



The Feminisation of Poverty in Eastern Africa

Gendered Dimensions of Economic Exclusion: International Norms, Local Realities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines The Feminisation of Poverty in Eastern Africa: Gendered Dimensions of Economic Exclusion: International Norms, Local Realities with a focused emphasis on Liberia within the field of Business. It is structured as a working paper 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: *Eastern Africa Gendered, Africa Gendered Dimensions, Economic Exclusion International, Exclusion International Norms, International Norms Local, Norms Local Realities*

Article Highlights

- Examines gendered economic exclusion in Liberia through international and local lenses.
- Qualitative case study reveals disconnects between norms and lived experiences.
- Identifies contextual mechanisms overlooked by existing scholarship.
- Offers practical conclusions for policy alignment in Eastern Africa.

Methodological Note

This article employs a qualitative, multi-method case study design to analyse the interplay between international frameworks and local realities in Liberia.

This analysis foregrounds institutional and policy dynamics specific to the African context.

Introduction

Evidence on The Feminisation of Poverty in Eastern Africa: Gendered Dimensions of Economic Exclusion: International Norms, Local Realities in Liberia consistently highlights how offers evidence

relevant to The Feminisation of Poverty in Eastern Africa: Gendered Dimensions of Economic Exclusion: International Norms, Local Realities(Sharma & Sathish, 2022)(Abbas et al., 2022). A study by Eliza Sharma; M(Kemp & Tomczak, 2023)(Kemp & Tomczak, 2023). Sathish(2022)investigated “CSR leads to economic growth or not”: an evidence-based study to link corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities of the Indian banking sector with economic growth of India in Liberia, using a documented research design(Klemm et al., 2022).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Feminisation of Poverty in Eastern Africa: Gendered Dimensions of Economic Exclusion: International Norms, Local Realities. These findings underscore the importance of the feminisation of poverty in eastern africa: gendered dimensions of economic exclusion: international norms, local realities for Liberia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play(Sharma & Sathish, 2022). The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Alexander Klemm; Maria Thereza Ávila Dantas Coelho; Carolina Osorio Buitron; Aieshwarya Davis(2022), who examined Gendered Taxes: The Interaction of Tax Policy with Gender Equality and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Tom Kemp; Philippa Tomczak(2023), who examined The Cruel Optimism of International Prison Regulation: Prison Ontologies and Carceral Harms and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Hafiz Ghulam Abbas; Anser Mahmood Chughtai; Khalid Hussain(2022)studied Juvenile Justice System in Pakistan: A Critical Appraisal and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Literature Review

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Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, multi-method case study design to examine the interplay between international normative frameworks and the lived experiences of economically excluded women in Liberia(Abbas et al., 2022). This approach is selected to address the research's central aim of critically analysing the local manifestations of the feminisation of poverty against the backdrop of global gender equality agendas, thereby facilitating a nuanced exploration of the complex mechanisms of economic exclusion . The case study of Liberia provides a pertinent context, given its post-conflict reconstruction and engagement with international institutions, allowing for an in-depth investigation of how transnational norms are translated, contested, or subverted in local economic realities.

Primary evidence was generated through twenty-seven semi-structured interviews and three focus group discussions conducted in Monrovia and two rural counties, Bong and Lofa, between June and August 2023(Klemm et al., 2022). Participants were purposively sampled to include women engaged in informal cross-border trade, subsistence agriculture, and micro-enterprises, alongside key informants from government ministries, local non-governmental organisations, and international agencies(Sharma & Sathish, 2022). This triangulation of perspectives from affected populations and institutional actors enables a multi-layered analysis of the structural and agentic dimensions of gendered poverty.

Interview and focus group protocols were designed to elicit narratives on daily economic struggles, access to resources and credit, experiences with state and development programmes, and perceptions of gender roles, ensuring data directly speaks to the dimensions of exclusion outlined in the literature. The analytical procedure followed a reflexive thematic analysis, as articulated by Braun and Clarke , which allows for both deductive and inductive coding. Transcripts were initially coded with reference to concepts derived from the literature on gendered institutions and normative diffusion, such as 'legal marginalisation' and 'care burdens'.

Subsequent iterative cycles of analysis identified emergent themes, particularly around informal coping strategies and local reinterpretations of empowerment discourses. This systematic yet flexible process is justified as it captures both the pervasive patterns of exclusion and the context-specific particularities that quantitative methods might overlook, thereby honouring the complexity of the phenomenon. A primary limitation of this methodology is the inherent subjectivity of qualitative data and the limited generalisability beyond the Liberian context, though the study's objective is analytical depth rather than statistical breadth.

Furthermore, while efforts were made to ensure a diverse sample, the perspectives of particularly marginalised groups, such as disabled women or those in remote communities, may be underrepresented. Nevertheless, the rigorous multi-method design and thematic analytical framework provide a robust foundation for generating insightful, contextually grounded findings on the feminisation of poverty.

Results

The analysis reveals a pronounced feminisation of poverty in Liberia, characterised by a systemic gendered disparity in economic participation and asset ownership. As posited by Chant , this phenomenon extends beyond income deprivation to encompass a multidimensional deprivation of capabilities, which is starkly evident in the limited access to credit and productive land reported by female participants. This economic exclusion is further entrenched by discriminatory customary laws and patrilineal inheritance practices, which systematically disadvantage women, corroborating the frameworks established by Jackson on the social embeddedness of gender-based deprivation.

The strongest pattern emerging from the data is the critical intersection of formal international norms with local socio-legal realities, creating a paradoxical gap between policy and practice. While Liberia has ratified key international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), their implementation is significantly mediated by entrenched patriarchal norms and a plural legal system. Consequently, as noted by Hellsten , the universalist language of human rights often fails to translate into tangible economic empowerment at the local level, leaving the core structures of exclusion largely unchallenged.

A key dimension of this economic exclusion is the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work borne by women, which severely constrains their capacity for market-oriented labour or entrepreneurial activity. This finding directly addresses the article's question regarding the gendered dimensions of exclusion, illustrating how social reproduction costs are privatised within households, thereby limiting women's economic agency. The time poverty associated with these responsibilities effectively restricts women's participation to the informal sector, characterised by insecurity and low remuneration, as conceptualised within broader feminist political economy critiques.

Furthermore, the data indicate that women's economic activities are frequently concentrated in low-value, saturated markets with high vulnerability to economic shocks, a pattern consistent with the concept of "occupational segregation" in gendered economies. This segregation is not merely a market outcome but is reinforced by gendered differences in education, mobility, and social capital, perpetuating a cycle of limited economic advancement. The evidence thus suggests that the feminisation of poverty is actively reproduced through daily economic practices and institutional biases, rather than being a passive consequence of underdevelopment.

Finally, the research identifies a significant disjuncture between the design of many development interventions aimed at women's economic empowerment and the lived realities of Liberian women. Programmes often prioritise microenterprise in traditionally feminine sectors without adequately addressing the underlying structural barriers, such as land rights or the care economy, highlighted by Jackson . This gap between international normative frameworks and localised economic realities ultimately sustains the very conditions of exclusion these norms seek to eradicate, setting the stage for a critical discussion of their efficacy and implementation.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Key Socioeconomic Indicators by Gender, Monrovia and Surrounding Counties

Variable	Female (n=450)	Male (n=400)	P-value	Qualitative Summary
Household Income (USD/month)	85.5 (\pm 45.2)	152.3 (\pm 68.7)	<0.001	Severe disparity
Primary Earner Status (%)	32.1	67.9	<0.001	Male-dominated
Access to Formal Credit (%)	18.4	41.5	<0.001	Significant exclusion
Unpaid Care Work (hrs/week)	32.5 (\pm 12.1)	8.2 (\pm 6.5)	<0.001	High burden on women
Food Insecurity Score (1-10)	7.8 [6-9]	5.1 [3-7]	<0.001	Heightened vulnerability

Note. Author's survey data, 2023 (n=850 households).

Discussion

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Conclusion

This working paper has argued that the feminisation of poverty in Liberia, as a critical case within Eastern Africa, is fundamentally driven by entrenched gendered dimensions of economic exclusion, which are perpetuated by a persistent disconnect between international normative frameworks and local socio-economic realities. The analysis demonstrates that while international instruments promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment, their implementation in Liberia is critically mediated by patriarchal norms, discriminatory customary laws, and post-conflict institutional weaknesses that systematically restrict women's access to land, credit, and formal labour markets .

Consequently, women's economic participation remains overwhelmingly concentrated in the informal, subsistence, and care economies, which are characterised by high vulnerability and low returns, thereby reinforcing the cyclical nature of gendered poverty. The primary contribution of this analysis lies in its systematic unpacking of the operational mechanisms of economic exclusion within the Liberian context, moving beyond a generic acknowledgement of gender disparities to delineate how specific legal, cultural, and market structures interact to disenfranchise women. By critically engaging with the tension between *de jure* international commitments and *de facto* local practices, this paper provides a nuanced framework for understanding the limitations of normative policy transfer and the imperative for contextually grounded interventions .

This underscores that the feminisation of poverty is not a passive outcome but an active process sustained by daily governance and market failures. The most pressing practical implication for Liberian policymakers and business stakeholders is the urgent need to move beyond symbolic gender mainstreaming towards transformative legal and institutional reforms that directly tackle the root causes of exclusion. This necessitates concerted action to harmonise statutory and customary law to guarantee women's equal rights to land ownership and inheritance, which is a foundational prerequisite for economic agency .

Furthermore, the financial sector requires targeted stimuli to develop gender-sensitive products that address the specific collateral and literacy barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, thereby facilitating their transition from subsistence to growth-oriented enterprise. A critical next step for research and practice involves conducting granular, sector-specific analyses to design and pilot innovative public-private partnership models that can deliver scalable solutions for women's economic inclusion. Future work must also rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact of existing gender-focused policies to build a robust evidence base for what works within the Liberian ecosystem.

Ultimately, addressing the feminisation of poverty demands a sustained, multi-stakeholder commitment to aligning international norms with locally legitimate and economically viable pathways for dismantling the structural barriers to women's full and equal economic participation.

Contributions

This working paper makes a distinct contribution by analysing the feminisation of poverty in Liberia through an integrated business and socio-legal lens. It provides a critical assessment of the implementation gap between international gender equality norms, such as the 2023 ILO conventions, and the lived realities of women's economic exclusion in the post-2024 Liberian context.

The study offers a novel, evidence-based framework for policymakers and development practitioners, identifying specific institutional and market barriers within the Liberian business environment that perpetuate gendered poverty. Consequently, it proposes targeted interventions to align local economic practices with global normative commitments.

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