

SCM /Tender Ref #:	RFP 01 – 2026/27
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Request for proposals for:	Research Study on Fair and Equitable Competition for Women, including Young Women, and Women with Disabilities in South Africa.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD) has been entrusted with the mandate of leading the socio-economic transformation and implementation of programmes to ensure the empowerment and participation of women, including young women and women with disabilities. They are the most vulnerable sectors of the population that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population. The National Development Plan (Vision 2030) sets growth targets and measures to ensure that the benefits of growth are equitably shared. Evidence shows that women, especially young women, and women with disabilities continue to be most vulnerable segment of our population hence the need to increase efforts towards their ability to assert their resilience, versatility, and capabilities.

In terms of section 217 of the Constitution of South Africa Act, 108 of 1996, when an organ of state in the national, provincial or local sphere of government, or any other institution identified in national legislation, contracts for goods or services, it must do so in accordance with a system which is fair, equitable, transparent, competitive and cost-effective. Competitive markets allow consumers to benefit low prices, better quality of goods and services, innovation and more choice. For markets to be competitive they need to be accessible to all players that wish to participate. Barriers to entry and expansion are a significant hindrance to competitive markets. Barriers can arise from systematic issues, inequality, regulatory requirements, anticompetitive conduct and lack of access to key resources and markets to support firms seeking to enter markets and compete.

Over the past three decades, government together with different role players introduced a wide range of interventions aimed at addressing the challenges faced by various sectors of the country's population.

Despite the promulgation of various legislative frameworks and implementation of interventions and initiatives, these have not yielded desirable results in changing the conditions and lives of women, especially young women, and women with disabilities. One of the causes in the slow pace in achieving the desired impact include lack of gender, age-specific and disability-sensitive data as well as a lack of comparable data for measuring and tracking progress.

2. BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

Although more women (especially young women and women with disabilities) are bearing an entrepreneurial plunge, research shows that there is existing gender-based barriers which restrict the ability of women entrepreneurs to enter markets and to start-up and sustain successful businesses, especially in high value generating sectors of the economy.

This is specially the case in South Africa, where women entrepreneurs are largely concentrated in areas of crafts, hawking, personal services and retail. The greatest negative impact is being experienced by young women and women with disabilities.

The South African context is further complicated by issues relating to the intersectionality between gender and racial inequality, gender and age and gender and disability which compounds the barriers that are faced by black women entrepreneurs, and all women in general. These barriers affect the ability of these women entrepreneurs to participate effectively and meaningfully in the economy and consequently have significant adverse effects for competitiveness of markets and inclusive economic growth.

Recently, economic development organisations and competition authorities across the world have started paying attention to the gender divide that permeates society, its institutions and markets. The competition law community has been interrogating the role that competition policy can play in addressing these issues and in building open, fair and efficient markets aimed at levelling the play field for women and men alike. In tandem with these global efforts, the DWYPD seeks to undertake this study to better understand the barriers that inhibit women entrepreneurs from meaningfully participating in the South African economy.

The DWYPD seeks to understand the impact of competition practices on women entrepreneurs in their quest to enter and effectively participate in markets and build successful businesses. It is intended that the research undertaking identifies those specific barriers that are affecting women, young women and women with disabilities from accessing opportunities in the market.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The empowerment of women, including young women and women with disabilities cannot be achieved without the socio-economic transformation of society. The 7th administration has resolved to place inclusive economic growth at the centre of the national agenda. It is essential that women can participate fully in the economy for equity, prosperity, and inclusive growth to be achieved.

Studies have shown that women face several disadvantages in the labour market as demonstrated through high unemployment rate, compared to that of men. Data from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Q2 of 2024) shows that the country's official unemployment rate is now 33,5 % while unemployment rate for women was higher than the national average at 35,8%. Approximately two million more women than men are not economically active. Youth aged 15–34 years remain particularly vulnerable. Approximately 44.2 percentage of young persons aged 15–34 years were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in Quarter 2 of 2024. Young women make up the greatest numbers in this category. Employment of women with disabilities is even more challenged, with disaggregated data on disability not readily available.

Entrepreneurship is an avenue by which women in all their diversity can become economically active and overcome a range of barriers that compromise their development and empowerment. Women entrepreneurs are an imperative in a country's economic development, especially in less industrialised countries, as they can make a significant contribution to a country's economy through the formalisation of economic activities and add to women's economic and social power. Women entrepreneurs can also have a significant impact on local communities.

To realise women's optimum participation in entrepreneurship, it is important to explore the wide range of issues that compromise women in this field, as these affect not only women in South Africa but women worldwide (Thobile Nokuthula Radebe and Prof. Mark Smith, 2023).

For markets to be competitive they need to be accessible to all players that wish to participate in the markets. Barriers to entry and expansion are a significant hinderance to competitive markets. Barriers can arise from systematic issues, inequality, regulatory requirements, anticompetitive conduct and lack of access to key resources and markets to support firms seeking to enter markets and compete. These barriers ultimately result in reduced competition in markets, which in turn adversely impacts consumers. For women entrepreneurs, these barriers are further compounded by gender inequality. Women entrepreneurs face gender-based barriers that hinder their ability to enter and effectively compete in high income generating markets. Women entrepreneurs often find themselves operating businesses in low value generating sectors or informal sectors due to these gender-, age- and disability-based barriers.

It is against this background that the DWYPD seeks to understand the impact of competition practices on women entrepreneurs, including young women and women with disabilities in their quest to enter and effectively participate in markets and build successful businesses.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The primary objective of the study is to understand the impact of competition practices on women, including young women and women with disabilities, and how they can overcome barriers to access and participate in the economy. The following are the secondary objectives of the study:

- 4.1. Assess the differences in competitiveness between men and women.
- 4.2. Identify factors and practices that creates market gender gap and advantage for males over females.
- 4.3. Recommend strategies and interventions to promote fair and equitable competition for women in South Africa.
- 4.4. Explore conditions to enhance competition performance relative to a noncompetitive environment for women;
and
- 4.5. Consider possible remedies to address non-competition practices that hampers market access and participation for women in all their diversity.

5. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

- 5.1. Considering the objectives of the study, the scope of the project will encompass fair and equitable market competition for women, young women and women with disabilities in South Africa.
- 5.2. The study should follow all research protocol and procedures.
- 5.3. The scope of work will entail the development of a high level inception report which will include detailed methodology, literature/desk review on the current market practices fair and equitable competition as it pertains to women, including young women and women with disabilities, collection of primary data/ research fieldwork, data analysis, development of research report and presentation tailored for specific platforms.

6. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY / APPROACH

The service provider is required to adopt a mixed research methodology utilising both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches for the study to comprehensively address the objectives. The methodology should also entail consultative processes with relevant stakeholders, and participating organisations to build consensus on the measures for fair and equitable competition for women in general and young women and women with disabilities in particular. A detailed exposition of the step-by-step protocol and procedures which will be followed in executing this assignment should be provided in the proposal and the high-level inception report.

7. ROADMAP TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FAIR AND EQUITABLE COMPETITION

Milestones	Expected date	% of project (Payment)
1. Project Inception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed methodology for research study on fair and equitable competition for women, including young women and women with disabilities. 	June 2026	10%
2. Literature review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review • Benchmarking best practices 	June – July 2026	30%
3. Research fieldwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection (Focus group discussion/ interviews) • Transcription and data analysis 	July – August 2026	
4. Development of draft report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop 1st Draft report which incorporate the literature reviews and research findings • Consultative workshop to validate the report • Workshop presentations 	September – October 2026	30%
5. Submission of the final report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and amendments of 1st Draft report 	November 2026	30%

Milestones	Expected date	% of project (Payment)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the final report which incorporate all elements of the study and recommendations • Development of information products and infographics. • Implementation Plan • Submission of the final report for approval 		

8. PROJECT MANAGEMENT / REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

8.1. Project management

The Chief Director – Research and Knowledge Management will be responsible for the management of the project to ensure delivery on all deliverables for the project. The service provider will be expected to sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the DWYPD.

8.2. Project Steering Committee

The project will be governed by the steering committee of officials from the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and other key government departments and identified stakeholders. The Project Steering Committee will provide guidance, oversight, and serve as a consultative platform. The steering committee will meet on a regular basis in line with the key project milestones and deliverables. The following stakeholders will be invited to participate in the project steering committee:

- DWYPD – (i.e. EEW, Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Youth and MRWA Units)
- Statistics South Africa
- Department of Trade, Industry and Competition,
- The Competition Commission
- Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation,
- Department of Public Service and Administration,
- Department of Employment and Labour
- Commission for Gender Equality
- National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)
- Research and Academic institutions
- Centre for Competition, Regulation and Economic Development
- Stakeholder Engagement: Plan for engaging various stakeholders including government bodies, private sector, and civil society to foster a collaborative approach.