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Nexus Between Gender Responsive Evaluation and Gender Responsive Public Procurement in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The study examines Gender-Responsive Evaluation (GRE) and Gender-Responsive Public Procurement (GRPP) nexus in Kenya and attempts to diagnose why the progressive Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) program is producing inadequate outcomes, with a significant discrepancy between its 30% objective and the number of contracts awarded to women-owned enterprises (WOEs). The study adopts a conceptual research design in the synthesis of feminist institutionalism and policy prioritization analysis. The approach is used to critique policy documents and empirical evidence and eventually model the systemic disengagement between procurement action and evaluative learning. The results suggest a dysfunctional feedback loop, with a severe lack of sex-disaggregated procurement information, which paralyzes constructive judgment and entrenches organizational bias toward ritual adherence, instead of quantifying transformative effect of gendered procurement that creates a vicious cycle of poor performance. This analysis concluded that GRPP and GRE are not independent activities but rather complementary elements of a gendered mainstreaming strategy, and their lack of operational linkage is the key factor in policy failure. The study recommends the need to incorporate GRE into the procurement laws and digital procurement systems to establish an evidence and legislative base. These efforts should be accompanied by capacity building to accelerate the need of gender evidence among oversight institutions. The contribution of the study is to reframe the problem as relating to systemic integration and not purely technical compliance which is necessary to forge this nexus and make public procurement a strategic, accountable tool to constitutional equity and inclusive economic growth in Kenya.

Keywords: Gender-Responsive Evaluation, Gender-Responsive Public Procurement, Kenya, Conceptual Research, Policy Integration

INTRODUCTION

Kenya is a landmark example in the universal undertaking of gender equality since the country created one of the most liberal policy frameworks on inclusive governance in Africa (GoK, 2010; GoK, 2019). Gender equity is enshrined in the 2010 Constitution and in supplementary documents,

including the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) program, which states the need to reserve 30% of the public contracts or awards to women, youth and persons with disabilities (Gok, 2010; Kangethe et al., 2022; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Oduor & Awuor, 2025). This is an effective acknowledgment of the fact that public procurement, which takes up a substantial share of the national budget, is a strategic tool of socio-economic transformation. Nevertheless, there is an apparent and persistent challenge on implementation that depreciates this noble aspiration (Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Oduor & Awuor, 2025). There is empirical evidence of a disturbing paradox to be explored. Although there is a strong legal framework in place, in reality the actual achievement of these goals is still elusive, and research shows that only approximately 1% of female-run businesses are successful in receiving government contracts (Nyeck, 2023; Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024; Martin, 2024; Odhiambo & Kamau, 2003; Nyathore, et al., 2023; Nyoike, 2019). This gap between policy goals and reality suggests not a collapse of the legitimate aspiration, but rather the existence of a significant structural defect in the apparatus of government procurement itself.

The main hypothesis of the inquiry is that the roots of such a systemic weakness lie in the fundamental mismatch between two mutually supporting focus areas of gender mainstreaming. These are Gender-Responsive Public Procurement (GRPP) and Gender-Responsive Evaluation (GRE) (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Williams, 2024; Martin, 2024; Nyathore, et al., 2023; Otieno & Kiraka, 2023). GRPP plays the main role as an implementing tool transitioning policy commitments into contract and market opportunities (Blais-Delisle et al., 2023; Otieno & Kiraka, 2023). However, when undertaken on its own, it is a blind process as it does not have the mechanisms of self-assessment feedback required to determine its actual effect or to refine its approaches. GRE, in its turn, offers the methodology of systematic assessment, which creates evidence of whether interventions are alleviating inequalities (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Gumucio et al., 2022; Götzmann & Bainton, 2021). However, when not connected to a tangible implementation tool or program, such as GRRP, its results can be seen as academic exercises that have very limited transformative potential. The dominant failure in Kenya is that these aspects have been treated as unrelated and dissimilar instead of as parts of an integrated, cyclical nexus (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024). This vicious cycle leads to the development of a system of governance

where procurement continues without any learning, and evaluation is conducted without the direct informing action, continuing a cycle of poor performance and failed constitutional commitments (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024).

The study, accordingly, explores the necessary nexus of Gender-Responsive Evaluation and Gender-Responsive Public Procurement in Kenya (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Williams, 2024). It goes beyond a descriptive study of discrete parts to make a conceptual study of how these program ideas are complimentary and interdependent. The study asserts the claim that GRPP and GRE form dynamic and reinforcing loops. This is because effective and gendered procurement creates the sex-disaggregated records and concrete experiences that constitute the components for meaningful assessment, whereas rigorous assessment furnishes the basis of evidence to identify obstacles, quantify transformational effect, and strategically redesign procurement policies and procedures so as to become more effective (Williams, 2024; Rathi, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023). This investigation theoretically models this nexus based on feminist institutionalism and public management theory and then uses the model as an analytical tool to diagnose the particular points of failure in the GRPP system, such as the AGPO program, in Kenya (MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Guido et al., 2023; Radnor et al., 2016; O'Toole Jr & Meier, 2015; Williams, 2024). The lack of an integrated system of data, the emphasis on ownership instead of impact, and capacity shortages are the institutional, political, and data-related obstacles that are examined to mitigate their effect of this critical feedback loop (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024).

This study has practical and theoretical contributions. In principle, it contributes to the existing literature on gender mainstreaming by strictly defining and theorizing the GRE-GRPP nexus as a crucial subsystem to the attainment of gender-equitable outcomes (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Williams, 2024). It brings the academic and policy discussion out of the context of individual technical tools to its integration as a system. Practically, such an analysis offers a diagnostic framework to the Kenyan policy-making team and practitioners (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Williams, 2024). It recognizes specific intervention areas for strengthening the nexus including hardwiring of GRE indicators to e-procurement and utilizing the evaluation results to obligate support of gender-responsible enterprises beyond the current emphasis of ownership rules under AGPO (PPRA, 2023;

Odhambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Williams, 2024). In conclusion, pursuant to such, this study argues that the potential of Kenya's constitutional imperative to equity depends on bridging this feedback loop and making public expenditure more of an engine of change that is evidence-based and gender transformative and less of ritual of compliance to procurement directives (Omweri, 2024; Mbori, 2021).

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The scholar discourse of gender equality in the field of public administration has taken two parallel, but highly interdependent paths of Gender-Responsive Evaluation (GRE) and Gender-Responsive Public Procurement (GRPP) (Odhambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Williams, 2024). In the pursuit of systematic measures of the effect that interventions have on understanding gender relationships, GRE has recognized its roots in feminist critique to the conventional evaluation procedure, where gendered influence was often suppressed (Odhambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Williams, 2024; MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Guido et al., 2023). At the same time, GRPP emerged as a strategic instrument on a global scale because it is known that public expenditures, which are frequently 10-15% of GDP, could be transformed not into a transactional activity but into a potent engine of socio-economic change and economic empowerment of women (UN Women, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Oduor & Awuor, 2025). In Kenya, this international imperative was translated into influential policy and underpinned in the 2010 Constitution and then the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) program, which formally allocates 30% of government tenders to women, the youth, and people with disabilities (GoK, 2010; GoK, 2019; Williams, 2024; Martin, 2024; Nyathore, et al., 2023). Such a groundbreaking model made Kenya among the first countries to utilize procurement as a means of affirmative action and set a definite intention to make use of government buying power as a means of gender equality (UN Women, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Williams, 2024).

The actual situation, nonetheless, reveals an eminent disparity in the current ecosystem that highlights the urgent necessity to investigate the interface between GRE and GRPP. Although there is a strong legal imperative, the actual adoption of AGPO is well below its target and recent reports state that the affirmative allocation is being achieved at only about 17% (PPRA, 2023;

Odhiambo, 2025; Williams, 2024; Martin, 2024; Nyathore, et al., 2023; Otieno & Kiraka, 2023). This discrepancy between policy aspiration and on-the-field performance suggests an institutional failure that cannot be solved by individually focusing on GRE and GRPP (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Williams, 2024). The existing literature are inclined to consider them as distinct fields where GRE is concerned with ex-post evaluation and learning, and GRPP is concerned with ex-ante market intervention (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Williams, 2024). This division establishes an unhealthy loop, in which procurement is done without solid evidence of what obstacles to focus on, and assessment is done without a clear process to translate results to practical changes in procurement planning, tender design, or supplier development (Carrión et al., 2021; Mertens et al., 2025; Bene, 2022; Morse, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). The void is a failure relating both to technical and governance mechanism, and it creates a cycle wherein gender difference in public contracting is recreated instead of eliminated (Williams, 2024; GoK, 2010; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Kagiri, 2024).

The impasse can be analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of feminist institutionalism and policy analysis which offer essential insights into the situation. Feminist institutionalism assumes that although institutions are not gendered-neutral, nevertheless, they create and reproduce gendered power relations (Guido et al., 2023; Eray, 2017; MacRae & Weiner, 2021). Its application to the procurement system of Kenya shows that the capacity limitation is not only technical but also political and epistemological (MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Guido et al., 2023; Radnor et al., 2016; O'Toole Jr & Meier, 2015; Williams, 2024). Mainstream monitoring and procurement systems frequently build their architecture on androcentric premises of selecting compliance and improved aggregate efficiency over transformative results concerning the utilization of power and equity (Nyeck, 2023; Rathi, 2025; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Williams, 2024). Moreover, models used to identify policy prioritization, including the Shiffman and Smith model, assist in diagnosing why GRPP does not take hold, including the lack of well-functioning coalitions between actors to promote gender accountability, the definition of procurement as an entirely technical compliance procedure, and a political environment that does not reward the use of gender evidence (Shiffman, 2017; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). The implication of these theories is that in the absence of addressing the underlying

institutional logics and power dynamics, technical fixes to either GRE or GRPP will tend to be derailed or even ceremonial (Shiffman, 2017; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024).

Theoretical concerns are reflected in local empirical research which can be observed to indicate a disjointed evidence base. Likewise, obstacles to women-owned businesses are being increasingly documented, including mismatches in the sector, absence of access to finance and bidding bids, and lack of capacity (Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024). Conversely, projects like UN Women Strategic Partnership Framework (UAE-SPF) Project in Kenya have sought to transform GRPP from ‘policy into practice’, by enhancing capabilities and incorporating databases (UN Women, 2023; UN Women, 2024). But these undertakings, however, in turn underscore the chronic absence of sex-disaggregated information throughout the procurement cycle that severely curbs the possibility of meaningful GRE (UN Women, 2023; UN Women, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). The absence of granular data on who bids, wins, and performs on contracts would mean that evaluations could only go as far as counting the outputs as compared to measuring the transformational impact to the economic empowerment of women (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). It is a gap in information that serves as a core hindrance in the feedback loop between procurement action and evaluative learning (Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025).

Critical evaluation of this literature points to five interrelated gaps in research that this study aims to fill. To begin with, there is a conceptual divide. Both GRE and GRPP are well defined. However, there is no comprehensive conceptual framework that explicitly models the interdependent, cyclical relationship of both concepts as a subsystem that must be work in tandem in instilling gender mainstreaming in a given public finance and procurement (GoK, 2019; UN Women, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). Second, there is a significant contextual gap. Much work on the GRPP-GRE nexus is global or sector-neutral, and little has been done to create depth to the particular political economy, decentralized governance systems, and historical background of the Kenyan AGPO program (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023). Third, there exists a gap in methodology, because the current research literature is rife with macro-level policy examinations or micro-level case examinations of individual programs. There is a lack of the mixed-method studies that could document the causal lines linking results of the evaluation to the

redesign of procurement within the Kenyan institutions (Williams, 2024; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024). Fourth, there is still a theoretical gap in the application of the insights of feminist institutionalism to the technical worlds of procurement and evaluation, hence the paucity of understanding how gendered institutional logics are supported and how they could be destabilized (Guido et al., 2023; Eray, 2017; MacRae & Weiner, 2021). Lastly, there still exists an empirical evidence vacuum as to the quantifiable consequences of deliberately enhancing the GRE-GRPP nexus (Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Martin, 2024). Limited longitudinal and comparative data is available on whether and how implementing GRE into the procurement systems results in more equitable contract awarding, sustainable growth of businesses run by women, and wider transformational changes (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Martin, 2024; UN Women, 2023; Nyathore, et al., 2023).

By filling such gaps, this study can go beyond mere description of the two distinct disciplines. It builds and justifies a complex model of GRPP and GRE as a system of self-correcting mechanisms. This nexus is theorized as the feedback mechanism necessary to ensure the transformation of progressive policies relating to procurement in Kenya into mechanisms of quantifiable and gender-transformative change (Omweri, 2024; Mbori, 2021; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Williams, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a conceptual research design to analyze the intersection between GRE and GRPP in Kenya (Andreasen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). The ultimate objective is not to produce empirical evidence but to develop a new analytical paradigm through a critical synthesis of existing theories, policies, and documented evidence (Andreasen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). This method is selected due to the fact that the main issue identified, which is the dysfunctional disconnection of gendered evaluation and procurement, can be seen as conceptual and systemic in nature (Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). It demands a deconstruction of the rationale, presumptions and institutions that do not permit these two spheres of GRE and GRPP to constitute a coherent, gender-transformative exchange in public administration (Carrión et al., 2021; Mertens et al., 2025; Morse, 2016). It is thus theory-building analytical methodology that attempts to dismantle the existing architecture of the current knowledge and practice on the GRPP

landscape in Kenya and comes up with a more coherent model proposal. It is carried out in a systematic course of selecting theories, analysis of documents, and synthesization of concepts through a reflexive, critical approach (Andreasen et al., 2015; Astalin, 2013).

The strategic integrations of the two complementary theoretical lenses, which form the basis of the design, include feminist institutionalism and policy prioritization analysis, namely the Schiffman and Smith framework (MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Guido et al., 2023; Radnor et al., 2016; Schiffman, 2017). Feminist institutionalism offers the underlying critique, stating that institutions such as procurement systems are not gender neutral but are permeated with both formal and informal rules which recapitulate gender relations of power (MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Guido et al., 2023; Radnor et al., 2016). Such a lens helps guide the study to inquire how the rules, routines and norms of the procurement bureaucracy in Kenya are actively shaping what is treated as valid evidence; whose results are important; and how accountability is gendered (Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024; MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Guido et al., 2023; Radnor et al., 2016). At the same time, Schiffman and Smith policy prioritization tool provides a diagnostic instrument with a clear framework (Schiffman, 2017). It was used first in global health and is an analysis of how issues achieve political momentum by examining the four interconnected factors of the strength of the actors surrounding the issue; the framing concepts; the political environment; and the issue itself (Schiffman, 2017; Murphy et al., 2020; Tomlinson & Lund, 2012). This study modifies this framework to diagnose the failure of the GRE-GRPP nexus as it is in Kenya in the context of public procurement. The investigation moves beyond technical incapacity to consider the politics of evidence and action (Béné, 2022; Morse, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016).

The data used in this conceptual analysis is derived through a systematic and critical review of secondary sources (Andreasen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). These documentary evidence are not considered neutral information but discursive artifacts informing the underlying power relations and operational assumptions (Andreasen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). This corpus is multilayered strategically, as it includes the constitutional and statutory bases of Kenya (the Constitution 2010, the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act) and the policy framework of the operational program of AGPO and relevant national strategies (including the Gender Data Strategy 2025-2027) of Kenya (GoK, 2010; GoK, 2019; GoK, 2015; PPRA, 2023, UN Women, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023). Moreover, it includes academic and grey literature

reporting implementation issues of AGPO, results of associated gender-responsive programs, and international standards of GRPP and GRE by organizations such as UN Women and the OECD (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Williams, 2024; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Gumucio et al., 2022; UN Women, 2024). The selection criteria are biased towards articles that represent the mainstream technocratic method of procurement and evaluation. Conversely, the sources equally unveil the underpinning contradictions, implementation failures, areas of failure, like audit reports, or the absence of sex-disaggregated data (Andreasen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024).

The analytical process is a hermeneutic process that is critical and iterative (Andreasen et al., 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). It involves the deconstructive reading and discourse analysis of the gathered documents, which interrogates the way in which the main concepts of ‘value for money’, ‘empowerment’, ‘compliance’, and ‘impact’ are defined and operationalized (Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013). The analysis particularly follows the tracing of gender construction (or lack thereof) in procurement policies and assessment reports (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024). The modified Shiffman and Smith model then organizes the analysis (Shiffman, 2017; Murphy et al., 2020; Tomlinson & Lund, 2012). The analysis involves examining the actor power of an institution such as the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) as compared to gender advocacy organizations; the concepts informing the notion of GRPP, whether it is a compliance cost or strategic investment; the political environment of devolution and its varied local incentives, and the nature of the issue, such as the visibility of gender inequality in procurement data (Shiffman, 2017; PPRA, 2023; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024; Jaakkola, 2020; Astalin, 2013; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). It is not a linear but a cyclic process, which vacillates the theoretical lens and the empirical facts on a regular basis, to make knowledge refined.

The end product of this methodology is the generation of a unique and cohesive conceptual framework. This structure models the GRE-GRPP nexus as a cyclical, dynamic process with core elements that and identifies where exactly the feedback loop is disrupted in the Kenyan GRE-GRPP context. It serves as a diagnostic instrument to classify barriers as technical, institutional and political, and suggest specific interventions to the impediments that are identified. Through strict adherence to this conceptual research design, the study is expected to deliver a substantive scholarly contribution. Specifically, it re-focusses the issue of GRPP underperformance in Kenya

not as an issue of mere procedural failure, but as a systemic disconnect thus providing a theoretically informed, context-sensitive roadmap to develop the critical nexus of action and learning necessary needed for gender-transformative public procurement spending.

FINDINGS

The critical assessment of the gender-responsive procurement environment in Kenya in terms of the conceptual framework of the GRE-GRPP nexus indicates that the system is not defined by a self-corrective, functional cycle, but rather characterized by a number of serious disconnects (Omweri, 2024; Mbori, 2021). The findings confirm the fundamental hypothesis that the renowned policy framework, especially the AGPO program, is functioning within a dysfunctional feedback loop (Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Nyeck, 2023; Williams, 2024). Although GRPP is a procedural requirement that is already being practiced, it is largely disconnected with the foundational systematic and gender-responsive orientation that quantifies its effectiveness to engender its innate transformative effectiveness (Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka and Otieno, 2024; Gumucio et al., 2022; Götzmann & Bainton, 2021). This disconnect is reflected in practice by continued under achievement, where only about 17% of the 30% affirmative action target is achieved. Moreover, it is estimated only about 1% of women-owned businesses actually win public contracts (PPRA, 2023; Wamuyu et al., 2025; Martin, 2024; Odhiambo & Kamau, 2003; Nyathore, et al., 2023). This disconnect around implementation determination and outcome is the main symptom of a system in which procurement behaviors are not driven by evaluative facts, and evaluations are not prescribed or integrated into the procurement processes (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024).

One of the most important discoveries is a drastic lack of data which cripples the nexus at its infancy (UN Women, 2025; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024). The procurement and monitoring systems are not designed to capture the sex-disaggregated data needed to create meaningful GRE because Kenyan systems are not formulated to capture this kind of data in a granular way (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). The e-procurement platform and the bidding procedures do not normally provide a formal account of the gender identity of bidders in the open competition, or the disproportionate rate of success of women-owned enterprises (WOEs) when they bid for tenders outside the 30% reserved

quota. This paucity of evidence extends to the unavailable documentation of any outcomes by the contracting entities including employment opportunities created to women or shifts in gender responsiveness to service delivery (UN Women, 2025; PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024). This represents is a fundamental obstructive phenomenon, because without such data, evaluation would be limited to merely tracking superficial outputs, including a specific number of tenders booked as being reserved, rather than having a substantive effect on economic empowerment or structural inequality (Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024; Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025). As such, GRPP remains without a consistent evidence base to diagnose the failure of WOEs to bid or win contracts, making the adapting of policy responses iterative and contingent on guesswork instead of being policy-focused and evidenced (Kangethe et al., 2022; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Oduor & Awuor, 2025).

Additional findings on the specificity of the breakdown of the nexus, decisively points to the public procurement policy cycle. Prior gender evaluations are rarely used to inform procurement plans and policies at the needs assessment and planning stage, since comprehensive evaluations are not usually performed (PPRA, 2023; Wamuyu et al., 2025; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Oduor & Awuor, 2025). The obstacles affecting WOEs identified in the analyzed documents during the tender design phase, namely, tight financial requirements, large bid lots, and high-security requirements of bids that remain unchanged since the findings of the evaluation, reveal that these barriers are not systematically addressed and included in the updated versions of binding procurement rules (Williams, 2024; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Blais-Delisle et al., 2023; Otieno & Kiraka, 2023). Likewise, during the contract performance and monitoring stage, although AGPO can specify award to a WOE, monitored contract requirements to demand that the supplier practice gender equity within their own organization (such as fair wages or safe working conditions to women workers) rarely feature in contracts. So public procurement entities bypass the chance to use the procurement opportunity to create wider market change (UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; PPRA, 2023). Last, during the overall policy review, periodic audits of AGPO concentrate on financial compliance and on the quantitative disbursement, rather than on the qualitative, gender-transformative results. Therefore, the policy cycle remains deprived of the learning required to evolve (UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Béné, 2022; Morse, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016).

The discussion also exposes major contextual gaps that increase dysfunction of the nexus. There is an excessive urban-rural imbalance, and the statistics show that up to 67% of AGPO beneficiaries are in Nairobi, leaving out marginalized women entrepreneurs in the devolved counties. This finding goes which goes against the equitable spirit of devolution (Omweri, 2024; Mbori, 2021; UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Nyathore, et al., 2023; Nyoike, 2019). Moreover, the operational definition of gender-responsive in procurement is still limited by its focus on the ownership of a business, where enterprises where women having 51% of the shares are considered women-owned (UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024; PPRA, 2023). This definition has resulted in global criticism (Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024) because it ignores the possibility of rewarding and valuing other gender-responsible businesses that are actively involved in gender equality in their workforce and supply chains. This radical strategy and renewal of operationalization is championed by UN Women (UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024). Emerging evidence also indicates informal barriers, such as perceived corruption and sexual extortion ('sextortion'), which provide a hostile environment to women bidders that formal procurement rules and official evaluations fail to capture or respond to. This represents an important blind spot in the system (Eldén et al., 2020; Forattini, 2024; Mwangi et al., 2022; Nyeck, 2023; Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024).

The end product of all these fragmented components is a vicious cycle of institutional inertia. The unintegrated GRE implies that it is not possible to measure the actual price of inefficiency and disparity in GRPP, undermining the economic and social argument of reform (Williams, 2024; Rathi, 2025). The ongoing absence of evidence produced through nexus on impact and barriers is the scarring of political will and harming the promotion of reform champions in the field of bureaucracy and civil society (Shiffman, 2017; Béné, 2022; Morse, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016). Capacity-building, thus, continues to be limited to technical or compliance skills for WOE or procedural compliance to officers, as opposed to helping develop interdisciplinary and system-based knowledge to design and operate integrated GRE-GRPP processes (Williams, 2024; Carrion et al., 2021; Mertens et al., 2025; Morse, 2016). This stasis makes gender-responsive procurement in Kenya mostly a compliance-driven, box-ticking process, which is not evolving into the strategic, evidence-based vehicle of gender equality and inclusive economic development that it is supposed to become, as established by constitutional and policy underpinnings.

DISCUSSION

The presented findings support the main hypothesis stating that Kenya has a large implementation gap in GRPP due to a broken, ineffective nexus with GRE (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Omweri, 2024; Mbori, 2021). This empirical reality is displayed not only in parallel systems that act in silos but in the mainstreaming of the “failure” as an integral part of its governance phase (Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; Gumucio et al., 2022; Götzmann & Bainton, 2021). Therefore, undertakings that are progressive like AGPO program are restricted in a kind of a procedural mandate that creates ritualistic action though not systematic learning. Currently, the ability to do rigorous and gender-sensitive evaluation of its effects remains underdeveloped and institutionally disconnected (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Eray, 2017; MacRae & Weiner, 2021).

Through the developed prisms of feminist institutionalism and policy prioritization analysis, the interpretation of these findings demonstrate that the fissure is not incidental or solely driven by technical factor (Guido et al., 2023; Eray, 2017; MacRae & Weiner, 2021; UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024). It is both institutional and political (PPRA, 2023; Mutangili, 2025; Williams, 2024; Kagiri, 2024; UN Women, 2023; Williams, 2024). Feminist institutionalism explains that the institutional rationality that often favors quantifiable, readily-reported products, such as the number of tenders reserved or awarded, against complex, transformative outcomes, like those associated with women economic power and social equality, is a gendered institutional logic (Guido et al., 2023; Eray, 2017; MacRae & Weiner, 2021). The highlighted logic is systematic in valuing masculine-coded measures of concrete delivery and depreciates the relational and structural work of deconstructing inequality (Béné, 2022; Morse, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016; Eray, 2017; MacRae & Weiner, 2021). That is why gender is presented rhetorically in the preambles of the policy, but disappears in the results sections and performance contracts, which determine actual resource distribution and bureaucratic mandates (Nyeck, 2023; Rathi, 2025; PPRA, 2023). Moreover, the application of the adapted Shiffman and Smith framework illustrates that various essential element are lacking. These include the paucity in the incorporation of factors that prioritize the gendered issues in procurement and evaluation bureaucracy: the lack of dominant, unitary coalition of actors that place demand for an integrated GRE-GRPP; and the problem of possibly misrepresented the GRE-GRPP nexus as a compliance challenge as opposed to a strategic

governance requirement. Additionally, the findings illustrate the lack of clarity in unearthing the political context that does not give strong incentives to officials who produce inconvenient evidence on inequality; and that the GRE problem in GRPP is a manifestation of bad data quality that becomes a self-undermining principle (Shiffman, 2017; Nyeck, 2023; Rathi, 2025; PPRA, 2023; UN Women, 2023). Thus, the witnessed ceremonial adoption of M&E and data deficit cannot be viewed as sector-wide failure but the effective institutional response that is deemed as a necessity to manage the political risk, preserve the image of accountability and not let the evidence that is inconvenient disrupt the established flows of power and resources (Morse, 2016; Bened, 2022; Morse, 2016; Parkhurst, 2016).

The consequences of this ruptured nexus are significant in limiting Kenya from attaining the development ends as well as the constitutional pledges. In practice, GRPP cannot develop intelligently in the absence of evaluative feedback. The policymakers do not have the evidence to respond to the important questions, such as, “Is the 30% target the appropriate measure or should the focus be on contract value or sector access?”, “How come that women owned businesses in rural areas are still left out from public procurement?”, or “What support interventions are associated with an improvement of results on aspects like bid bond guarantees, capacity building, or contract bundling?” This creates a vicious circle of good intentions but poorly realized measures and programs thus leaving the populace questioning the effectiveness of affirmative action (Williams, 2024; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Keitany & Chepkwony, 2023; Odhiambo, 2025). This dynamic and reality is thematically sustained through the compliance-focused nature of gender equality in public finance and procurement. As the global debate on supplier gender-responsiveness and the labor market moves to discussion on accountable procurement spending, the Kenyan system is still obsessed with ownership as a proxy measure (PPRA, 2023, UN Women 2024; UN Women, 2024; Williams, 2024). As a result, they miss the chance to leverage government purchasing power, incentivizing equal pay, aid women in leadership and promote safer working environments across the market supply chain (UN Women, 2023; Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024). This curtails the transformational capabilities of procurement to its present focus on a narrow target of specific beneficiaries which are WOEs as opposed to becoming an expansive instrument of social change in the market.

Despite the rigorous analytical framework provided through this study, there are certain limitations

that limit the range of the conclusions and hint on opportunities for more research in the future. First of all, it unearths systemic trends and theorizes relations yet it does not measurably quantify the extent of these disconnections at the national, ministerial and devolved governance levels. Despite being logically convincing and evidence-based, the GRE-GRPP model needs to be investigated using in-depth mixed-methods case studies. Further empirical study needs to examine important exceptions missed in this study, such as examining the counties or national agencies in which elements of the nexus work in order to determine facilitating factors and viable entry points for proposed intervention. Moreover, although this discourse focuses on gender, an intersectional approach that takes into account ethnicity, disability, or urban-rural realities as significant compounding factors is essential for an in-depth comprehension of exclusion. Follow-up research needs to be based on participatory action research designs is needed in order to co-design GRE tools with procurement organizations and female entrepreneurs so that the solutions are context-sensitive and politically realistic.

A two-part intervention that breaks the cycle of existing ignorance, by creating open, reliable channels through which gendered evidences reach the desired audience and creating reliable channels through which a discriminated group can influence gender politics by voicing complaints, is needed to establish the trend of effective nexus of GRE-GRPP bridging. To begin with, the state should be obliged to plan and mainstream integration in the public financial management systems. It would involve institutionalizing GRE measures into the provisions of the laws governing Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act, which would compel the gathering and processing of sex-disaggregated data during every phase of the procurement process, including bidder registration, and the finalization and evaluation of the contract (UN Women, 2025; Nyeck, 2023; Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024). The national e-procurement system has to be re-engineered to capture this data as an obligatory component, changing it from a transactional platform to a strategic intelligence system. Second, the capacity building has to be radically reframed. Further from just providing training to female entrepreneurs to complete bids, it has to provide interdisciplinary training to procurement officers, M&E experts and auditors, to design gender-responsive tender requirements, to scrutinize contract clauses to produce gender equality, to only carry out evaluations to gauge transformative effect (Williams, 2024; Rathi, 2025; Morse, 2016). Lastly, in order to generate the required political pressure to drive this evidence-based approach, strategic

partnerships should be reinforced. The county assemblies, parliamentary committees, civil society watchdogs and media should be able to employ the GRE tools and findings to also hold the executive accountable. This makes GRE less of an educational process and more of a democracies pillar of accountability. The performance of this nexus is crucial in transitioning the GRE-GRPP combination to an intelligent, adaptive and truly transformative approach for gender inclusive economic development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to explore the salient interrelation of GRE and GRPP, with a view to understanding how a sound policy framework such as AGPO can continue to have inconsistent outcomes. The thesis of the discussion was that the existing lack of implementation is not just the failure of political will and technical ability but a structural failure driven by the fact that GRE and GRPP have been treated as parallel tracks instead of being seen as mutually supportive parts of one governance cycle. The study used a conceptual research design based on feminist institutionalism theory and a policy prioritization analysis to break down the functions that were reported to be dysfunctional in the Kenyan system of procurement. The conclusions validated the presence of a failed feedback loop, in which the actions undertaken by procurement are not informed by evaluative evidence, and evaluations are neither required by, nor incorporated sufficiently into the procurement practices, resulting in a cycle of resource wastage and further inequalities (Odhiambo-Abuya, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Wamuyu et al., 2025; Williams, 2024; UN Women, 2023).

Most salient findings of this study point to the fact that the AGPO program is functioning in an enormous data vacuum, where systematic, sex-disaggregated data along the procurement line are not available in any way, thus making meaningful GRE impossible and keeping GRPP strategically blind (UN Women, 2025; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Kiraka & Otieno, 2024; PPRA, 2023; Wamuyu et al., 2025; Williams, 2024). Moreover, the system is characterized by a ritualized approach to compliance instead of transformational change and a narrow perspective on ownership quotas without the opportunities to measure or reward more gender-acceptable practices in the market (UN Women, 2023; Martin, 2024; Odhiambo & Kamau, 2003; Nyathore, et al., 2023; Nyoike, 2019). Urbanization of privileges and a tradition of institutionalized excesses such as

‘sextortion’ provide further examples of how the divide between action and appraisal could allow deep-rooted injustices to remain unchallenged. In the end, the cumulative nature of these findings culminates in a self-recycling furtive cycle of institutional inertia. The inertia results to an evidence base of reform being undermined by lack of integrated evaluation, which in turn suppresses political demand of change, and where capacity building remains a shallow exercise and gender-responsible procurement will not develop into a strategy of change.

This study being a conceptual analysis is inherently restricted in its capacity to offer statistically generalizable data or survey micro-level causal pathways on a particular county or ministry level. It is powerful in developing a diagnostic framework and theorizing systemic relationship rather than empirical validation. These constraints, though, distinctly outline key areas in which future research can be conducted. There is urgent need for empirical, mixed-methods case studies to test the GRE-GRPP nexus model in distinct sectors or devolved units and identify the cause and effect of integrating GRE into procurement processes. To co-design context-sensitive GRE tools, the investigation needs to involve participatory action research to engage procurement entities and women entrepreneurs. Moreover, to foster an inclusive and equitable solution, an intersectional lens needs to be used in future studies to perceive how the ethnicity, disability and geography heighten the procurement disadvantages that were uncovered through the gendered analysis.

In order to break the existing loop and build a working GRE-GRPP nexus, a dual approach to both the provision and demand of evidence on gender is necessary. A first step is the policy and system integration that should be required. This necessitates a revision of the regulations of the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (PPADA) to make the GRE protocols legally entrenched, thus turning the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data at each procurement phase, including bidder registration through the post-contract impact assessment, into an obligatory necessity (GoK, 2015; Nyeck, 2023; Orser et al., 2021; Williams, 2024). The e-procurement system of Kenya should be redesigned to a design capable of capturing such data in a synchronized manner that it transforms it into a strategic intelligence system as opposed to being a transactional platform. Second, the issue of capacity building should be radically redefined and amplified. Training should transcend from training for WOEs understand “how to bid” to “understand and address interdisciplinary expertise and dynamics inside government procurement” (Williams, 2024; Rathi, 2025; Morse, 2016). Internal auditors, procurement officers and M&E specialists

should receive special training to design gender-sensitive tender requirements, implement contractual clauses through gender equality deliverables thus make gender impact evaluations transformational, rather than procedure deliverables.

Lastly, the issue of strategic alliances to establish and maintain the political need of this nexus should be strengthened. The tools and discoveries produced by integrated GRE-GRPP systems should be given to county assemblies, parliamentary oversight committees, civil society organizations, and the media. They have the role of transforming evidence into accountability. This is so, because gender-responsive evaluation is not only an academic annex, but also a cornerstone in democratic governance. To sum up, linking GRE with GRPP is the most urgent, but incomplete stage to bridge the noble vision embodied by the ambitious policy framework in Kenya and a smart, responsive, and truly transformative tool of realizing the constitutional promise of equity.

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