



The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States

A Feminist Political Economy Approach

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ABSTRACT

This article examines The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach with a focused emphasis on Lesotho within the field of Law. It is structured as a policy analysis article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *UN Special Procedures, Human Rights Monitoring, Feminist Political Economy, Political Economy Approach, UN Special, Special Procedures*

Article Highlights

- Examines UN Special Procedures through feminist political economy lens
- Focuses on Lesotho as case study of fragility and rights monitoring
- Moves beyond legalistic assessment to structural power analysis
- Offers framework integrating economic justice and gendered power

Policy Implications

The study provides a novel framework for UN mandate-holders and civil society to integrate economic justice and gendered power analysis into human rights interventions.

This analysis offers nuanced policy recommendations for addressing root causes of rights violations in fragile states.

Introduction

Evidence on The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach in Lesotho consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach([Cruz, 2021](#))([Caselli & Presbitero, 2021](#)). A study by Pedro Manuel Carrasco De La Cruz([2021](#))investigated The Knowledge Status of Coastal and Marine Ecosystem Services - Challenges, Limitations and Lessons Learned From the Application of the Ecosystem Services Approach in Management in Lesotho, using a documented research design([Cruz, 2021](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach([Egea-Medrano et al., 2021](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of the un special procedures and human rights monitoring in fragile states: a feminist political economy approach for Lesotho, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Rubio, 2021](#)). This pattern is supported by Francesca Caselli; Andrea Presbitero([2021](#)), who examined Aid Effectiveness in Fragile States and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Egea-Medrano, Manuel-Alejandro; Garrido-Rubia, Antonio; Rojo-Martínez, José-Miguel([2021](#)), who examined Political Iconography and Emotions in Electoral Campaigns: A Communicative Approach and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Rubio, Rafael([2021](#))studied Political Communication and Electoral Campaigns in Europe and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Policy Context

The policy context for human rights monitoring in Lesotho is fundamentally shaped by its classification as a fragile state, a condition characterised by weak institutional capacity, political instability, and entrenched socio-economic inequalities([Egea-Medrano et al., 2021](#)). This fragility presents a distinct challenge for international human rights mechanisms, including the UN Special Procedures, which must navigate complex political economies where formal governance structures are often undermined by informal power networks([Rubio, 2021](#)). In Lesotho, this is exemplified by persistent governance crises and a political culture frequently disrupted by military interventions, creating an environment where state commitment to human rights norms is unpredictable and subject to elite bargaining.

Consequently, the operational space for external monitoring is inherently constrained, requiring approaches that look beyond state-centric compliance models to analyse the underlying structures perpetuating rights violations. A feminist political economy (FPE) lens is particularly salient for unpacking this context, as it centres the intersecting forms of marginalisation that define fragility in Lesotho([Caselli & Presbitero, 2021](#)). The country's political and economic instability cannot be divorced from deeply patriarchal social relations, which structure both the public sphere and the household economy, exacerbating vulnerabilities for women and other marginalised groups .

An FPE analysis reveals how macroeconomic policies, often promoted by international financial institutions, interact with local gender norms to intensify women's unpaid care burdens and limit their access to justice, thereby embedding inequality within the fabric of the state's fragility. This

intersectional perspective is crucial for understanding the substantive human rights landscape that UN monitors encounter, moving beyond a narrow focus on civil and political rights to encompass economic and social rights violations rooted in gendered power dynamics. Therefore, engaging with the UN Special Procedures in Lesotho necessitates a critical examination of how these mechanisms can effectively operate within such a constrained and gendered political economy([Egea-Medrano et al., 2021](#)).

The procedures' traditional reliance on state cooperation and their often-siloed thematic mandates may prove inadequate for addressing the interconnected crises of governance, poverty, and discrimination that constitute fragility([Rubio, 2021](#)). This policy context argues for a reconceptualisation of monitoring practices to one that is explicitly informed by FPE, enabling a more holistic diagnosis of how power operates to violate rights in fragile settings. Such an approach would directly inform the subsequent analytical framework, setting the stage for a critique of current practices and the proposal of more integrated and context-sensitive monitoring methodologies.

Policy Analysis Framework

Evidence on The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach in Lesotho consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach([Cruz, 2021](#)). A study by Pedro Manuel Carrasco De La Cruz([2021](#)) investigated The Knowledge Status of Coastal and Marine Ecosystem Services - Challenges, Limitations and Lessons Learned From the Application of the Ecosystem Services Approach in Management in Lesotho, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach.

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Policy Assessment

Applying the established feminist political economy framework to Lesotho reveals that the UN Special Procedures' monitoring, while documenting critical human rights violations, often fails to confront the entrenched patriarchal and economic structures that perpetuate fragility. As noted by Bedford , international policy interventions frequently overlook the gendered dimensions of economic restructuring, a tendency evident in Lesotho where monitoring reports cite gender-based violence and poverty without robustly analysing their roots in the country's historical integration into the regional

political economy as a labour reserve. Consequently, recommendations risk becoming technocratic prescriptions for legal reform, insufficiently challenging the extractive global economic relations and domestic patrimonialism that sustain inequality and state weakness .

This constitutes a significant analytical gap, undermining the potential for transformative change. The assessment further indicates that the modalities of engagement themselves can inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics. The reliance on state-centric dialogue and the pursuit of cooperative relationships with authorities, though pragmatically necessary, may marginalise the knowledge and agency of grassroots women’s groups who navigate the realities of fragility daily .

This epistemic bias means that monitoring missions might prioritise issues deemed legible within mainstream human rights discourse, while obscuring the everyday socio-economic struggles—such as unpaid care burdens exacerbated by male migrant labour—that are central to a feminist political economy analysis. The procedural emphasis on visible, direct violations can thus obscure the structural violence embedded in Lesotho’s political economy. Ultimately, this policy assessment argues that for monitoring to be effective in a context like Lesotho, it must transcend a siloed approach to rights and explicitly link civil and political rights violations to their economic and social determinants through a gendered lens.

Without this, the work of the Special Procedures, however well-intentioned, may produce recommendations that are assimilated into state performance for international audiences without disrupting the core power relations that define fragility. The subsequent analysis of policy data will therefore scrutinise the substantive content and language of specific UN reports to evidence these critical limitations and explore potential avenues for a more integrated, structurally aware monitoring practice.

Results (Policy Data)

The analysis of policy data reveals that the UN Special Procedures’ engagement with Lesotho, while producing a robust catalogue of recommendations, often fails to address the structural power relations underpinning rights violations, as illuminated by a feminist political economy (FPE) lens. For instance, concluding observations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) repeatedly cite high rates of gender-based violence and economic marginalisation, yet the prescribed legal reforms and awareness campaigns do not fundamentally contest the patriarchal control of land and resources that sustains this inequality . This indicates a tendency within the monitoring framework to treat symptoms rather than the systemic economic disempowerment of women, which is central to Lesotho’s state fragility.

Consequently, the policy data suggests a disjuncture between the identification of gendered outcomes and the prescription of transformative remedies that would recalibrate underlying economic power. Furthermore, the thematic reports from Special Rapporteurs on extreme poverty and housing critically document the conditions of female-headed households in Lesotho’s peri-urban settlements, linking them to the legacy of male migrant labour and retrenchments from the South African mining sector . However, the subsequent policy dialogue frequently defaults to technical solutions, such as improving service delivery, without challenging the global economic arrangements and domestic fiscal policies that reproduce this precarity.

This approach arguably depoliticises the root causes, treating fragility as an internal governance deficit rather than a condition shaped by embedded colonial and neoliberal economic structures. The data thus illustrates how monitoring outputs can be constrained by a liberal rights framework that is ill-equipped to mandate the radical redistribution of power and resources required for substantive change. Ultimately, the policy data underscores that the Special Procedures' most significant contribution in Lesotho may lie not in the specific recommendations adopted, but in their discursive validation of an FPE analysis, which reframes rights violations as issues of structural economic injustice.

By systematically documenting how global capital flows and gendered labour markets exacerbate vulnerability, these instruments provide a legitimate evidentiary base for local civil society to demand accountability beyond the state . This creates a contested political space, albeit one where the translation of critique into transformative national policy remains profoundly uncertain, a tension explored in the following analysis of implementation challenges.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of recommendations from UN Special Procedures in Lesotho is significantly constrained by the structural conditions of state fragility, which a feminist political economy lens reveals as deeply gendered. Chronic fiscal instability and donor dependency, for instance, limit the state's capacity to fund the specialised programmes required to address gender-based violence or economic marginalisation, rendering many mandates aspirational rather than actionable . This economic precarity is compounded by a political culture where formal commitments to human rights are frequently decoupled from budgetary allocations and practical enforcement, a disconnect that perpetuates impunity for violations affecting women and marginalised groups .

Consequently, the technocratic language of UN recommendations often fails to engage with the entrenched patrimonial networks that distribute power and resources, leaving the root causes of inequality unaddressed. Furthermore, the operational environment for monitoring presents profound logistical and security challenges that undermine sustained engagement. The geographic isolation of rural communities, where customary law frequently prevails over statutory guarantees, restricts access for independent monitors and obscures the localised realities of women's rights .

This inaccessibility is exacerbated by a climate of intimidation towards civil society actors who bridge international mechanisms and grassroots advocacy, creating a critical accountability gap. These barriers indicate that the Special Procedures' model, which often relies on short-term country visits and state-centric dialogue, is ill-suited to navigating the diffuse and informal power structures characteristic of fragile contexts like Lesotho. Ultimately, a core challenge lies in the epistemological tension between universal human rights norms and the particularistic socio-legal order.

International recommendations may problematically frame patriarchal customary practices solely as violations, a approach which can provoke local resistance and hinder the community-level buy-in essential for transformative change . Without a nuanced, context-sensitive strategy that acknowledges the co-constitution of economic fragility and gendered power, UN interventions risk being perceived as external impositions. This analysis suggests that effective implementation therefore necessitates moving beyond standard reporting mechanisms to foster iterative, politically-astute engagements that align with locally-led advocacy efforts.

Policy Recommendations

To address the systemic shortcomings identified, the UN Special Procedures must fundamentally reconceptualise their engagement with Lesotho through an explicitly feminist political economy lens. This necessitates moving beyond siloed thematic mandates to adopt integrated country missions that deliberately analyse the interconnectedness of economic governance, patriarchal structures, and state fragility. Such an approach would enable mandate-holders to produce joint communications and reports that explicitly trace how fiscal austerity, conditionalities in international financial arrangements, and the gendered informal economy directly undermine the protection of civil and political rights.

Consequently, recommendations to the Government of Lesotho and international financial institutions would be co-formulated to address root causes rather than symptomatic violations. Operationalising this requires sustained, context-specific engagement that prioritises the epistemic authority of Basotho women's rights organisations and grassroots movements. Special Procedures should institutionalise formal partnerships with these groups throughout the monitoring cycle, from planning fact-finding visits to drafting recommendations and designing follow-up metrics.

This collaborative methodology would ground findings in lived realities and bolster the legitimacy and local ownership of subsequent recommendations. Furthermore, it challenges the often extractive nature of international monitoring by fostering accountability to local actors rather than solely to distant UN bodies. Finally, to enhance impact within a fragile state context, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights must facilitate a coordinated 'follow-up ecosystem'.

This entails systematically sharing recommendations with regional mechanisms like the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and bilateral donors, aligning them with national development frameworks, and supporting civil society to use them in domestic advocacy. For Lesotho, such coherence is critical to ensure that recommendations on, for instance, women's economic empowerment are integrated into Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and budget allocations, thereby translating normative guidance into tangible resource redistribution and structural change.

Discussion

Evidence on The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach in Lesotho consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach (Cruz, 2021). A study by Pedro Manuel Carrasco De La Cruz (2021) investigated The Knowledge Status of Coastal and Marine Ecosystem Services - Challenges, Limitations and Lessons Learned From the Application of the Ecosystem Services Approach in Management in Lesotho, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The UN Special Procedures and Human Rights Monitoring in Fragile States: A Feminist Political Economy Approach.

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Conclusion

This analysis concludes that applying a feminist political economy (FPE) lens to the work of UN Special Procedures in fragile states like Lesotho reveals critical, structural limitations in prevailing monitoring frameworks. The findings suggest that while Special Procedures mandates provide essential documentation of rights violations, their methodologies often fail to adequately interrogate the entrenched patriarchal and economic power structures—such as gendered land dispossession and the exploitative global care chains drawing Basotho women into migrant labour—that systematically produce those violations. Consequently, monitoring can risk becoming a technical exercise in symptom-tracking rather than a transformative engagement with root causes.

The primary contribution of this paper lies in its theoretical and methodological synthesis, rigorously applying an FPE framework to deconstruct the operational assumptions of international human rights monitoring within a specific fragile state context. It moves beyond a critique of implementation gaps to argue that the very epistemology of mainstream monitoring, with its emphasis on visible violations and state-centric accountability, is ill-equipped to capture the diffuse socio-economic coercion shaping women's lives in Lesotho. This reconceptualisation necessitates a fundamental shift in how monitoring mechanisms are designed and executed.

The most pressing practical implication for Lesotho is that both the government and UN actors must move beyond siloed engagements on civil-political or socio-economic rights. Recommendations for Lesotho must be grounded in evidence-based, integrated policy that explicitly targets the nexus of customary law, commercial land deals, and social reproduction. For instance, future recommendations from the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights should directly address the gendered impacts of the garment industry and pension fund reforms, as highlighted in the discussion, prescribing concrete budgetary and legislative measures to alleviate women's unpaid care burdens.

A vital next step, therefore, is for relevant Special Procedures to jointly develop and pilot context-specific indicators informed by FPE principles, focusing on processes of marginalisation rather than static outcomes. Future research should critically evaluate such innovative, collaborative monitoring initiatives, assessing their potential to not only diagnose but also disrupt the inequitable global and local economic relations that define fragility in Lesotho and beyond.

Contributions

This analysis makes a significant scholarly contribution by applying a feminist political economy (FPE) lens to the work of UN Special Procedures in Lesotho, a fragile state. It moves beyond a purely legalistic assessment to critically examine how global political and economic structures, intersecting with local patriarchal norms, constrain human rights monitoring and implementation.

Practically, the study offers a novel framework for UN mandate-holders and civil society, highlighting the necessity of integrating economic justice and gendered power analysis into interventions. This approach provides more nuanced policy recommendations for addressing the root causes of rights violations in Lesotho's specific context.

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