order to get access to information. It is very evident why internet connectivity plays a vital role when it comes to access to government procurement activities (Mohammed et al. 2015)

The government has also set aside some capacity building programs under AGPO so as to empower youths to get more involved in the procurement activities instead of just sitting around and waiting for white collar jobs that are not forth coming:

The youths can take part in capacity building programs by doing a number of things such as; making follow up in the supplier portal provided by the government or visiting any national or county government procurement offices for more information. They can also get involved in the various programs by constantly checking the AGPO website for any available or future programs. (Participant 8)

Financing

Some of the participants reported that lack of adequate finances to be able to take part in the government procurement opportunities was a major reason why most of the youths do not even bother to grab the procurement opportunities in the county government of Kisumu. One participant noted "Most of us youths lack the necessary financial capabilities to be able to participate in government procurement activities and meet the financial requirements" (Participant 2).

Another participant commented about the lack of finances saying;

Despite the fact that I have been pre-qualified under the AGPO program, I am still unable to participate due to limited access to financial services in the banks and money lending institutions such as the Youth Enterprise Development fund which can allow me to participate and compete with other youths in the procurement opportunities offered by the government. This is because most of the

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> *financial institutions have a lot of requirements that I as a youth cannot meet and also fear that I will not be able to repay the loans. (Participant 5)*

The participants were also asked to give their opinion on what they think the government should do to ensure that the youths don't feel excluded from the public procurement contracts despite of them lacking financial capability and some gave the following responses: "I think the government should provide money lending services to youths with proper securities which will enable them to access government procurement opportunities and even create employment opportunities for themselves and even people around them" (Participant 7).

The fourth participant also gave his opinion on the same, saying:

> *I am of the idea that the government should create awareness in regards to how to access the finances available and all the necessary procedures that are involved to be able to access those funds. The government should also encourage the youths to apply for those funds since most of the funds that are being provided by the government for the youths are interest-free. (Participant 8)*

Youths also have a huge problem when it comes to accessing information on sources of funds set aside by the government. Most of the participants blamed the high unemployment rate as one of their inabilities to access the funds since most of the financial institutions want to be certain that you are in a position to pay back the funds borrowed within the speculated time, and without any source of income, it becomes difficult for the youths to access funds.

Most of the participants also responded in regards to what is preventing most youths from accessing information on sources of funds. One of the participants who is really affected by inadequate funds responded by saying:

> *I registered under the AGPO program to be able to gain financial stability by accessing the available government opportunities within the county government of Kisumu. However, when I did my inquiries on how to gain access to the funds, I realized that the procedures that were supposed to be followed to acquire funds were so many and not easy to understand, furthermore, for me to access those funds, I have to go all the way to Kisumu town since those services are not available within the sub-counties and finally, I have a strong feeling I will not get those funds even if I applied since the system within the government is already corrupt and for me to access those funds, I must know someone in the top offices to help me access the funds. (Participant 3)*

From the findings based on financing, Kipkoech (2015) focused on determining how implementing the AGPO program has enhanced SME growth with specific reference to youths and shared that some lending entities assisted in financing their Local Purchase Order (L.P.O). However, access to finance is a challenge, especially for small businesses and youths, given that they are required to pledge collateral in the form of assets that are not adequate. In addition, Mwangi et al. (2018) also asserted that, unlike larger firms, smaller firms face the challenge of increased costs concerning accessibility to credit facilities since most lending institutions shy away from advancing credit facilities to small firms because they are too risky when it comes to repayment of loans advanced to them. Small firms have inadequate savings, low securities and collateral, and low experience and knowledge that limit their ability to access financial resources, including loan facilities from lending institutions.

Participant three, however felt that if all youths can receive proper training and awareness on how and where they can get access to financial services that are being provided by the government for business purposes, then they will be able to grab the procurement opportunities set aside for AGPO group by the government.

When asked about the different financial constraints that prevent youths from taking part in government procurement opportunities and even applying for tenders, most of the participants felt attacked directly by that question, since it is a major contributor to why they cannot gain easy access to government procurement opportunities.

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The financial constraints that I am facing as a person include: a lack of easy access to internet connectivity to be able to check the procurement portal to see the available contracts, I also don't even have a smartphone and the finances required for me to access the portal. (Participant 7)

Overarching Question: Youths' Access to Government Procurement Opportunities

Most participants felt that youths have the right to access government procurement opportunities and have equal and fair chances to compete with other suppliers so that in the end they can be able to make ends meet. They also responded by saying that through the affirmative action laid out in the constitution by the government, all members in the AGPO group (youths, women, and persons with disability) have access to up to 30% of all government procurement opportunities, however, the majority of the participants who are representing youths within the county government of Kisumu, still have a problem in accessing those opportunities, that's why they remain unemployed and leave from hand to mouth.

Empowerment

Need for empowerment was dominant among the youth respondents, as most of them felt that they were less competitive. One of the participants stated that;

For the procurement process to be more efficient and effective, we as youths need to be very empowered so that we can be in a position to make informed decisions before we register to be under the AGPO program, since there is no need for me as a youth to register and in the long run not be able to participate because of lack of finances, long procurement procedures that are not easy to understand and not receiving enough sensitization from the government. (Participant 2)

Another participant also responded to the importance of youths gaining empowerment on how to access government procurement opportunities.

Through the youth empowerment programs, we as youths will be able to understand the laid-out procurement procedures to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency, since we will have the knowledge and technical know-how that will enable us to compete fairly with other suppliers and contractors within the procurement entity. (Participant 4)

One of the participants also responded by saying:

If government sensitization is done properly, the empowerment levels will increase among the youths, hence we will have equal opportunity to compete in the tendering process fairly, like the other firms that are already participating and are very competitive without getting disqualified from the entire process. We will also be able to receive adequate training and access the available information provided online through government sensitization. (Participant 1)

Some of the participants also realized that financing is also a key factor when it comes to accessing government procurement opportunities, hence the need for youths to be more empowered in various ways so that they can be able to acquire finances to be able to participate adequately.

On matters relating to finance, I suggest that youths be empowered a lot and this can be accomplished by the government by ensuring youths gain access to financial services and even access the services at any time, trying to limit the legal requirements to easily access the available funds and also giving the youths enough time so that they can be able to pay the finances promptly without getting embarrassed in any way. (Participant 8)

The researcher also enquired why there is limited participation among the youth despite the measures that have been set aside by the government. Almost all the participants had their reasons why they did not participate in the procurement activities.

I do not participate in government procurement opportunities because of a lack of interest and motivation from the government entities, lack of information on how to access those government procurement opportunities, and inadequate finances, hence, the government should ensure that we, as youths are in a position to get the required information through social media platforms, print media, and the government websites. (Participant 6)

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Despite all the laid-out plans on how youths can get access to government procurement opportunities, it was still evident that the government still has a long way to go to ensure that youths, women, and people with disability get what is rightfully theirs. This is because of the increased levels of corruption. World Bank and IFC 2007 enterprise survey indicated that 71% of the companies surveyed expect to be given gifts to secure a government contract, with the value of the gift representing 8% of the total contractual amount.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to explore of obstacles that hinder AGPO by youths in the county government of Kisumu, Kenya. From the first objective, which was how procurement procedures hinder the AGPO by youths in the county government of Kisumu, it was evident that procurement procedures have a great impact when it comes to access to government procurement opportunities by youths. The findings show that the government has not yet put in place adequate control systems to ensure that the procurement process is efficient and effective enough so that all youths can compete fairly in government procurement opportunities. It is also very evident from the findings that the procuring entities should uphold integrity at all times by adhering to the laid-out procurement procedures so that they can encourage more youths to participate. Legal frameworks such as PPDA, PPRA and PPOA should also be followed to the letter to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the entire procurement process. By so doing, the procurement procedures set aside by the government will be of great benefit not only to the youths but also to women and people with disabilities. From the results, it is evident that through empowerment theory, the youths will be able to access the available information easily, and the stakeholders, such as the government, will be able to uphold integrity.

In the second objective, the study also discovered that government sensitization is a major obstacle that hinders access to government procurement opportunities by youths. It was discovered that despite the government saying that there are sensitization programs put in place for the youths, it was still evident that there is a lack of targeted and more tailored sensitization programs set aside by the government for the youths, which leads to low awareness levels and understanding of how to access the government opportunities. From the findings, poor internet connectivity and lack of money to buy bundles were a major reason why the youths could not gain access to the information set aside by the government on their online platforms, which is one of the ways the government can sensitize youths on how to gain access to government procurement opportunities.

From the third objective, the study also noted that financing was a key obstacle to why youths do not gain access to government procurement opportunities. Lack of adequate finance is disadvantageous to the youths since there is no contract or tender that one can be given without the procuring entity ascertaining that you are in a position to supply the required goods and services, hence most of the youths get disadvantaged and even if they go to the banks and financial institutions, there are a lot of procedures to be followed to be given loans and the payoff period is also short and the banks and financial institutions do not care whether you have been paid for the work done or not. From the findings, access to sources of funds set aside by the government was also a major contributor to why the youths are not participating in government procurement opportunities.

Recommendations

From the first research question, results show that procurement procedures have a positive effect on youth access to government procurement opportunities. The study therefore recommends that the county government of Kisumu should ensure there is transparency and efficiency in the procurement process by making sure they uphold integrity, make the procurement procedures accessible to all youths, and provide a proper legal framework to the youths to encourage all youths to participate. By doing this, the youth uptake of government procurement opportunities will rise

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tremendously, and everyone will get equal opportunities.

The study further recommends that the training programs on AGPO are done more frequently and in each sub-county so that most youths can attend, and those trainings should also be affordable. Through this, the youths will be more empowered with the knowledge and skills on how to access government procurement opportunities. The county government should also ensure that information on procurement opportunities is provided in the different online platforms such as the county government of Kisumu advertisement of the tender platform, AGPO platform among other platforms are easily accessible, this can be made possible by ensuring there is good internet connectivity even in the rural areas and the bundles required to access that information are a bit cheap.

Additionally, the study recommends that the county government of Kisumu should ensure that youths gain easy access to the finances set aside by the government for the youths. This can be achieved by ensuring that they develop more elaborate plans to ensure as many youths as possible utilize the exemption from paying tender securities to access the tenders. The county government should also have a conversation with the banks and financial institutions such as the youth development enterprise fund to be able to reduce the requirements for one to be given funds and also increase the payoff periods for youths to be able to pay off the loans acquired. This will encourage more youths to take part in government procurement opportunities since they will have access to capital and sources of funds.

Suggestion of Future Research

The study suggests that further research should be conducted on the obstacles hindering access to information on tendering participation by people living with disability in Kisumu County, and also another study should be conducted to determine the impact of capacity-building programs on AGPO by youths in Kenya. Further studies should also be conducted to determine whether the implementation process concerning the AGPO program has been put in place. By exploring the obstacles hindering youth participation in government procurement opportunities through qualitative research, policymakers, programs, and interventions can aim at enhancing youth access to procurement processes and promoting their socio-economic empowerment.

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