SOURCING 2EQUAL Colombia

AN INNOVATION OF IFC International Finance Corporation WORLD BANK GROUP

Case Study



Supporting Women-Owned or Led Small and Medium Enterprises to Break into Procurement Supply Chains:

Evidence from the Sourcing2Equal Colombia Program

OCTOBER 2026

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Key Messages

- **Women-owned or led small and medium enterprises (WSMEs) are underrepresented in procurement supply chains worldwide.** There is growing interest from buyers, the World Bank Group (WBG) and the broader development community in promoting supplier diversification and the integration of SMEs and WSMEs into value chains. Yet, there is limited causal evidence whether interventions to support firms' participation in procurement produce impacts. A randomized controlled trial in Colombia showed that technical assistance to support WSMEs to apply for private sector procurement opportunities moved WSMEs from interest to knowledge, skills, and bidding for contracts. Six months after being offered the Sourcing2Equal program, 63 percent of firms with access to the program had recently registered on a corporate supplier portal, compared with 53 percent in the control group. Meanwhile, 51 percent of trained firms had submitted a corporate bid, compared with 43 percent in the control group. The program also improved firms' procurement knowledge and capacity, from market research to proposal preparation.

- **Firms that already had some procurement knowledge or experience converted the training into winning contracts.** Their likelihood of winning a corporate bid rose by 8-9 percentage points, an increase of approximately 20 percent compared with the control group. Similar gains were not observed among firms previously unacquainted with procurement, which the program sought to equip more for preparedness than for near-term commercial results.

- **Longer-term evidence is needed to demonstrate outcomes such as increased revenues and job creation among participating firms, and to allow time for potential impacts on winning bids to materialize among firms newer to procurement.** The Colombia study measured impacts 6–12 months after training, as the control group was then invited to participate in the intervention. Follow-on studies are planned to test longer-term outcomes and complementary interventions such as access to working capital finance.

Context and Motivation

WSMEs remain strikingly underrepresented in supply chains, receiving less than one percent of procurement spending by large corporations and governments worldwide (Vazquez and Frankel, 2017). Public procurement alone represents 13 percent of GDP in low- and middle-income countries.[1] Integrating SMEs and WSMEs into these value chains therefore offers substantial untapped potential. Access to new customers and to large, stable demand, including via winning contracts and supplying multinationals, can support firm growth and job creation (Ferraz et al., 2015; Alfaro-Ureña et al., 2022; Ignaszak and Sedláček, 2026).

WSMEs face significant supply- and demand-side barriers in procurement markets. On the demand side, buyers may have strict procurement policies with high technical and financial standards that are challenging for some SMEs, rely on large established suppliers, lack sex-disaggregated data on supplier firms, or struggle to identify new eligible firms. On the supply side, WSMEs are usually smaller than existing suppliers, and operate in sectors with lower-value contracts like food and beverages, uniforms, and professional services. WSMEs may have limited information about opportunities, weaker networks, insufficient skilled staff time (for example to write proposals), difficulty meeting documentation and technical requirements, or limited access to working capital to fulfill orders.

1 https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/how-large-public-procurement

Despite growing interest in supplier diversification, there is limited causal evidence on whether and how interventions can support WSMEs to enter procurement markets and win contracts. Information about opportunities may not be enough: a study in Uganda found that personalized procurement notices did not increase participation unless firms also received information addressing pessimism about the fairness of the process (Colonnelli et al., 2024). In Liberia, a research team including IFC economists found that SMEs that participated in a seven-day training on how to bid for procurement won more contracts, with a large but statistically insignificant impact on revenues (Hjort et al., 2020). However, given that only 20 percent of invited firms took up the training, the study could not identify the impacts specifically for WSMEs. The IFC study presented in this case study tested whether a package of information, skills, role models, networking, and mentoring could improve WSMEs' procurement participation and success.

Sourcing2Equal is a WBG-led global program, launched in 2019 in partnership with the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) and the Government of Norway. The program seeks to connect thousands of women entrepreneurs to new market opportunities via corporate procurement. The program first began in Kenya in 2021, before expanding to Colombia in 2023 where it operated in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. The program has reached 3,450 entrepreneurs representing approximately 1,550 women-owned businesses to date. It is expected to continue scaling in Kenya, into Mexico, and beyond.

In Colombia, micro, small, and medium enterprises account for approximately 65 percent of employment and 40 percent of GDP (OECD, 2022). Of 1.7 million formally registered firms, most are microenterprises; while 4.3 percent are small or medium enterprises, of which 23 percent are primarily women-owned (Colombia, 2023; World Bank Group, 2024).

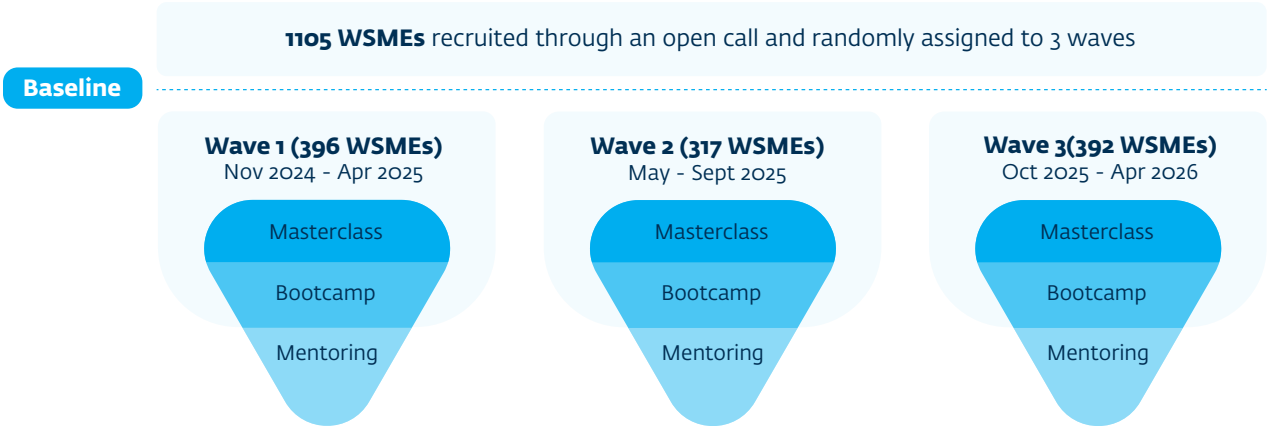
The objective of Sourcing2Equal Colombia is to support access to markets for WSMEs by increasing their access to private sector procurement opportunities. The program had three components: a corporate peer-learning platform, firm-level advisory support, and capacity-building solutions for WSMEs on procurement readiness.

Sourcing2Equal Colombia engaged 16 corporate buyers that were looking to diversify their supply chains, creating a network of large firms with interest in sourcing from WSMEs. A market study indicated that these corporate buyers together purchase from hundreds of thousands of suppliers; indicating that their supply chains present significant opportunities for smaller firms. Fourteen of these buyers made specific commitments to the program to increase WSMEs' participation in their supply chains, including defining or adjusting their procurement policies, mapping the supplier base, developing WSME suppliers, and facilitating access to finance products, among others. These like-minded buyers were brought together for peer-to-peer learning opportunities and one-on-one light advisory sessions on inclusive procurement, along with other organizations such as chambers of commerce.

The Sourcing2Equal program is largely focused on addressing some of the key challenges faced by these

WSMEs, via a procurement capacity-building intervention held in the major cities of Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. This capacity-building intervention, described in more detail below, was the focus of the impact evaluation. At the conclusion of the impact evaluation, the Sourcing2Equal team facilitated matchmaking opportunities between these corporate buyers and WSMEs. To learn more about Sourcing2Equal Colombia, visit the Sourcing2Equal Colombia website here.

Methodology



The capacity-building intervention used a three-stage funneled design.

1. First, WSMEs were invited to a two-hour online **masterclass**, covering opportunities, processes, and requirements.
2. Next, they were invited to a 25-hour **bootcamp**—spread over two half-day online sessions and a two day in-person workshop—on proposal development and pitching, negotiation techniques, financial accounting, compliance, and delivery.
3. Finally, "star suppliers" were selected based on interest, attendance and potential (size, sector, previous experience, pitch), and invited to individual **mentoring**.

The earlier interventions were designed to focus on foundational information and skills, allowing the later interventions with smaller numbers of participants to focus more efficiently on advanced skills and practical applications. The purpose of the funnel was to allow WSMEs to self-select to match their participation to their level of engagement and readiness, and to focus the more resource-intensive mentoring interventions on a subset of WSMEs with the most promise. The estimated marginal cost for a participant in the combined masterclasses and bootcamps was US$422, and in the mentoring was an additional US$626 (thus, the marginal cost of putting one more firm through the entire program including mentoring is estimated at US$1,048).

The impact evaluation study used the funnel approach to develop a **phased-in randomized controlled trial (RCT)**. The study team worked with the program team to enroll 1,105 eligible WSMEs and larger, experienced women-owned microenterprises via a national open call between June and September 2024. The study team then randomly assigned these firms to enter the program in one of three approximately equally sized waves, roughly six months apart. This design allowed firms already offered the program to be compared with firms still waiting at six and 12 months.

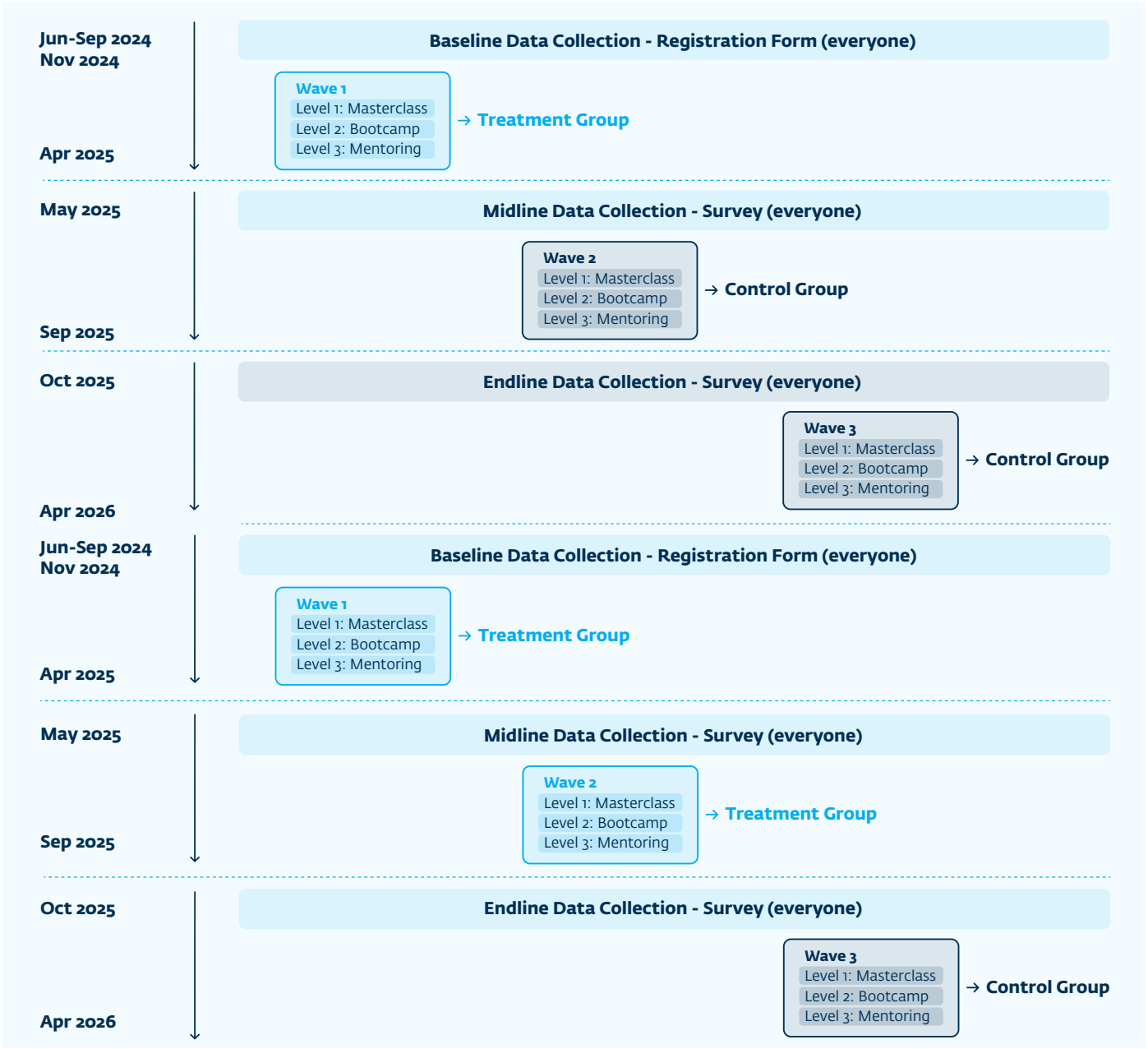
The study used the program's intake form as baseline data. The midline survey was conducted approximately six months after baseline, when the first wave had been treated with access to the program, but waves two and three were still control groups awaiting access. The endline survey was conducted around 12 months after baseline, when waves one and two had been treated with access to the program, and wave three was still a control group awaiting access. The study design and primary and secondary outcomes were registered online, following scientific best practices.[2]

Since not all firms took up the intervention, and firms were not randomly assigned to the separate components of the intervention (masterclasses, bootcamps, and mentoring), the study cannot isolate the effect of each activity separately. Instead, the study's main estimates capture the impact of offering the whole suite of activities to firms, regardless of their participation.

2 https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/14881



Photo: Women in Sourcing2Equal training session. ©IFC



Findings

- **WSMEs' knowledge and readiness improved six months after participating in the interventions.** Women reported knowing more about procurement and where to find opportunities. They also felt more prepared across most readiness measures, with improvements in understanding the procurement process, conducting market analysis to identify opportunities, preparing proposals including use of feedback, and learning from other women entrepreneurs. These effects were all statistically significant, and the impacts 12 months after participating were generally not significantly different from the six-month impacts.

- **Increased knowledge translated into action.** Bidding behavior also showed positive effects: 63 percent of WSMEs in the treatment group had recently registered on a corporate supplier portal, compared with 53 percent in the control group. Meanwhile, 51 percent had submitted a corporate bid, compared with 43 percent in the control group.

- **Gains in winning bids were concentrated among more experienced firms.** Among firms with some baseline procurement knowledge, the proportion of firms winning at least one bid increased from 39 percent in the control group to 48 percent in the treatment group; and among WSMEs with at least one prior corporate win, the proportion increased from 55 percent in the control group to 63 percent in the treatment group. At endline, contracts won by the treatment group had a median value of approximately US$24,000, and a mean value of approximately US$110,000 (since a small number of contracts had very large values). Examples of these contracts include US$8,000 to supply digital marketing services to a consumer goods company, US$21,000 for weight calibration services to a construction materials firm, and US$36,000 for tax services to a bank. The bulk of new contracts came from buyers not participating in Sourcing2Equal, and from a widely dispersed set of buyers, suggesting that gains are transferable beyond the program buyer network.

- **Firms with no baseline experience of procurement revised their confidence in engaging buyers and winning contracts downward.** The project team anticipated this as a realistic reassessment of some firms' procurement fit at their current stage of preparedness, and recommended intermediate steps for less prepared firms.[3]

Qualitative evidence corroborates the quantitative impacts, and provides further insight into the specific topics WSMEs found helpful. The bootcamps and mentoring bundled information, skills, role modeling, and networking, and the binding constraint likely differed across firms. Nonetheless, qualitatively about a third of treated WSMEs reported the main changes were to their strategy and value proposition (topics focused on in the bootcamps and mentoring), 16 percent reported improvements in internal process such as capacity to fulfill larger orders (also topics focused on in the bootcamps and mentoring), while 13 percent reported better ability to meet documentary and compliance requirements (mainly covered in the masterclasses).

Estimates accounting for whether firms took up at least the masterclass suggest that the impacts on winning bids among firms that actually participated were about 20 percent larger than the main estimates mentioned above. By design, participation also dropped sharply at each stage of the funnel: a little over half of eligible firms attended the masterclass, a third the bootcamps, and roughly one in ten were invited to and attended the mentoring. An extension exercise that predicts which firms would participate in each activity suggests that the effect of attending the mentoring on winning bids is about 50 percent to 70 percent larger than the main estimates. However, predicting which firms participate turns out to be difficult in this case, and hence the extension results are noisy.

3 The number of corporate bids won, revenue from bids, employees hired, and spillovers to public bidding showed no significant effects, as expected within a 6–12-month window. The likelihood of submitting bids to other MSMEs fell by nine percentage points at twelve months, suggesting substitution toward corporate buyers. These outcomes were registered as secondary given the short time horizon.

Persistent barriers remained. In additional qualitative questions about challenges, roughly a third of firms cited scattered, hard-to-find information about opportunities. A fifth mentioned limited staff time and internal capacity, demanding documentation requirements, or limited access to finance. One in eight perceived a need to have personal contacts at corporations. By endline, only 14.5 percent of firms who reported having won contracts said they had accessed finance to support these contracts—comprising 8 percent accessing loans (formal or informal), and 6.5 percent a line of credit.

In sum, the RCT demonstrates that the WSME capacity-building intervention produced positive impacts on the outcomes it targeted: knowledge, readiness, registering to portals, and submission of bids. The intervention helped different WSMEs differently. Firms with less baseline familiarity gained basic information and readiness, but did not increase their propensity to bid and win during the time frame of the observations, and some firms revised their attitudes downward. Firms with baseline exposure to the process became more likely to win bids in six months or one year, in addition to gaining information and readiness. The fact that the majority of corporate bids won were with buyers who did not participate in the program suggests that the intervention builds suppliers' capabilities that open doors beyond the program's own buyer network. Nonetheless, constraints such as lack of consolidated information, documentation, and application processes, as well as access to finance, remain binding for many WSMEs.



Photo: Women in Sourcing2Equal training session. ©IFC

Implications for Program Design, Policy and Research

- **Future programs in contexts with larger numbers of eligible WSMEs and SMEs will allow evaluations to examine the longer-term effects on firms' revenues and job creation, as well as possible positive spillovers to public procurement.** This study contributes to a relatively sparse evidence base on interventions to support SMEs, especially WSMEs, and their participation in corporate procurement. The study demonstrates that WSMEs benefit in the short- to medium-run, after which all remaining firms were granted access to the intervention and hence there was no long-run control group. Going forward, the World Bank Group is looking to implement the program in contexts where there may be oversubscription by potential participants. Future evaluations will seek to assign some firms to a pure control group for the long run, helping to address a knowledge gap in the longer-term effects. Such results could also inform discussions with public sector partners on the design of initiatives to diversify public sector procurement.

- **As part of its planned scale-up, the WBG also intends to expand the existing approach with complementary interventions for WSMEs and SMEs, including improving the access to working capital.** Feedback from Sourcing2Equal participants showed significant demand for complementary offerings alongside the training, including working capital financing. The WBG is incorporating additional services, including access to such finance, into the next generation of Sourcing2Equal projects. The effects will be studied through impact evaluations and expanded monitoring efforts.

- **Future interventions and accompanying studies could consider how to target and deliver more tailored services to WSMEs and SMEs with varied degrees of preparedness.** The Colombia evaluation showed that WSMEs that already had prior exposure to corporate procurement were those that experienced the largest gains in terms of winning bids, while other WSMEs gained preparedness but notyet

successful bids, as anticipated by the program. Future studies may also examine how these interventions impact WSMEs and SMEs over the longer run that initially are less prepared for corporate procurement opportunities, to understand whether they change their business practices and ultimately grow into corporate procurement opportunities.

Impact Evaluation at IFC

Impact evaluation enables IFC to help our clients demonstrate their economic and social impact credibly to their stakeholders. By scientifically articulating the development impacts of its initiatives and projects to local stakeholders and policy makers, IFC provides visibility and transparency.

IFC impact evaluations, conducted in partnership with the World Bank Group's Knowledge Bank, use rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental methods, and high-quality measurement tools, to quantify selected projects' success across multiple development outcomes. A key feature of these methods is the ability to establish unambiguous cause-and-effect relationships – by accurately attributing impacts to receiving the project or program.

Visit IFC's Impact Evaluation website here.

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Women in Sourcing2Equal training session. ©IFC

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Read the full working paper here