

SERIES TITLE

Bread & Butter Series: African Feminist Reflections on Future Economies

ARTICLE TITLE

Growth for Whom? A Pan African Feminist Reflection on Macro Level Economic Policies

DATE

2019

AUTHOR

Crystal Simeoni

EDITOR

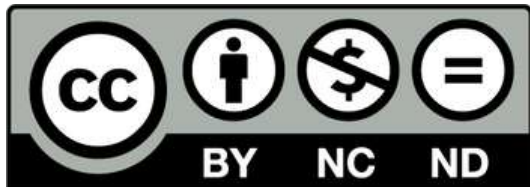
Rita Nketiah

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Jessica Horn

ILLUSTRATION AND LAYOUT

Suhaidatu Dramani



In the spirit of sharing feminist knowledge, this series is distributed under a Creative Commons license that allows for non-commercial distribution in original form with full credit given to the authors.

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)

Justice Sarkodie Addo Avenue

East Legon – Accra

P.M.B CT 89. Cantonments, Accra-Ghana

www.awdf.org

 @awdf01

FOREWORD

From 13-15 September 2018, the African Women's Development Fund convened activists, scholars, researchers and policymakers to build a thoughtful, progressive and transformative vision for the Future of African Women and the Economy under AWDF's Economic Justice and Security thematic area. This convening investigated the various ways that African feminists are engaged in critique, analysis and the re-visioning of African economies to provide justice and security for African women. The convening is part of a larger movement-building process and ongoing conversation around resourcing African women's economic justice and security at AWDF. The Bread and Butter series is a multifaceted knowledge production project that springs out of the convening, reflecting AWDF's commitment to providing feminist analysis of African women's organising.

“The series aims to document the dynamic, critical and radical perspectives of African women thinking and organising around their economic futures.”

The series aims to document the dynamic, critical and radical perspectives of African women thinking and organising around their economic futures. The expression “bread and butter” refers both to the ways in which individuals come to sustain themselves usually through paid labour and individuals' practical, every day economic needs and concerns.

We understand this series as our reflection on the subsistence and practical, every day needs

and concerns of African women oriented to the future. We believe that African women's economic issues are both internalised and challenged in every day acts of resistance and solution-building. We also aim to demystify economic analysis as a purely academic, Western led, or masculine-centered pursuit, out of reach for African women. Indeed, we believe that all African women understand the consequences and solutions for oppressive economic models and policies and we encourage their voices as economic actors, thinkers and shape shifters. We aim to get to the real “bread and butter” issues that women and girls face on this continent, and envision a future Africa that ensures women's and girls' sustainable livelihoods, meaningful labour, and full rights and autonomy. The series will feature a range of opinion pieces, research essays, poems, stories and narratives of and by African women, with a future-focused feminist economic lens.

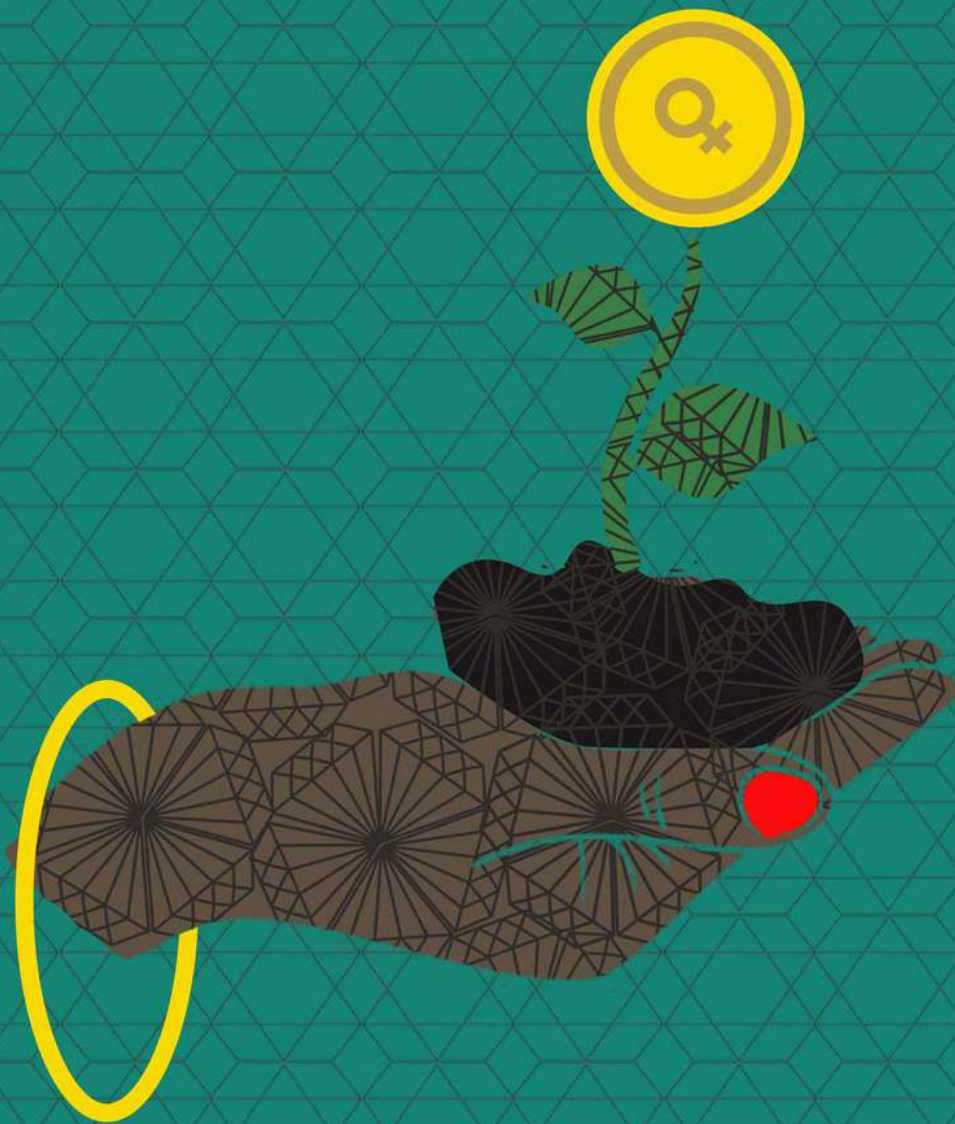
We hope that this series will engender new conversations about how we support African women to pursue economic justice and security. We also hope to contribute to a larger conversation about how philanthropic institutions regionally and globally can better support African women's economic interests, as articulated by African women, themselves.

Join us on our journey to create economically just and secure feminist futures!

*Rita Nketiah, Editor
Knowledge Management Specialist, AWDF*

ARTICLE SUMMARY

The first article in our series was written by Crystal Simeoni from [the African Women's Development and Communication Network \(FEMNET\)](#), convenors of the African Feminist Macroeconomics Academy. The article provides a feminist reflection on current neoliberal macro level economic policies in Africa and how they affect women's lives. The writer argues that current definitions of women's economic empowerment are too narrow to offer impactful strategies. This follows from increasing analyses that, in as much as Africa's economies grow, so does inequality between her people. Simeoni argues that current neoliberal macroeconomic frameworks will continue to exacerbate the problem.



GROWTH FOR WHOM?

A PAN AFRICAN FEMINIST REFLECTION ON MACRO LEVEL ECONOMIC POLICIES

By: Crystal Simeoni

In recent years, internet image searches of “Africa” have moved away from the stereotypical images of poverty and disease towards the “Africa Rising” narrative. There are now images of high rise buildings in cosmopolitan cities and stories of the latest tech startup in any of the continent’s capital cities. According to the Africa Rising image, after years of stagnation and intense poverty indicators, Africa can largely boast of economic prosperity. GDP figures have grown, which in turn has improved the continent’s poverty levels. The World Bank predicts a growth of 3.5% in 2019 with a previous 3.2% growth between 2017 and 2018, from a previous 2.4% the previous year of 2016 (Adegoke, 2018) . This growth is predicted to continue in the coming years. Economic policies the world-over predict that a maximisation of economic performance and increase in GDP through capitalist and free market policies will ostensibly stimulate growth for all.

In Africa, however, this formula is clearly not working when 33.6% of the continent still lives in poverty, with indicators suggesting a continued increase, according to the World Poverty Clock (World Data Lab, 2018). In contrast to World Bank statistics cited above, the rates of inequality seem to be growing in tandem with this very same economic growth. Women and girls bear the biggest burden of this inequality.

Some mainstream economists have argued that Africa's rapid and continuous population growth accounts for the current trends of economic growth and growing inequality. Africa will continue to experience economic growth, however it currently does not distribute that income equitably amongst its rapidly growing population. An overreliance on our current macro level economic frameworks can only exacerbate the problem.

“By 2050, Africa's population is expected to rise to 1.3 billion people according the United Nations which will make it the world's biggest workforce in the subsequent years.”

By 2050, Africa's population is expected to rise to 1.3 billion people according the United Nations (United Nations, 2017) which will make it the world's biggest workforce in the subsequent years. By 2040, there will be an estimated 1.1 billion Africans in the work force which will be the world's largest (Future Agenda, 2019). While this population growth can provide a great opportunity, it is important to ensure that this growth is carefully managed. With the trajectory of economic growth increasing in tandem with inequalities, with a

population rise of that magnitude, the current macro-level economic models will have to change. Africa needs to start preparing for this growth economically, socially and infrastructure-wise. This growth will, in turn, mean an inevitable rise in consumer spending and many argue there will inescapably be a much bigger African middle class (Ibid). Questions arise, though, as to how secure this middle class will be if current trends continue where states are still unable to provide quality public services like education and healthcare. In fact, there is growing concern that Africa's burgeoning middle class will continue to pay for what I call private solutions for public problems. Ostensibly, this means that members of Africa's middle class are one serious illness away from entering into debt.

“Gender inequality remains highest on the list of consequences for Africa's economic growth.”

Gender inequality remains highest on the list of consequences for Africa's economic growth. The trickle down narrative which assumes that top-level economic growth inevitably trickles down to the most marginalized seems to be a fleeting dream. It is definitely not working for the women of Africa who already face a plethora of structural barriers. These barriers include cultural and religious norms, access to quality education, ownership and control of land, fewer economic choices, access to child care and social protection and so forth. This underpins the fact that men and women interact with the economy in very different ways. Current economic models do not take these barriers into consideration and actually work towards deepening the exclusion of

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

One key intervention towards achieving gender equality has been a clarion call for women's economic empowerment. To begin however, there must be an understanding of "women's empowerment" as a concept. It is important to note that there has been no consensus on how to define "women's empowerment" and as a result, indicators can be quite complicated. For the purposes of this essay, I refer to Naila Kabeer, who defines empowerment as the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability (Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer further explains that the capability to bring to bear this "choice" must include three interconnected factors as follows:



RESOURCES

To include access as well as future claims to both material and human & social resources

AGENCY

To include processes of decision-making as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation

ACHIEVEMENTS

To include well-being outcomes

FEMNET puts forth that there has been a trend to relegate economic empowerment to micro level economic analysis and intervention.

“Women’s economic empowerment must be understood and redefined as far more than women’s ability to compete equally in existing markets, or as the beneficial outputs of their contribution to economic growth.”

Women’s economic empowerment must be understood and redefined as far more than women’s ability to compete equally in existing markets, or as the beneficial outputs of their contribution to economic growth.

It must include women’s access to and control over economic resources including land, access to decent work, control over their own time and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions and policy spaces. FEMNET has identified a dearth of policy and advocacy interventions at the intersection of women’s rights and macro-level economic policy and has chosen this as the nexus of intervention for work around women’s economic empowerment and works through the following four-pronged approach: control over their own time and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions and policy spaces. FEMNET has identified a dearth of policy and advocacy interventions at the intersection of women’s rights and macro-level economic policy and has chosen this as the nexus of intervention for work around women’s economic empowerment and works through the following four-pronged approach:

CAPACITY BUILDING

Building the capacity of women’s rights organisations and activists to understand and articulate macro level economic policy through a feminist analysis.

1

KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

Advocating for governments to collect data that is disaggregated by sex but also by geographic location, economic income, ethnicity, religion, etc. as well as ensuring the inclusion of qualitative data in their data sets. Under this strategy, FEMNET is also working with women’s rights actors to produce data and knowledge that can be used for evidence-based advocacy.

2

ADVOCACY

FEMNET ensures that the Pan African women’s movement is present in mainstream economic policy spaces at all levels as well as gender spaces and bringing a feminist analysis of macro level economics to these respective spaces at local levels all the way to global spaces.

3

CROSS SECTIONAL MOVEMENT BUILDING

FEMNET has begun work to ensure there is co-created work and analysis between women’s rights actors and feminist economists to ensure that alternative models are grounded in academic rigour as well as bed-rocked in lived realities.

4

The approach to mainstream macro-level economics remains excessively narrow and continues to reinforce gender inequalities rather than resolving them – one such example is the limited ways in which “production” continues to be defined and analysed by economists. Much of the current mainstream economic analysis neglects to consider care work (predominantly conducted by women

undervalues and erases it from contributions to GDP. By “macroeconomic policies”, FEMNET includes: fiscal and monetary policy, the international financial architecture (including tax regimes and illicit financial flows), industrial policy, regulation of decent work and the care economy. Indeed, we believe that all of these elements shape the equitable availability and distribution of resources.



MAKING DATA WORK

With the current focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there has been a shift to recognize the centrality of data, as the world develops. The idea that data is needed to identify gaps, track progress and ensure planning for the future is based on evidence that big data can directly shape policy and social transformation. Building from the Data Revolution idea that accompanied the SDGs, Africa formulated the Africa Data Consensus as a response to how the continent defines the data ecosystem and landscape for Africa. It calls for data to be timely, user-driven and disaggregated and encourages a “partnership of all data communities” (United Nations, 2015).

“From a women’s rights perspective, it is not enough to rely on just sex disaggregated data, because for data to be impactful it must tell a gendered narrative.”

From a women’s rights perspective, it is not enough to rely on just sex disaggregated data, because for data to be impactful it must tell a gendered narrative. Data needs to be triangulated with data points that speak to sex, but also include (and not limited to) geographic location, income group, race, and religion. This ensures that the data is telling a more robust and nuanced narrative and in this way will bring to the fore areas of exclusion in a clearer manner. Further, data must be both quantitative as well as qualitative to ensure the documentation of the lived realities and experiences of African women as it

pertains to the economy at all levels. It is imperative that there are concerted efforts to cross-pollinate between feminist economists and African women’s rights organisations and activists. Feminist economists are working on alternative heterodox (Lee, 2008) economic models based on feminist principles and analysis and this needs to work in tandem with the African women’s movements who uniquely experience the effects of unjust macro-level economic policies. The African women’s movement has been at the forefront of fighting against injustice and inequality and firmly rooted in the realities of the lives of African women and girls. These two groups need to constantly feed into each other’s strategies to achieve viable alternative economic models that move from rhetoric to practicality.

For the last few decades, policymakers have neglected to recognize how macroeconomic policies directly impact women’s rights. To be able to develop viable alternatives, there is need to understand how global, regional and national macro-level economic policies have an impact on the women and girls of Africa. Once this is done through a feminist analysis, women’s rights organisations and activists can then push for alternatives that take into consideration the global interconnectedness of our current realities. These alternatives however need to be underpinned with strong African narratives.

To be able to drive these alternative models and frameworks, strong institutions and

governance structures are needed to ensure there is movement from rhetoric to resourced meaningful implementation. These institutions and governance structures must inherently have meaningful representation of women and be in continuous collaboration and consultation with wider civil society and very specifically women's rights organisations and activists. To ensure that this future is a reality, a key ingredient is political will ensures that institutions and governance structures are prioritised, well-resourced and allowed to function independently.

There is a growing trend to instrumentalise the role of women in macro – level economic policy in an “add women and stir” type of approach. From an advocacy perspective, it is indeed easier to get the attention of policy makers through quantifying and building a case based on how shifts that are more transformative for women are better for the economy as a whole.

That entry point may be what is available to use as an approach, however caution needs to be exercised to ensure that women are not valued merely based on their usefulness to improve economic growth. While in fact, the issue to actualise is the full realization of women's human rights and gender equality. Not having the latter goes on to further reinforce patriarchal perceptions of women and this is something the women's movement must constantly challenge in our strategies.

There is, however, a growing movement of Pan African feminists who are speaking out, from their respective corners, to not only

question, but disrupt current macro-level economic policies. For far too long the women of Africa have been seen as passive victims when it comes to macro level economic policies. The tide is changing – the women of Africa are present and in spaces they have historically been locked out of. I stand with them because:

“I believe in Africa. I believe in African dreamers like myself. I believe in the women of Africa for they are the drivers of change for the next generation. I believe in the collective Action of the women of Africa. I believe in the power of human Pan African values. I believe in the audacity of the women of Africa to change the destiny of this great continent to ensure we all live in dignity and happiness.”



REFERENCES

Adegoke Y. (2018) "Africa's economic outlook is promising for 2018, but there are clouds on the horizon." [online] Quartz Africa. Available at <https://qz.com/africa/1179387/africas-economic-outlook-is-promising-for-2018-but-there-clouds-on-the-horizon/> [Accessed 15 Nov 2018].

Future Agenda. (2019). *Africa Growth*. [online] Available at: <https://www.futureagenda.org/insight/africa-growth> [Accessed 21 Nov 2018].

Lee, F.S. (2008). Heterodox Economics. In: S.N. Durlauf and L.E. Blume, eds., *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, Second Edition, 2nd ed. [online] Available at: https://hetecon.net/?page=about&side=heterodox_economics [Accessed 14 Nov 2018].

Naila Kabeer, 1999. "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," *Development and Change* International Institute of Social Studies, vol. 30(3), pages 435-464, July.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables*. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP/248. [online PDF] Available at: https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017_KeyFindings.pdf. [Accessed 20 Oct 2018].

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2015) *Africa Data Consensus*. In: *High Level Conference on Data Revolution*. [online]. Addis Ababa: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/22669/b1152568x.pdf?sequence=1> [Accessed 28 Nov 2018].

World Data Lab. (2018). "World Poverty Clock". [online] Available at: <https://worldpoverty.io/> [Accessed 28 Nov 2018].



Crystal Simeoni

Crystal Simeoni is the Head of Advocacy and the lead on Economic Justice at FEMNET. Crystal holds an MA in African studies with a focus on rural economic development. Her career has centered around fighting inequalities at local levels all the way to regional and global spaces and platforms. The intersection of women's rights and macro level economic policies keep her up at night. Her work at FEMNET contributes to creating a critical mass of women's rights actors who are audacious enough to disrupt current models that do not work.