

Expanding Public Procurement for Women in Agri-Food

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Background

Public procurement is worth around 12% of global GDP, which makes governments the largest buyers in most economies. Yet women-owned businesses win only about 1% of these contracts.¹

A survey by ITC SheTrades of nearly 100 women agri-food suppliers in Ecuador found that more than 90% had never bid for a public contract. They named three obstacles: they could not find the tenders, the registration and bidding requirements were too complex, and they had no assurance they would be paid on time.

With funding from Germany, ITC SheTrades worked with Ecuador's government, private sector and cooperatives to prepare women to compete for public contracts and to reform the rules that had kept them out. The result is a model other countries can adapt.

1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2021/02/11/gender-and-equality-in-public-procurement>

At a glance



3,140
WOMEN
TRAINED



73
WORKSHOPS
DELIVERED



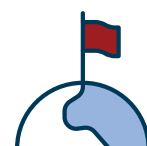
33
CITIES ACROSS
16 PROVINCES



4
LEGAL AND
REGULATORY
REFORMS



1
PRACTICAL GUIDE
IN 3 LANGUAGES



1
NATIONAL
WORKING GROUP
ESTABLISHED

How it works

Expanding women's access to public procurement takes a system-wide effort. Training women to supply the state achieves little if public buyers keep their tenders hard to find and complete, or if the requirements favour larger, established firms.

ITC worked with women in the agri-food sector who wanted to sell to the government, and with the public institutions that buy from them, alongside national and local governments, cooperatives, financial institutions and other partners.

THREE LINES OF WORK RAN IN PARALLEL

Preparing women suppliers. Women farmers and entrepreneurs learned how to register as government suppliers, prepare tenders, and manage the contracts they won. ITC also published step-by-step guides in [Spanish](#), [Kichwa](#) and [Shuar](#), so women can reach this knowledge in their own languages.



Connecting suppliers and buyers. ITC ran matchmaking sessions between women entrepreneurs and public institutions. Suppliers could ask directly what it takes to win a bid; buyers could find new producers to widen the range of goods and services they source.

Reforming the rules. ITC advised Ecuador's institutions throughout the country's procurement reform, from drafting technical proposals to convening the responsible ministries and agencies, so that women's participation was written into the law.

What changed

Beyond linking women suppliers with public buyers, ITC helped lay the legal groundwork for gender-responsive public procurement: rules designed to help women-led businesses compete on fair terms. Between March and October 2025, Ecuador adopted four connected reforms, turning this support from a project activity into permanent law.

1. RECOGNITION

Organic Law to Promote the Economy of Women Entrepreneurs (March 2025).

For the first time, Ecuadorian law names women entrepreneurs as a group the procurement system must actively support. It introduces four tools: price preferences that give their bids an advantage when tenders are scored; contracts reserved for women-led businesses; advance payments, so they have the cash to fulfil an order; and rules encouraging larger contractors to subcontract to them.

3. PERMANENCE

Reform of the Organic Law of the National Public Procurement System (October 2025).

Writes these measures into Ecuador's main procurement law, so support for women-led businesses is part of how the system works, not a separate programme running beside it.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

Regulation of the Law to Promote the Economy of Women Entrepreneurs (October 2025).

Sets out how the law works in practice, through training, help to register informal businesses legally, financial education, and better access to credit, technology and buyers, so women can meet what a tender requires.

4. MEASUREMENT

Regulation of the Organic Law of the National Public Procurement System (October 2025).

Adopts the [ISO IWA 34](#) definitions of women-owned and women-led businesses, so the government can identify its women suppliers, count how many contracts they win, and track their share of public spending over time.

Sustaining the reforms

Ecuador's Ministries of Agriculture, of Production and Foreign Trade, and of Foreign Affairs, supported by ITC, set up the country's first National Working Group on Women and Public Procurement. Announced as the project closed, the group will oversee how the reforms are carried out once ITC's involvement ends.

Testimonials and what comes next

Gabriela Moyón submitted her first bid for a contract with the Ministry of Education after the workshops and won it in March 2026. For the next two years she will supply quinoa burgers and plant-based sandwiches to public schools. The contract gives her a steady income, enough to expand her business and employ four single mothers from her community.



Rosa Lara joined other women who wanted to grow their businesses through public procurement. Together they founded the Cooperativa Kuyé Cacao & Vainilla, which now brings together 27 women across five provinces to produce and market cocoa and vanilla under the Chocovandina brand.



A MODEL READY FOR SCALING

By working closely with national and local partners, ITC delivered change on three fronts at once: women, institutions and law. The project is now being scaled to farmer organisations across East and West Africa and Asia.



Work with us

There is no single formula for gender-responsive public procurement. ITC is ready to co-design and adapt this approach with governments and partners who want to bring more women into their public supply chains – and to raise that 1%.

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