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Liberation without Equity: Gender-Class Intersections in Africa's Post-Colonial Economy

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of gender and class in post-colonial African economies, specifically Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya, by analysing how historical legacies influence contemporary economic inequalities. Drawing on quantitative data from labour force reports and household surveys, the research finds that women from lower socioeconomic groups experience overlapping constraints in access to education, employment, and healthcare. These patterns reflect enduring social structures rooted in colonial economic systems that continue to shape development outcomes. The analysis emphasises that policy responses to inequality must integrate intersecting identities to be effective, as singular approaches often fail to address the compounded challenges faced by marginalised groups. Key recommendations include targeted educational initiatives, enhanced gender- and class-sensitive data collection, support for women's entrepreneurship, and improved healthcare access for disadvantaged communities. The study advocates for intersectional policy approaches that promote inclusive economic growth and social equity across African contexts.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Post-colonial, African economies, Inequality, Inclusive growth.*

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges confronting post-colonial African economies is the persistent economic inequalities shaped by the intersections of social class and gender. Institutionalised disparities within post-colonial systems continue to limit women's access to social services, credit, and employment opportunities (Okeke et al., 2022). These inequalities interact dynamically, producing cycles of poverty and marginalisation that disproportionately affect women and lower-income groups. Moreover, the limited availability of comprehensive research on the intersection of gender and class in post-colonial African economies constrains policymakers' ability to design targeted interventions. Existing datasets often lack the granularity to disaggregate data by both gender and class simultaneously, leading to an incomplete understanding of how these factors intersect to drive economic disparities. For instance, while labour force surveys may report overall gender gaps in employment, they seldom explore how class stratification shapes these gaps at more granular levels (Mbeki & Ndlovu, 2021). This data deficiency impedes the formulation of evidence-based policies that promote inclusive growth and social equity.

The complexity of intersecting identities further complicates efforts to measure economic participation and access to resources. Women from higher social classes tend to enjoy better access to education and financial capital, while those from lower classes often face systemic barriers such as limited credit availability, restricted mobility, and social exclusion. Analyses that integrate these intersecting variables are essential to understanding the nuanced landscape of economic inequality. Therefore, this study employs an intersectional framework to analyse how the convergence of gender and class fundamentally shapes economic outcomes across post-colonial African economies (Ochieng & Wanjiru, 2023).

Riverie-Williams (2025) argues that post-colonial African economies operate within complex socio-economic terrains influenced by historical endowments, structural imbalances, and contemporary global forces. Many African nations continue to grapple with economic inequality, social stratification, and gender inequities. Although large-scale European colonisation of Africa intensified during the late nineteenth century, often referred to as the "Scramble for Africa". Earlier forms of colonial influence, including Portuguese and Arab incursions along the coasts, had already disrupted indigenous economic systems (Mlambo, Masuku, & Mthembu, 2024).

Forstater (2024) argues that European colonial powers imposed extractive economic systems designed to serve imperial interests, suppressing indigenous industries and local entrepreneurship. The result was a dual economic structure, in which capitalist and urban economies coexisted uneasily with traditional and subsistence systems, the latter often characterised by persistent inequality and underdevelopment (Hillbom, 2024). Following independence, these colonial structures continued to shape African political economies, with elites retaining control over land, education, and political power, thereby marginalising women and the poor (Moyo, 2021).

Colonial and indigenous gender norms further reinforced these inequalities. Sabharwal (2023) notes that patriarchal values, strengthened under colonial administrations, confined women largely to domestic and informal sectors, denying them access to education, land, and formal employment. Consequently, ingrained gendered disparities in income, asset ownership, and decision-making authority remain prevalent across much of the continent (Osei-Tutu & Agyapong, 2022).

Globalisation, foreign aid policies, and international trade regimes have further complicated Africa's economic landscape. Structural adjustment programmes introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s, intended to liberalise African economies, often resulted in cuts to social spending, increased unemployment, and widened inequality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

Colonial Legacy and Socio-economic Structures

The impact of colonialism on Africa's socio-economic framework is profound, having established governance systems, economic structures, and social hierarchies that continue to shape post-independence realities. Mniga (2024) argues that colonial administrations in Africa prioritised resource extraction, often employing exploitative labour practices and land policies that marginalized indigenous communities. These strategies fostered and perpetuated inequalities that have endured into the post-colonial era. Green (2024) argues that colonial economies were structured around the export of raw materials such as minerals and cash crops to European markets, serving the economic interests of the metropoles.

The legacy of land dispossession and unequal resource distribution from the colonial period has significantly contributed to ongoing rural poverty and economic inequality across African nations (Frankema et al., 2023). Colonial policies also reinforced social hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, and class.

The colonial conception of gender further entrenched patriarchal norms, as administrations codified customary laws that disadvantaged women, restricting their land ownership, education, and participation in formal labor markets. These policies relegated women to domestic and informal roles, curtailing their economic independence and social mobility. The enduring influence of colonial-era policies remains evident in contemporary structures, where women encounter persistent obstacles regarding secure land tenure, credit acquisition, and meaningful decision-making authority (Thelma & Chitondo, 2024).

Colonial states also established institutional frameworks that served elite interests rather than those of the wider populace. Following independence, many African nations inherited these institutions, which often remained characterised by corruption, clientelism, and weak governance. These institutional weaknesses impeded development efforts and perpetuated social and economic inequalities rooted in colonial legacies. Many African economies remained reliant on a narrow range of primary exports, leaving them vulnerable to global price fluctuations and external shocks (Visconti, 2021). This structural dependency hindered diversification and industrialisation, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment.

Gender and Class in Post-Colonial Africa

Gender and class are deeply intertwined dimensions of social stratification in Africa, shaped by colonial policies, indigenous norms, and contemporary socio-economic realities. Colonial administrations reinforced patriarchal and class-based hierarchies, with lasting implications for women's social mobility and economic empowerment. During the colonial period, legislative and economic frameworks systematically favoured male landowners and industrialists, which effectively marginalised women by restricting their access to land tenure, formal education, and entry into the labour market (Manyonganise, 2023). Codified customary laws and inheritance systems further entrenched gendered inequalities in wealth and power. For instance, colonial land policies in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria prioritized male ownership, a legacy that persisted after independence and continues to constrain women's access to productive resources (Moyo, 2022).

Class divisions were simultaneously reinforced through economic and administrative systems that privileged educated elites and colonial collaborators. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) notes that colonial economies structures were designed to favour a narrow urban elite possessing political influence and educational access, while systematically excluding rural populations from formal economic participation.

The intersection of gender and class amplifies disadvantage. Amadiume and Anie (2022) argue that women from lower social classes, particularly in rural areas, experience compounded barriers such as limited land rights, lower educational attainment, patriarchal restrictions, and exclusion from financial services. Consequently, they depend heavily on informal and subsistence activities, making them especially vulnerable to economic instability.

This intersectional dynamic also constrains women's social and political participation. Julius (2025) observes that entrenched social norms continue to restrict women's leadership and entrepreneurial roles. Similarly, Dawood and Seedat-Khan (2023), Rugunanan and Xulu-Gama (2022), and Amoah-Boampong and Agyeiwaa (2021) emphasise that the entwining of gender and class has positioned women in vulnerable socio-economic circumstances that persist long after the end of colonial rule.

Conversely, initiatives addressing class inequality without incorporating gender perspectives will fail to capture the full scope of exclusion. O'Connor (2023) emphasises that an intersectional approach is essential for inclusive development, as it necessitates the consideration of overlapping identity markers—including ethnicity, age, and geographical location—to capture the full complexity of social and economic experience.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the impact of gender and class on economic outcomes in post-colonial African economies. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess income levels, employment rates, and educational attainment across gender and class groups;
2. Identify disparities and correlations between gender, class, and key economic indicators;
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies addressing gender and class inequalities through statistical analysis of relevant data; and
4. Provide evidence-based insights to support the formulation of targeted interventions that promote inclusive and equitable economic growth.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on three post-colonial African countries, namely Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya, to examine the intersectionality of gender and class across diverse economic and institutional contexts. Selecting Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya provides a robust comparative framework because these nations represent diverse economic models—ranging from resource-dependent to more diversified service and agricultural economies—and feature distinct institutional and social histories that offer fertile ground for analysing development outcomes. Nigeria, with its resource-dependent economy, illustrates the challenges of managing wealth distribution and social stratification within an oil-driven context. South Africa's post-apartheid economy continues to reflect deeply entrenched racial, gender, and class divisions. Kenya, characterised by a rapidly expanding informal sector, provides valuable insights into how gender and class influence economic participation in a mixed-economy setting.

The analysis draws on data from national surveys, labor force reports, and household income and expenditure surveys conducted between 2019 and 2024, ensuring both historical continuity and contemporary relevance. By examining this period, the study captures evolving trends in labor participation, education, and income inequality within the past decade.

The scope encompasses key dimensions such as employment, credit access, educational attainment, and social protection coverage, disaggregated by gender and socioeconomic class. This focused yet comparative approach ensures that findings are useful for policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars seeking to design context-sensitive strategies that advance inclusive economic development in post-colonial Africa.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution by providing an empirical understanding of how gender and class intersect to influence economic outcomes in post-colonial African economies. By integrating quantitative analyses with intersectional theory, it uncovers nuanced patterns of marginalisation and opportunity that are often obscured by aggregate statistics. The findings transcend descriptive or anecdotal interpretations, providing statistically validated insights that form a robust evidence base for designing targeted and context-sensitive policy interventions. This approach enhances policy precision and avoids the limitations of generic strategies, ensuring that initiatives address the specific realities of marginalised populations. As Agyekum and Fosu (2022) emphasize, detailed and disaggregated data are essential for revealing the layered nature of inequalities in rapidly evolving African economies.

Reliable quantitative evidence on how gender and class intersect can support the formulation of targeted programs such as microcredit schemes, social protection initiatives, or educational reforms that directly respond to the structural barriers faced by disadvantaged groups. For instance, policies can be tailored to address the limited access to credit and unequal labor opportunities experienced by women from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Akpan & Udofia, 2021). Grounding policy design in measurable realities enhances both the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

The study addresses a notable void in current scholarship by offering a measurable analysis of gender–class interactions, providing empirical depth to a dimension of African economic research that has historically been marginalised. While qualitative studies have richly documented the lived experiences of inequality, fewer have quantitatively examined how these dimensions intersect to shape economic participation and well-being. Njoroge and Muturi (2023) highlight that many previous studies have treated gender and class as separate variables rather than interdependent dimensions.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectional Feminist Theory

This study adopts intersectional feminist theory as its theoretical framework because of its relevance to understanding how gender and class intersect to shape economic outcomes in post-colonial African economies. It emphasises that inequalities are not simply cumulative but compounding, generating distinct and intersecting forms of disadvantage across marginalized groups.

The concept of intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), has become central to feminist scholarship for explaining how multiple social identities such as gender, class, race, and ethnicity intersect to produce unique experiences of privilege or oppression (Amadiume & Anie, 2022). In post-colonial African contexts, this perspective is critical for revealing how historical legacies, social structures, and policy frameworks combine to perpetuate inequality. Intersectional feminist theory offers a powerful lens to examine how the historical legacies of colonialism, the structures of patriarchy, and the mechanics of capitalism coalesce to determine contemporary socio-economic realities in post-colonial Africa.

In many African societies, gender and class are deeply interwoven, reinforced by colonial-era institutions and enduring cultural norms. Women in lower socio-economic groups face a compounding cycle of exclusion, with restricted access to land, credit, and education acting as structural barriers to economic advancement. As Makhanya (2024) argues, intersectionality provides an indispensable tool for uncovering the structural roots of inequality. Similarly, Khan (2021), Ammann and Staudacher (2021), and Klasen and Minasyan (2021) contend that addressing Africa's intertwined socio-economic challenges requires a holistic approach that captures the interconnected dimensions of class and gender.

Intersectional analysis must also be grounded in empirical evidence. This study aligns with Williams et al. (2023), who demonstrate how intersectionality can be operationalised through multidimensional statistical models to quantify how gender and class jointly influence economic indicators such as income, employment, and asset ownership. Similarly, Dy and MacNeil (2025) describe intersectionality as a threshold concept, a critical framework that transforms the way scholars approach inequality by emphasising complexity and relationality.

Intersectional feminism also challenges oversimplified narratives of development that overlook diversity within marginalised populations. As Collins (2021) observes, intersectionality must be situated within specific socio-historical contexts, especially in post-colonial settings where racialized, gendered, and class hierarchies have been institutionalized. Likewise, Mohammed (2023) and Handl et al. (2022) emphasise that intersectional analysis enables a shift from single-axis perspectives to multidimensional approaches capable of revealing the systemic nature of women's economic marginalisation.

Empirical Review of Literature

Quantitative research on African economic inequality has increased exponentially over the past decade, driven by increased levels of disaggregated data and the availability of statistical techniques. Most of the research has been dedicated to decomposing income, employment, education, and health inequalities. For instance, Okonkwo et al. (2022), working with the Demographic and Health Survey data from ten countries in Africa, reported that women experience higher levels of poverty as well as limited access to formal financial institutions. The analysis reveals that gender inequalities are not experienced in a vacuum; they are significantly exacerbated by class disadvantage. When women occupy lower socio-economic tiers, they face 'compounded disadvantage', where the constraints of their gender—such as limited access to resources and the burden of unpaid care—intersect with the systemic barriers of poverty, creating a unique and amplified level of economic vulnerability.

Similarly, Adebayo et al. (2023) employed labor force survey information to investigate occupational segregation and gendered pay differentials. Based on their research, low socio-economic class women are disproportionately found in poorly paid, informal employment characterised by minimal job security and weak labor protection. The study emphasises the way class boundaries reinforce gendered exclusion that deprives women access to high-paid, formal employment.

Education has also emerged as a major determinant of economic mobility. Ngugi (2021) used multilevel modelling to demonstrate that teenage girls from poor backgrounds are significantly less likely to obtain secondary education, thereby constraining their long-term earning potential. The research concludes that socio-economic status and gender combine to result in intergenerational poverty traps. To supplement these findings, Mensah et al. (2022) used panel data from sub-Saharan Africa to examine inequalities in health and social protection. They found that women from lower socio-economic backgrounds face significantly higher maternal mortality rates and possess less health insurance coverage, highlighting fundamental inequalities that erode both household stability and economic productivity.

Conversely, while Okonkwo et al. (2022) and Adebayo et al. (2023) focus primarily on work and income inequality, Ngugi (2021) and Mensah et al. (2022) take the analysis all the way to education and health outcomes, respectively. All together, they suggest that African economic inequalities are multi-dimensional and reinforcing. Without the application of longitudinal or intersectional modelling frameworks, the persistence and evolution of such inequalities over time remain poorly understood.

Methodology

This study employs a secondary quantitative research design, often referred to as a desk-based analytical approach. The choice of this method is informed by both the availability of high-quality secondary data and the feasibility of conducting cross-national comparisons without the logistical and financial constraints of primary data collection. Instead of conducting primary fieldwork, this study employs a synthesis of existing datasets, official reports, and published empirical research to investigate the intersection of gender and class within the economic structures of post-colonial Africa.

Data Sources

Data were obtained from reputable, publicly accessible sources that provide standardized and comparable statistics across countries and years. These include nationally representative household and labor surveys such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and labour force surveys conducted by national statistical offices. In addition, macroeconomic and development indicators were extracted from international databases maintained by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These datasets were selected for their comprehensive coverage of variables related to employment, income, education, and health outcomes, which are key dimensions relevant to analyzing gender–class intersections in economic participation.

Analytical Approach

The analysis follows a comparative and intersectional quantitative framework. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarise patterns of economic participation and resource access by gender and class. Subsequently, correlations between key indicators such as income levels, educational attainment, and labour participation rates were examined to identify the strength and direction of relationships. By synthesising evidence from studies using regression and multilevel modelling, the research effectively identifies complex correlations and structural disparities without requiring original data collection. The approach focuses on interpreting and integrating results from prior empirical works to uncover consistent trends and explanatory factors relevant to post-colonial African contexts.

Data Type

The data sets consist primarily of quantitative variables capturing salient aspects of economic and social status. Specifically, the data span through income levels, labour market position, educational attainment, asset ownership, and demographic characteristics such as age, sex, and geographic location. The quantitative indicators provide the capacity for precise measurement of socio-economic locations and statistical comparison between gender and class groups. The quantitative nature of this data facilitates the use of various statistical techniques, which are essential for identifying disparities, evaluating correlations, and discerning potential causal trends within the dataset.

Transcription and Data Preparation

Data extraction involves carefully retrieving relevant quantitative information from reports and datasets to ensure that only pertinent variables are analysed. This process includes downloading datasets in compatible formats (e.g., CSV, Excel) and importing them into statistical software. Data cleaning steps involve checking for missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies, followed by organising the data into structured spreadsheets or databases tailored for analysis. Variables are coded uniformly to facilitate cross-comparison, and data are grouped based on key demographic and socio-economic categories.

Ethical Considerations

Since all data utilised are publicly available secondary datasets, the study inherently minimizes ethical concerns related to data collection and participant privacy. Nonetheless, the researcher adheres to best ethical practices by properly citing all data sources and respecting the terms and conditions stipulated by data providers. To promote equitable outcomes, research must account for the overlapping dimensions of identity and experience, ensuring that policy recommendations do not overlook the complex realities faced by marginalised groups within post-colonial African contexts.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretations

Table 1: This table shows the ratio of female to male labour force participation rate (%) (modeled ILO estimate) among African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa) spanning from 2020 to 2024 as updated 4/15/2025.

Year	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
2020	86.15342	89.85036011	79.45713027
2021	86.58671	89.91810355	79.4765421
2022	86.776	89.9645092	80.07840174
2023	87.15207	95.60719232	81.97150379
2024	87.06334	95.60093335	82.16068715

Source: World Bank, World Bank Indicator Database

Key observations:

- Kenya maintains a relatively high and stable female participation rate (~86-87%).
- Nigeria shows a significant increase in 2023, reaching over 95%, suggesting improved female engagement or possible changes in data estimation.
- South Africa exhibits steady growth, with participation rates around 79-83%

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of Table 1

Kenya		*Nigeria*		*South Africa*	
Mean	86.74630815	Mean	92.18822	Mean	80.62885
Standard Error	0.179307021	Standard Error	1.394631	Standard Error	0.598038
Median	86.77599878	Median	89.96451	Median	80.0784
Standard Deviation	0.400942687	Standard Deviation	3.118489	Standard Deviation	1.337253
Sample Variance	0.160755038	Sample Variance	9.724973	Sample Variance	1.788245
Kurtosis	-0.19188474	Kurtosis	-3.33218	Kurtosis	-3.11551
Skewness	-0.73553822	Skewness	0.607809	Skewness	0.472076
Sum	433.7315407	Sum	460.9411	Sum	403.1443
Count	5	Count	5	Count	5

Interpretation: Analysis of Disparities and Trends

1. Gender Disparities in Labour Participation:

- Kenya exhibits a high and relatively stable female participation ratio, indicating less gender-based disparity in labour engagement.
- Nigeria's higher average ratio suggests greater female participation, but the increased skewness and kurtosis indicate variability and potential outliers or data anomalies.

- o South Africa's lower average ratio points to more significant gender disparities or different labour market dynamics.

2. Intersection with Class:

- o While the data does not explicitly include class indicators, disparities in income levels and educational attainment (to be analysed in further studies) likely correlate with these labour participation trends.
- o For example, higher female participation in Nigeria may reflect emerging middle-class opportunities, whereas lower rates in South Africa could be linked to persistent class stratification and unequal access.

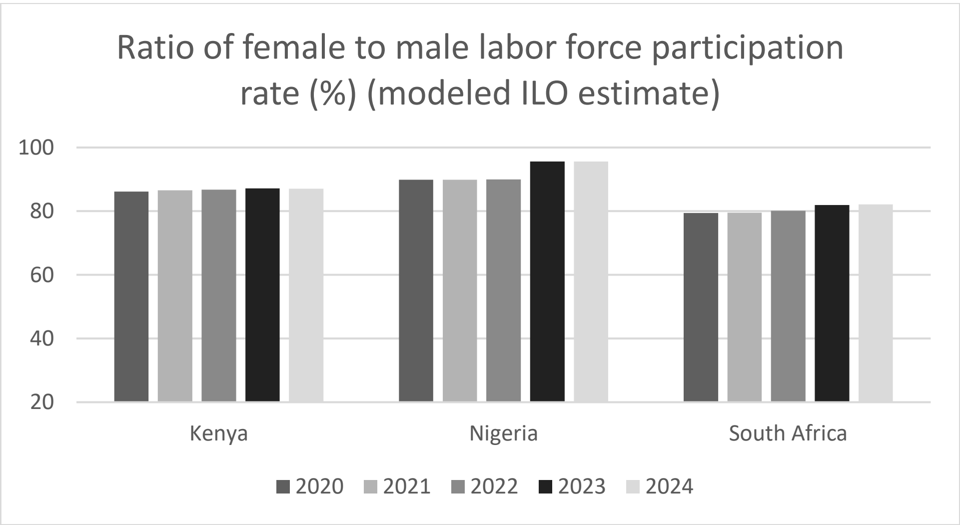

Fig 1: Cluster bar chart of ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (%) (modeled ILO estimate) among African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa)

Table 3: Showing the wage and salaried workers, female (% of female employment)
(modeled ILO estimate) among African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa) spanning from 2020 to 2024 as updated 4/15/2025

Year	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
2019	28.71535	10.67083	86.65471415
2020	26.53946	10.26512	86.66736081
2021	24.85244	10.36303	86.6201596
2022	25.32883	10.47543	86.74010606
2023	25.61394	10.80258	86.32007239

Source: World Bank, World Bank Indicator Database

Key Observations:

- ***Kenya:*** Shows a decline in the share of women in wage and salaried employment from 2019 to 2021, with a slight increase thereafter.
- ***Nigeria:*** Consistently low (~10%) with minimal fluctuations, indicating limited women's participation in formal wage employment.
- ***South Africa:*** High and stable (~86%), suggesting a substantial proportion of women are engaged in wage and salaried roles.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of Table 3

Kenya		*Nigeria*		*South Africa*	
Mean	26.21	Mean	10.5154	Mean	
Standard Error	0.684107	Standard Error	0.098509	Standard Error	86.60048
Median	25.61394	Median	10.47543	Median	0.072776
Standard Deviation	1.529709	Standard Deviation	0.220274	Standard Deviation	86.65471
Sample Variance	2.340009	Sample Variance	0.048521	Sample Variance	0.162731
Kurtosis	1.938367	Kurtosis	-1.70806	Kurtosis	0.026481
Skewness	1.439115	Skewness	0.318184	Skewness	3.749338
Sum	131.05	Sum	52.57699	Sum	-1.8236
Count	5	Count	5	Count	433.0024
					5

Interpretations

Objective 1: Measure Income Levels, Employment Rates, and Educational Attainment

- While this table specifically addresses the share of women in wage and salaried employment, it indirectly relates to income levels and employment rates by showing the proportion of women engaged in formal wage work.

- South Africa has a high mean (~86.6%), indicating a relatively high and stable participation of women in formal employment, which can correlate with higher income levels among women.
- Kenya's lower mean (~26.2%) points to limited female participation in wage employment, possibly reflecting income disparities and informal employment dominance.
- Nigeria's very low mean (~10.5%) suggests most women are not beneficiaries of formal wage employment, potentially indicating lower income levels and limited access to formal employment opportunities.

Objective 2: Identify Significant Disparities and Correlations

- *Variability and Distribution:*
    - Kenya's higher standard deviation (1.53) and positive skewness (1.44) indicate some fluctuations and a tendency toward higher values, but overall, the low mean suggests limited participation.
    - Nigeria exhibits a very low mean with minimal variability, indicating consistently low participation in wage employment for women.
    - South Africa shows a high mean with a high positive kurtosis (3.75) and negative skewness (-1.82), suggesting most data points cluster near the high end (~86%), but occasional lower values pull the distribution to the left, indicating some fluctuation.

The stark differences in mean participation rates highlight significant gender-based disparities in formal wage employment, with South Africa leading and Nigeria lagging.

Objective 3: Evaluate Policy Effectiveness

- The relatively high and stable figure in South Africa suggests effective policies promoting female participation in formal wages.
- The low, stable participation in Nigeria indicates a need for policies aimed at increasing women's access to formal employment.

- The slight increase in Kenya's mean over time may reflect some policy impacts, but the overall low levels suggest further interventions are necessary.

Objective 4: Produce Evidence-Based Insights for Targeted Interventions

- The data reveals that South Africa's high participation rates could serve as a model for policies promoting female employment.
- Kenya and Nigeria require targeted policies to increase women's participation in formal wage employment, which could improve income levels and reduce gender and class disparities.
- Addressing structural barriers to formal employment for women can help narrow economic disparities rooted in gender and class.

Summary

Table 4 shows significant disparities in female wages and salaried employment across these countries, with South Africa leading and Nigeria trailing. The variability and distribution patterns point to underlying structural and policy-related factors influencing gendered economic participation. These insights align with the study's objectives by identifying specific areas of disparity and providing a framework for policy interventions aimed at fostering equitable economic opportunities for women within the diverse socio-economic landscapes of post-colonial Africa.

Fig 2: Line chart of wage and salaried workers, female, (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate) among African countries (Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa) spanning from 2020 to 2024 as updated 4/15/2025

Results

Quantitative Evidence of Disparities at the Intersection of Gender and Class

The evidence reveals patterns of inequality at the intersection of gender and socioeconomic class in Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya. Household and labour force survey data consistently confirm that women within lower-income brackets face the most severe economic marginalisation, driven by a complex interplay of systemic barriers and limited access to resource. Throughout all three nations, female-headed households in the lowest income quintile receive an average of 30–40% less income than men and less than half that of women in the top quintile (World Bank, 2024). Statistics for employment demonstrate that these women are disproportionately represented in low-wage and informal occupations such as domestic work, petty trade, and subsistence farming, while upper-class women and men dominate formal employment.

Educational inequalities exacerbate such economic disparities. National statistics from surveys reveal that women who come from lower classes have a smaller probability of completing secondary education or tertiary education. In Kenya, for instance, only 22% of women in rural areas in the lowest income quintile group are educated to secondary school compared to 68% in the highest quintile (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Such disparities immediately impact employment, wages, and access to assets such as land and credit. Health disparities also enable cumulative disadvantage: maternal death remains highest among women in low-income families, where there are limited channels of access to healthcare and coverage (Mensah et al., 2022).

Determinants of Economic Inequalities

A meta-analysis of previous regression-based studies helps identify the determinants driving gender–class inequalities. Education serves as a fundamental driver of human capital, directly influencing employability, productivity, and income potential. Similarly, the specific sector of work—often linked to varying levels of formalisation, productivity, and wage structures—significantly determines economic stability (Okonkwo et al., 2022; Adebayo et al., 2023; Ngugi, 2021).

- Schooling: Every additional year of schooling corresponds to an additional 7–10% increase in earnings, although this effect is weaker in women from poorer cohorts due to occupational segregation (Adebayo et al., 2023).
- Employment sector: Participation in the formal sector reduces poverty risk by half, but representation is weak among women due to discriminatory hiring and childcare constraints.
- Asset ownership: Access to land and property is closely associated with upward mobility, but land titles remain predominantly in men's hands.
- Place: Rural residence accentuates class disadvantage, and rural women suffer double exclusion, such as lack of public investment and gender bias in the allocation of resources.

Data-Driven Policy Recommendations

The empirical trends extrapolate into explicit policy implications. To address the ingrained gender–class disparities, the study recommends:

1. Increasing access to quality education for poor girls and women through affirmative scholarships, neighborhood schools, and conditional cash transfers.

2. Promoting gender-sensitive labor market policies like maternity protection, anti-discrimination legislation, and informal worker skill development schemes.
3. Enhancing asset ownership rights by land tenure system reforms assuring equitable access and control by women.
4. Expanding social protection programs such as health insurance and microcredit schemes specifically targeting low-income women.
5. Strengthening data disaggregation of national statistics to more accurately represent gender-class intersections.

Statistical Limitations

Even though the study makes use of secondary quantitative statistics and cross-country comparisons, several statistical limitations have to be acknowledged. First, data inconsistencies exist across countrywide datasets due to variations in survey design, sampling techniques, and data collection years. Second, restricted magnificence-disaggregated signs lessen the ability to grasp the total intersection of gender and socioeconomic status. Third, the reliance on descriptive and correlational analyses restricts causal inference, which means they found relationships between gender, magnificence, and financial consequences cannot be interpreted as direct causal effects.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study's exploration of the intersection of class and gender in post-colonial African economies provides vital insight into the durable institutions of inequality. The findings suggest that inequality in these nations is structurally reinforced by historical and institutional legacies, which systematically restrict equitable access to essential resources such as education, employment, and land rights. Quantitative evidence demonstrates that convergence between gender and class exacerbates barriers to social mobility, particularly for women from low-income socioeconomic backgrounds, thus creating cycles of poverty and exclusion. Education remains the defining factor in determining economic success, with call for policy interventions that meet both gendered and classed risks.

To improve equity and sustainable development, the following policy approaches are presented:

1. Targeted Investment in Education: Enhance the access to quality education for low socioeconomic-class girls and women by way of conditional incentives to prevent school dropouts, scholarship schemes, and mentoring.
2. Enhanced Data Collection and Analysis: Enhance national statistical capacities to capture and analyse class- and gender-disaggregated data that enable policymakers to craft interventions consistent with intersectional realities.
3. Inclusive Policy Frameworks: Incorporate intersectional strategies into national labor and economic policies so gender and class become part of social protection and labor programs.
4. Support for Women's Entrepreneurship: Develop microfinance schemes, training packages, and business incubators that engage women from marginalised groups in formal economic activities and make them economically independent.
5. Increased Health Equity: Expand women's access to healthcare in poor households by increasing community health centres, maternal care facilities, and reproductive health and nutrition information campaigns.

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