

'In My Own Words':

Economic Autonomy Through the
Lens of African Women & Girls



The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network



AFRICAN
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
FUND



The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network

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FOREWORD

The expectations and demands placed on African women and girls globally can often feel overwhelming and unattainable. At the same time, African women and girls' demands towards their governments are frequently downplayed within a capitalist framework – a faint reflection of a society that values profit above human well-being. Addressing the quandary of women's rights, pursuits, amenities, and assets is paramount. When women have access to opportunities, it has a positive impact on a country's economic productivity and development as a whole.

Hence, it is crucial for African leaders to prioritize five critical areas: promoting education for girls, addressing gender-based violence, increasing women's participation in politics, improving women's access and provision of healthcare, and empowering women economically. These areas are not just issues, but the urgent challenges that women and girls face daily, making the need for advocacy and empowerment more pressing than ever.

Throughout history, women have shown an unwavering determination to share their stories and make a lasting impact on the world. As commonly phrased, '*Women don't tire*' – they have faced cultural beliefs and social conventions but have chosen to live on their own terms. Their voices have sparked a sense of acceptance of oneself, optimism, and confidence, reshaping our world in the process. When women and girls share their experiences of struggle, resilience and personal triumph, they often discover that sharing their stories can be a source of empowering themselves.

We continue to support African women and girls, which is an extraordinary position to be in! Our unwavering objective is to establish a secure platform for women and girls to exchange their personal encounters and explore the narratives of others. We anticipate that this compendium will go beyond the notion of storytelling as a means of empowerment. Our goal is to serve as a catalyst for raising awareness about the challenges faced by African women and girls. We aim to acknowledge their efforts in opposing patriarchal systems and, most importantly, to hold duty-bearers responsible for their well-being and rights accountable for promoting their safety, health, education, and overall empowerment in Africa.

- Nicole Maloba



EDITORIAL



I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout,
but so that those without a voice can be heard.
... We cannot all succeed when half of us are
held back.

– Malala Yousafzai

For far too long, the fight for economic justice and national development in Africa has been incomplete without the essential voices of women and girls. Silenced by societal expectations and systemic barriers, African women and girls have been denied the freedoms to control their own financial destinies and fully experience economic empowerment.

This book breaks that silence. It's a powerful tapestry woven from the threads of women's lived experiences, a collection of genuine desires coming together. Each page introduces you to an African woman with dreams and a burning hope to achieve economic autonomy. You'll meet African men who actively support women's rightful place in society and witness the unwavering determination of women who dared to challenge the status quo, be it in their workplaces, communities, or even personal lives. You'll also encounter the unwavering spirit and voices of women and girls who remain dedicated to securing economic justice and rights for all women.

These are not privileged heroines, but ordinary people who dared to dream, build, and fight for a more just and progressive society. From entrepreneurs, mothers, and sisters to advocates for women's rights, leaders, and artists, their stories resonate with the melodies that make up the symphony of economic autonomy – defined and reimaged by women in all their diversity, and in their own words.

Let the voices in this book be the opening notes of a progressive economic movement built on feminist principles.

– Lurit Yugusuk

INTRODUCTION



DID YOU KNOW?

That 1 in 10 women globally live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 a day?

At this rate, by 2030, an estimated 342 million women and girls will still be trapped in this cycle¹.



DID YOU ALSO KNOW?

That women are significantly less likely to have access to social safety nets like pensions and unemployment benefits compared to men?

This gap is particularly wide for women in informal jobs, which make up nearly 60% of female employment globally². Beyond these,



DID YOU KNOW?

That Women perform a massive share of unpaid care work – childcare, housework, etc. – amounting to over 16 billion hours daily?³

The economic value of this work is estimated at a staggering \$10.8 trillion annually, exceeding the global tech industry's worth⁴. Studies further suggest that if valued

1 UN Women (2023). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Gender Snapshot 2023. Link: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf>

2 Gender and vulnerable employment in the developing world: Evidence from global microdata. Retrieved from Science Direct and Written By: Maria C. Lo Bue, Tu Thi Ngoc Le, Manuel Santos Silva, and Kunal Sen. Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X22002005>

3 Oxfam International (2023). Not all gaps are created equal: the true value of care work. Link: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/not-all-gaps-are-created-equal-true-value-care-work>

4 Oxfam Policy and Practice (2022). Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis. Link: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/time-to-care-unpaid-and-underpaid-care-work-and-the-global-inequality-crisis-620928/>



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monetarily, unpaid care work in Africa could represent a substantial portion of GDP, exceeding 40% in some countries⁵. Furthermore, **women face greater barriers to accessing financial institutions and bank accounts, hindering their economic opportunities.**

The current status quo, coupled with factors such as gender-based violence, limited access to resources, and ingrained social norms, continues to impede women's economic empowerment. Nonetheless, FEMNET recognizes that investing in women's economic empowerment is integral for gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Against this backdrop, this collection of stories serves as a critical voice in advocating for women's economic justice. It seeks to raise awareness about the critical challenges women face in achieving their economic justice. With women sharing what economic autonomy means to them and their respective calls to action to their governments and development partners, the book remains a critical reference point for a rights-based approach to women's economic justice.

Methodology and Participants Profile

This collection features the powerful stories and calls to action of 16 African women and girls, showcasing their journeys towards economic empowerment. Hailing from Kenya (8), Malawi (1), Zimbabwe (1), Burundi (1), Zambia (1), South Sudan (1), Eswatini (1) and Uganda (3), these women offer diverse perspectives on economic self-determination. Regarding age distribution, one woman was aged between 18 and 25 years, 7 were between 26 and 35 years, 5 were between 36 and 45 years, and 5 were above 46.

Through an [online questionnaire](#), they explored four key questions related to women's economic empowerment: (1) What does women's economic empowerment mean to you? (2) What problems do you encounter in your daily life both within and outside your work? (3) What specific actions or policies do you think are necessary for governments to implement in order to tackle these challenges and advance economic justice and rights for all African women and girls? and (4) Lastly, in 10 words do you have any personal reflections or messages you would like to share with your government, policymakers, activists, or fellow women regarding the importance of women's economic empowerment?

⁵ International Labour Organization (ILO). Why measuring unpaid domestic and care work matters, and how we can help. Link: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/unpaid-work/measuring-unpaid-domestic-and-care-work/>



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Their responses were then transformed into a compelling tapestry of voices: monologues, letters, calls to action, and personal narratives. These have been organized as follows;

Country	Title
Uganda	The Uneven Scales: A Ugandan Woman's Fight for Economic Equality
Kenya	Bridging the Gap: From Policy to Progress for Women and Girls
Zambia	Mr. President, It is Time to Invest in African Women and Girls
Kenya	In the face of Adversity, We Rise: A Commitment to Gender Equality
South Sudan	Double Duty, Unequal Support: A Single Mother's Call for Economic Justice
Kenya	A Monologue: Stifled Potential and Denied Economic Autonomy through Traditional Norms
Eswatini	Breaking Barriers: Women's Economic Empowerment and Leadership in a Patriarchal World
Kenya	The Weaver of Equality: A Tale of Advocacy in the Face of Prejudice
Uganda	Investing in Women, Investing in Uganda: A Call for Action on Health Equity and Financial Security
Kenya	The Daily Grind: Economic Autonomy of Women equals Investment in Employment and Labour Laws
Malawi	Beyond Silence: The Call for Economic Equality for Women
Kenya	For the People of Africa: Men of Quality do not fear Gender Equality
Zimbabwe	A Deeper Look into What a Women's Rights Advocate Truly Needs
Kenya	Women's Economic Empowerment: What's Sustainable Agricultural Practices and Education got to do with it?
Uganda	Perhaps... After All,... Investing in the Care Economy is where we all need to start.
Kenya	Beyond the Numbers: How Gender Responsive Budgeting Empowers Women and Girls

This rich collection serves as a powerful resource for women everywhere. It sheds light on the challenges they face while highlighting the immense possibilities for achieving dignity, security, and self-reliance. Each story is a valuable lesson in the ongoing fight for women's economic empowerment.



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'In My Own Words':

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The Uneven Scales: A Ugandan Woman's Fight for Economic Equality

“

In my opinion, women's economic empowerment refers to the ability of women to have increased control over their own economic resources and opportunities – including access to financial resources, skills development, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and participation in decision-making processes related to economic activities. It involves breaking down barriers and addressing systemic issues that limit women's access to economic resources and opportunities, ultimately leading to greater gender equality and improved socioeconomic outcomes for women and their families.

”

– Lydia Nakato, Uganda.

The weight of being a woman in today's world has been heavy on my mind lately. Every path I take feels like it has a hidden tollbooth, a tax on my gender. It starts with the work itself. We fight for equal pay, but somehow, the scales are always tipped off in favor of my male counterparts. Then... there's the climb to the top. Promotions seem like a one-way street for them, while I – as a woman – am stuck on a rickety ladder with missing rungs.

My dream was to be my own boss, to run a thriving rice business. But banks see me – a woman without collateral – and slam the door shut. Importing that special rice from Kenya, the one that would bring in more customers is a dream out of reach and continues to remain a shimmering mirage in the distance as it costs up to twenty million Ugandan shillings (approx. 6000USD) – an amount that I may not be able to easily afford.

Even at home, there's no respite. The endless chores, the constant care for the children – it is all on my shoulders, unpaid hours that leave me drained before the workday even begins and this affects my productivity at work. This burden doesn't just affect me, it is also experienced by countless women in Africa and beyond. We can't reach



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our full potential, can't participate in the full symphony of life, can't engage in community roundtables. All because of this lopsided weight.

Society plays its part too. Old fashioned biases and gender stereotypes hold me back, whispers of "women belong at home" like a dusty record on repeat. And the leaders we have? Most are men, making decisions that don't always take our needs into account. Just look at the budget committee - with maybe one or two lone women who can't possibly represent the vast chorus of our voices. Corruption doesn't help either. It leaves our rights too far off reach.

We need change, my friend. It is time to enact and enforce legislation to promote gender equality and equal pay in the workforce. It is time for governments to increase budgetary allocations towards essential services such as education, healthcare and social protection among several others. It is time to fast track the agenda to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. It is time to implement targeted programs and policies that support women's access to financial resources such as microfinance programs, women's entrepreneurship support initiatives, and gender responsive budgeting. It is time to invest in education and skills training programs that target girls and women, including vocational training, STEM education, and literacy programs to enhance their economic opportunities. It is time to establish social protection programs and policies that provide safety nets for women in vulnerable situations, including maternity leave, childcare support, and access to affordable healthcare.

Beyond this, we should collectively promote women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels and strengthen data collection and analysis on gender disparities in economic participation to inform evidence-based policymaking and monitor progress towards achieving economic justice and rights for all women and girls in Africa.

By working together, by demanding change, we can create a world where women can finally thrive, where economic justice isn't a distant melody but a vibrant symphony for all. Let's embrace equality, empower women, and build a future where everyone has a chance to have autonomy over their own futures.



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Bridging the Gap: From Policy to Progress for Women and Girls

“
To me, women’s economic empowerment means ensuring the power to transform economies in communities is given to women as it should be.
”

– Grace Orai, Kenya.

Dear Comrades,

Today, I write as a young woman, who, like many others, has faced gender discrimination throughout my life. These experiences have not only been frustrating but have also limited the opportunities to realize my full potential. Beyond discrimination itself, I have encountered situations where opportunities exist, but the support systems needed to fully thrive are lacking. This lack of adequate support makes it incredibly difficult to achieve my full economic and financial potential, both within and outside the workplace.

To address these issues, I urge my government, policy makers, development partners and all other relevant stakeholders in promoting gender equality to consider a shift in policy focus. While new policies aimed at empowering women and girls are often created, the true challenge lies in ensuring their effective implementation. Currently, very many policies often lack clear enforcement mechanisms. There are no binding regulations that dictate how resources will be acquired and allocated for their implementation. This lack of accountability allows for gaps to form, rendering most policies ultimately ineffective.

Brethren, instead of developing entirely new policies, I believe a stronger focus on enforcing existing ones is crucial. With clear laws that hold the government and all relevant stakeholders accountable for implementing the existing policies, we can collectively ensure that the resources and support systems outlined are delivered. In essence, **the message is clear: Stop developing new policies, implement the existing ones effectively.**

With a stronger focus on implementation and enforcement, we can bridge the gap between policy and progress. This will allow young women like me, and countless others, the opportunity to overcome discrimination and achieve our full potential.

Yours Truly,
Grace Orai



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Mr. President, It is Time to Invest in African Women and Girls

" I see women's economic empowerment as enabling women to explore and utilize financial opportunities to meet their livelihoods with productive resources that they own and improve their socio-economic status. — **Zambian Advocate for Gender Equality.** "

Mr. President,

In developing countries – including Zambia, the gender gap stands at 6% while globally, it sits at 4% of men with 78% of men reporting having an account at a formal financial institution compared to 74% of women.

Indeed, the disadvantages and discrimination faced by women and girls severely limit their ability to lift themselves out of poverty. As a result, women are more likely to work in informal, low-wage jobs with exploitative and unequal working conditions, and have restricted access to affordable, quality financial products and services, like a savings account or small loan.

It goes without saying that investing in women's economic empowerment sets a path for poverty reduction and for advanced gender equality. To ensure women's economic justice and empowerment, **it is imperative that the government invests in pro-poor policies and opportunities.** These investments should be accessible and user-friendly, especially for ordinary women who are often disadvantaged due to illiteracy and caregiving responsibilities that limit their time and ability to participate in productive roles.

Moreover, the **government must fully implement the decentralization agenda by granting full authority and functions to local councils.** These councils should then build the capacities of local communities, with a particular focus on enabling women to actively participate in local development projects.

Thank you for your attention to these crucial matters.

Sincerely,

A Zambian advocate for gender equality.



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In the face of Adversity, We Rise: A Commitment to Gender Equality

Women’s economic empowerment means providing women with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to achieve financial independence, pursue their career goals, and contribute meaningfully to the economy. It involves breaking down barriers that prevent women from accessing equal opportunities in the workforce, such as gender discrimination, unequal pay, lack of access to education and training, and limited access to financial services.

For me, women’s economic empowerment also encompasses creating a supportive environment where women feel empowered to pursue entrepreneurship, leadership positions, and decision-making roles in both the public and private sectors. It is about recognizing and valuing the contributions of women in the economy and ensuring that they have equal access to resources, mentorship, and networks to succeed in their endeavors. Ultimately, women’s economic empowerment is not just about improving individual lives; it is about building a more inclusive and prosperous society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of gender.

– Georgina Kawira, Kenya.

Despite the undeniable hurdles that lie ahead, I stand firm in my commitment to achieving gender equality and the economic empowerment of African women and girls. The path to a just and equitable world for all women and girls is paved with complexities, but the destination is undeniable – a future where opportunity thrives and potential flourishes.

In recognizing some of the challenges women and girls face in their day to day lives, I note that many people are resistant to change, especially when it comes to challenging traditional gender roles and societal norms. This resistance hinders efforts to



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raise awareness and promote gender equality, as some individuals may be unwilling to acknowledge or address issues such as discrimination and gender-based violence. Additionally, there is often a lack of awareness about the importance of gender equality and social justice rights, particularly among certain communities or demographics – a situation that makes it challenging to engage people in meaningful discussions and initiatives aimed at promoting equality and justice. Furthermore, systemic inequalities, including unequal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, contribute to gender-based disparities and social injustice.

Given this situation, **governments in Africa should enact and enforce laws that protect women's rights in the workplace, including laws against discrimination, harassment, and unequal pay.** This also involves ensuring equal access to land ownership, inheritance rights, and property rights for women. Secondly, **investing in girls' education is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting economic empowerment.** Governments, development partners and all other relevant stakeholders should prioritize policies that ensure girls have equal access to quality education at all levels, including addressing barriers such as school fees, gender-based violence, and cultural norms that prioritize boys' education. Third, **implementing targeted economic empowerment programs for women and girls, such as skills training, vocational education, entrepreneurship support, and access to financial services, can help women gain economic independence and contribute to household and community development.** Improving access to healthcare services, including reproductive health services and maternal healthcare, is crucial for women's well-being and economic empowerment. As such, governments should invest in healthcare infrastructure, ensure access to affordable healthcare services, and prioritize women's health needs.

Additionally, **implementing social protection programs, such as cash transfers, childcare support, and maternity leave policies, can help mitigate the economic vulnerabilities faced by women and girls, particularly those in low-income households or marginalized communities.** Lastly, **improving the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data** is essential for understanding the specific challenges faced by women and girls and monitoring progress towards gender equality goals.

Economic justice for women is not just a moral imperative, it is a catalyst for inclusive prosperity and societal progress. In my work and as I continue to advocate for gender equality, I commit to continue building a world where women and girls can reach their full potential.

This is my commitment. Join me.

**In solidarity,
Georgina Kawira.**



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Double Duty, Unequal Support: A Single Mother's Call for Economic Justice

Perhaps, after all... women's economic empowerment means the ability to generate income.

- Zahra Said, South Sudan.

The weight of responsibility sits heavy on my shoulders. As a single mother raising a family while navigating the complexities of the workforce, I understand firsthand the challenges we face. This letter serves as a call to action, a plea for a system that truly supports 'working-class' mothers, particularly those of us with multiple dependents.

This concern extends beyond the walls of my own household. Society, as a whole, often fails to recognize the unique challenges we face. Even more concerning, existing economic empowerment laws and policies often fall short. Yet, we still are the backbone of countless families and a vital force in the workforce. However, a lack of affordable childcare, unequal pay and limited access to flexible work schedules make it incredibly difficult for us to thrive.

We need affordable, accessible childcare options that allow mothers to work without the constant worry about their children's well-being. This includes government funding for childcare centers and tax breaks for working families. And before I close off... we need to close the gender pay gap through legislation that promotes equal pay for equal work. Additionally, we need to address unconscious biases in hiring practices that often disadvantage women.

By investing in working mothers, we invest in a stronger economy, healthier families, and a brighter future for all. We are the untapped potential waiting to be unleashed. Let's make women's economic empowerment a national priority.



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A Monologue: Stifled Potential and Denied Economic Autonomy through Traditional Norms

“ I’d say that economic autonomy can be defined as women being able to afford the stuff that make their life easier – e.g. sanitary towels, being able to pay for medication, being able to cater to their kid’s & siblings’ schooling, affording to travel the world to experience other cultures because they have the means to. It means becoming free from abusive husbands that hit women when they borrow them money, and most of all, it simply means generally giving women the power to own and create... THE REAL PURCHASING POWER!

”
- Selina, Kenya.

We talk about traditions, how they connect us to the past, weave a tapestry of history. But sometimes, those threads can bind a little too tightly, and become invisible shackles that impede women’s economic autonomy. Today, I want to talk about these traditions. Well-meaning as they may be, they can hold women and girls back from realizing their utmost economic, social and political potential. Take an example of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a practice rooted deep in several African cultures. It is more than just physical pain and a traditional norm. It steals a girl’s future, limits her mobility, her ability to work, and ability to earn a living. It is a life sentence of hardship, and a step further away from her empowerment.

And then there’s land. Land that fathers pass down to sons, leaving women with nothing. No way to grow food, no way to build a future for themselves or their families. This economic disenfranchisement keeps women trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In other cultures, women do not have much autonomy and freedom over their dreams. This limits their education, access to markets, and even to jobs. It is like building walls around their potential, keeping them from realizing their dreams and even their rights.



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But these shackles can be broken! We need to seriously and intentionally enforce the 2011 Anti Female Genital Mutilation Act, this time round while meaningfully engaging communities, girls, survivors of FGM, men and everyone else altogether. We need land reforms, laws that give women equal rights to inherit land, to own and cultivate on their own terms. We need to create an enabling environment that allows women and girls to make the most of educational and economic opportunities.

When we invest in women's economic empowerment, we unlock a brighter future for everyone. Stronger families, national development and economic growth, and a more just society. Let's create a world where traditions do not hold back women but empower them. When women rise, the whole world does too!



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Breaking Barriers: Women's Economic Empowerment and Leadership in a Patriarchal World

“
To me, women economic empowerment is the aspect of placing women in economic leadership spaces to be able to have control over resources.
”

- Thulisile Maziya, Eswatini.

Patriarchal societies often fail to recognize women as capable leaders. This lack of social justice hinders not only women's potential and denies us our economic justice and rights, but also overall progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030). To achieve true gender equality and empower women economically, we need a multi-pronged approach that involves:

- 1. Establishing equal economic opportunities for all, regardless of gender.** This means dismantling discriminatory practices that hold women back, such as unequal pay for equal work and lack of access to childcare and parental leave, among other social protection benefits.
- 2. Designing specific strategies to fulfill women's rights to economic empowerment.** This includes ensuring control over resources such as land and credit, and access to financial services like loans and savings accounts.
- 3. Advocating for fairness and equity across all aspects of social life, including education, healthcare, and political participation.** Remember, women's rights are fundamental human rights, and they should be able to freely enjoy this within any given jurisdiction.
- 4. Providing women with opportunities to lead, leaving no one behind.** This also requires us all to embrace diversity and inclusion as core values for a more just and sustainable future. While at it, we should promote mentorship and sponsorship programs to cultivate the next generation of women leaders.
- 5. Supporting initiatives that foster women's economic autonomy, such as skills training programs, access to markets and ownership rights.** Only till then, can women make their own decisions and build the financial security they need to meet their unique needs.

By considering and implementing these strategies, we can break down patriarchal barriers and unlock the full potential of women's leadership and economic power. This is crucial for achieving women's economic justice.



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The Weaver of Equality: A Tale of Advocacy in the Face of Prejudice

“ Women economic empowerment is about giving women the power and knowledge to make economic decisions that best serve their needs in whatever context they are in.

- Afrika, Kenya. ”

In a land steeped in tradition, Afrika, a beacon of hope, tirelessly worked for the often-stereotyped souls – the ostracized LGBTIQ+ community. Yet, her path was fraught with thorns. The whispers of homophobia slithered through society, poisoning minds and hindering her efforts to build bridges of understanding.

A fiercer foe continues to lurk – the ever-present shadow of patriarchy. Every step forward sometimes feels like wading through mud, a constant struggle to earn her place as a woman in a world where men held the reins. Each waking day is a battle cry, a fight for respect and a voice at the table.

Amid this relentless fight, Afrika knew that she should never back down – all because the fight wasn't just hers. It belonged to countless women, their economic empowerment stifled by outdated laws and ingrained misogyny. A vision forever blooms in her heart – a world where progress echoed not just in words, but in actions.

Her voice continues to rise as a clarion call for change. She continues to call for a repeal of the archaic homophobic laws that shackled the LGBTIQ+ community as a key pillar to ensuring economic empowerment. It also goes without saying that gender-sensitive policies are important in ensuring economic autonomy. Laws that acknowledge the unique struggles women faced in the marketplace and the societal burdens that weighed them down is key. Policies crafted with an understanding eye, ensuring women in all their diversity not only survive but flourish.

Beyond this, dismantling the charade should be immediate. Individuals who pontificate about women's issues, who held the power to enact laws yet lacked the empathy to understand the consequences – need to be dethroned. **African women and girls deserve a seat at the table, not mere spectators to decisions that shaped their lives.**

In my advocacy for gender equality and women's economic empowerment, I hope that you too know that when you stand tall, your voice paves the path to a brighter future – not just for yourself but for several generations to come.



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Investing in Women, Investing in Uganda: A Call for Action on Health Equity and Financial Security

“
In my own words, women’s economic empowerment means having control over finances, basic needs, education, healthcare, and working in a respectful environment.
”

– Patricia Humura, Uganda.

As an African woman deeply invested in the health and well-being of my fellow Ugandans, I continue to see women and girls face challenges in accessing health-care. Currently working in the field of health equity, I also witness the daily struggles many women face in managing their finances, often due to factors beyond their control.

One of the most significant barriers is the high tax burden placed on salaries. This, coupled with the shortcomings in essential government services, particularly health-care access, creates a suffocating situation. Many women struggle to afford basic necessities, let alone crucial healthcare services, especially those related to reproductive health.

This lack of access to quality healthcare has a ripple effect. Women require good health to be not only financially secure but to also contribute positively to the overall economic well-being of our nation. You may agree with me that ***‘A healthy woman is a productive woman, able to support her family and participate fully in the workforce’***.

Therefore, I urge my government, policymakers, development partners and any other relevant stakeholders to consider the following:

- 1. Review and potentially reduce the tax burden on salaries.** By putting more money back in women’s pockets, we empower them to prioritize their health needs and invest in their financial security.
- 2. Focus on strengthening and expanding government healthcare services.** This includes ensuring access to quality reproductive healthcare services readily available and affordable throughout Uganda.

As I conclude, investing in the health and financial security of Ugandan women is not just the right thing to do, it is a smart economic decision. By creating a healthier and more empowered female workforce, we unlock the full potential of our nation’s human capital.



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The Daily Grind: Economic Autonomy of Women equals Investment in Employment and Labour Laws

“From a personal point of view, I think that women’s economic empowerment... or economic autonomy is about creating sustainable livelihoods for women.

– Jeronime Obwar, Kenya.

Just like every other African woman, one of the biggest hurdles I face is the constant weight of economic insecurity. The burden of financial worry can be overwhelming, impacting everything from day-to-day needs to long-term planning.

There are clear steps that policy makers and development partners can take to create a more economically empowered future for African women and girls. I believe progressive employment policies and strong labor laws are crucial. These policies should not only ensure equal opportunities for women in the workplace but also take an extra step to ensure that women participating in the workforce are compensated fairly and can be promoted. Nonetheless, economic empowerment goes beyond simply holding a job.

Investing is a powerful tool for women to break the cycle of poverty. Access to financial education, microloans and savings programs can empower women to start small businesses, invest in their education or training, and build a safety net. With more control over their finances, women can save for the future, invest in their children’s education and build assets that allow them to achieve their full potential.

By enacting these policies and investing in these areas, we can create a world where women thrive economically and contribute their full potential to society.



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Beyond Silence: The Call for Economic Equality for Women

“
To me, women economic empowerment means equipping women with skills and knowledge to become economically independent and make informed economic decisions.

”
- Anonymous, Malawi.

As a young African woman, one of my greatest daily struggles is the inability to vocalize my needs freely in a society where I often feel that my voice may not be heard, or thoughts considered. Don't get me wrong ... a thousand ideas swirl within me, each one a potential solution to avert gender inequalities and economic injustice. But my words seem quite elusive. Still, I continue to imagine myself as an articulate and passionate contributor to the fight for women's economic justice and hope that I do not always have to be a silent observer in any kind of conversation that desperately needs my voice.

When it comes to advancing women's economic justice, I think that a significant shift in attitude is required from policy makers to be able to make policies that effectively tackle economic inequality. For example, it is time to acknowledge that ensuring fair compensation for women in the workplace and legal protections during maternity leave are not handouts, but essential steps towards true equality and are part and parcel of ensuring women enjoy their rights. Only until then, can policymakers become more intentional towards ensuring that they are advancing economic justice from a rights-based perspective.

Furthermore, neglecting the idea of empowering girls with knowledge of sustainable living and economic management perpetuates economic injustice and leaves us disadvantaged from the start. **I'd like to remind policymakers that true progress for African women hinges on their economic empowerment.**



'In My Own Words':

Economic Autonomy Through the Lens of African Women & Girls

For the People of Africa: Men of Quality do not Fear Gender Equality

“In my own words, women’s economic empowerment is to give women equal opportunity to participate in all social/economic activities, in leadership responsibilities and in production value chains’

– Edward Riungu, Kenya.

Kenya, like many societies in Africa, faces a deeply ingrained obstacle: outdated cultural beliefs that position women as subordinate to men. These beliefs create a significant barrier to achieving true gender equality. However, there are encouraging steps being taken to dismantle these norms and empower women.

The Weight of Tradition: Challenging Outdated Beliefs

The most significant challenge lies in transforming cultural mindsets. Traditional beliefs about gender roles are often deeply rooted and passed down through generations. These beliefs can limit women’s opportunities in education, employment, and leadership. Dismantling these norms requires a multi-faceted approach that involves three key items, which are:

- 1. Education:** Educating both men and women about the benefits of gender equality is crucial. This can be achieved through community programs, school curriculums, and public awareness campaigns.
- 2. Shifting Narratives:** Promoting stories of successful women and highlighting the positive impact of gender equality on families and communities can help change social perceptions.
- 3. Engaging with Tradition:** Finding ways to reinterpret traditions and cultural practices to be more inclusive of women is essential. This involves working with community leaders and religious authorities to create a more equitable framework.



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A Legal Framework for Change: Kenya's 2010 Constitution

A significant turning point came in 2010 with the promulgation of Kenya's new constitution.

This document stands as a revolutionary and comprehensive framework for human rights, particularly for women. Here's how the constitution empowers women: The Bill of Rights lays a strong foundation for gender equality, guaranteeing fundamental rights like non-discrimination based on gender and promotes equal opportunities. Additionally, it paves the way for more legislation focused on protecting women's rights, particularly in economic development. Lastly, it attempts to actively promote gender balance in government positions.

Men As Allies: Why Gender Equality Benefits Everyone

The statement "Men of quality do not fear gender equality" is a powerful one and my call to fellow African men. It emphasizes that true strength lies not in dominance but in creating a society where everyone can thrive. When women are empowered, the benefits are far-reaching. They can contribute more effectively to the household, leading to a more stable and prosperous family environment. A gender-equal workforce unlocks the full potential of a nation's human capital, leading to increased productivity and economic growth. It brings diverse perspectives and experiences to the table, leading to more just and equitable policies.

The Road Ahead: Building a More Equitable Future

Kenya has made significant strides in advancing gender equality, but the journey is far from over. Shifting cultural mindsets takes time and sustained effort. However, the legal framework and ongoing initiatives provide a strong foundation for building a future where women and men can reach their full potential and contribute equally to a thriving Kenya.



'In My Own Words':

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A Deeper Look into What a Women's Rights Advocate Truly Needs

Women's economic empowerment is enhancing women's capacity for financial sustainability, with enabled access to relevant resources such as land, water, markets, capital, etc... and policies that support women's sustainable development.

– Kumbirai, Zimbabwe.

I am going to quickly start with the rising cost of living that puts a constant strain on my personal finances. Basic necessities like food, housing and healthcare can feel increasingly out of reach. For some reason, and I know many African women and girls would say the same – such a situation can create a sense of personal vulnerability. At the organizational level, one of the biggest hurdles I face as an advocate for women's rights is the lack of sustained funding. Securing resources for crucial programs that support women's economic justice and rights is a constant struggle. This funding shortage limits our reach and ability to effectively empower women in Zimbabwe and beyond. Additionally, the current policy environment is often unfavorable for civil society organizations (CSOs). Restrictive regulations and bureaucratic hurdles can make it incredibly difficult to operate effectively and deliver programs. In a stifling environment, we sometimes feel like it is a deliberate attempt to silence our voices.

Given these significant challenges, I urge policymakers and development partners to establish a dedicated fund that specifically supports women-led CSOs. This investment would provide much-needed financial stability and allow us to expand our efforts and impact on women's economic justice. Also, governments should allow CSOs/WROs greater autonomy through self-regulation so that we can streamline processes and allow us to focus our resources on our core mission – empowering women. I also think that it is important to deliberately implement the “zebra system” within government ministries and parastatals (state-owned enterprises). This system would ensure women hold a significant number of leadership positions, fostering a more equitable and representative government.



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My Message of Hope: *Policymakers must remember a fundamental truth: national development cannot be achieved without economically empowered women and girls. Investing in women's economic justice is not just the right thing to do, it is a strategic imperative for a prosperous and thriving nation. When women are empowered to reach their full potential, the positive ripple effects impact families, communities, and the entire nation.*

By addressing the challenges outlined above and embracing the proposed solutions, we can create a brighter future where women are active participants in shaping a stronger, more equitable society.



'In My Own Words':

Economic Autonomy Through the Lens of African Women & Girls

Women's Economic Empowerment: What's Sustainable Agricultural Practices and Education got to do with it?

In my own words, women economic empowerment means giving women an opportunity to equally access national resources to help sustain the well-being of their immediate and extended family members'

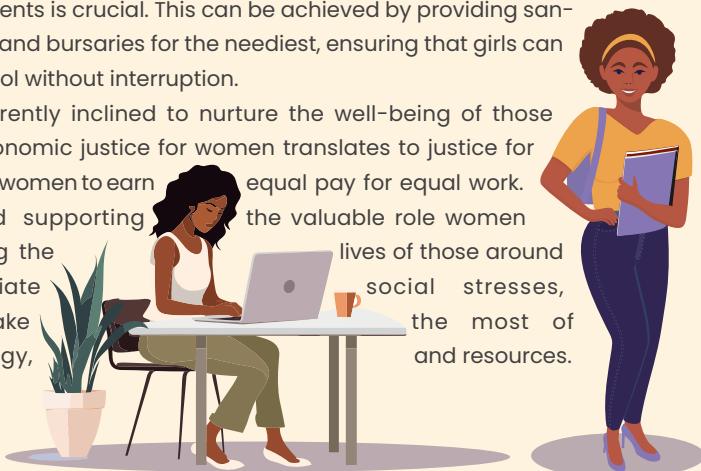
– Anonymous, Kenya.

One significant challenge I face is the high cost of living, particularly the high prices of daily food items. Some of the specific actions/policies that governments can implement in order to tackle challenges and advance economic justice and rights for all African women and girls are:

- **Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Governments should promote sustainable agricultural practices that enable small-holder farmers to provide food for families at affordable prices. This approach not only supports the employment of farm workers but also ensures soil conservation, safeguarding the well-being of future generations.
- **Access to Secondary Education:** Improving access to secondary education for female students is crucial. This can be achieved by providing sanitary towels and bursaries for the neediest, ensuring that girls can attend school without interruption.



Women are inherently inclined to nurture the well-being of those around them. Economic justice for women translates to justice for families, enabling women to earn equal pay for equal work. Recognizing and supporting the valuable role women play in improving the lives of those around them can alleviate social stresses, helping them make the most of their time, energy, and resources.



'In My Own Words':

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Perhaps... After All,... Investing in the Care Economy is where we all need to start.

“ I understand women’s economic empowerment as access to key resources and services including care, health and social services. ”

– Harriet Mukajambo, Uganda.

From community townhalls and household conversations to government proceedings and even the news, we often hear the call for gender equality. But what if achieving gender equality and women’s economic autonomy starts with a progressive care economy enshrined in feminist principles Hold on... let me break it down even further. Imagine a world where women aren’t limited by unpaid childcare, eldercare and household responsibilities!

Many women in Uganda, myself included, continue to grapple with the lack of access to social support services. Unfortunately, affordable and quality daycare centers, after-school programs, elderly care facilities, or home care services are often out of reach. This lack of support forces us to take on a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. The consequence? We’re limited in our ability to pursue education, employment, and ultimately, economic independence.

Conveying it in my own words, I believe that by investing in the care economy, we can create a system that empowers both caregivers and those receiving care. When women and girls have access to reliable and affordable care options, they can pursue education and employment opportunities. This leads to increased female participation in Africa’s workforce, higher household incomes and a more equitable distribution of economic power. Beyond this, a strong care economy creates jobs and stimulates economic activity. It allows more individuals, particularly women, to contribute their skills and talents to the workforce, boosting overall productivity. Lastly, investing in care ensures that children, elderly individuals and people with disabilities receive the support they need to thrive. This leads to a healthier and more productive population.

Perhaps it seems like a distant dream, but **after all**, achieving gender equality and a thriving society starts with a strong care economy. **I urge our government to prioritize investment in this crucial sector.** We can all play a role: contacting local representatives, participating in public hearings, or joining advocacy groups working on these issues. By working together, we can make this dream a reality.



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Beyond the Numbers: How Gender Responsive Budgeting Empowers Women and Girls



Women's economic empowerment means that at a personal level a woman is able to make financial decisions which supports her practical and strategic gender needs. It also ensures holistic well-being for the woman to have power and control on access and utilization of her resources.



- Easter Okech, Kenya.



It is 2024 ... a year filled with a myriad of technological advancements and a supposed march towards a more equitable world. Yet, a dark reality persists for African women and girls. Gender based violence, a brutal manifestation of misogyny and deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, continues to cast a long shadow. The economic consequences of this violence are devastating.

When women continue to live in fear, they are steered away from reaching their full potential. They may be forced to drop out of school, miss work, or live under constant stress, hindering their ability to contribute to the economy and support themselves and their families. This not only traps them in a cycle of poverty but also robs their communities and nations of their talents and skills.

Their fight for economic justice for African women and girls is inextricably linked to the fight against gender-based violence. When women are economically empowered, they gain a stronger voice, gain independence, and the ability to break free from abusive situations. By dismantling the structures that perpetuate violence and investing in initiatives that promote women's economic opportunities, we can create a safer and more prosperous future for all of Africa.



'In My Own Words':

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To address this and ensure a more just future, governments must:

Implement gender-transformative budgets: These budgets allocate resources specifically for programs and initiatives that empower women and girls, address gender inequality, and combat violence against them.

Guarantee public participation: Women and girls must have a voice in shaping policies and budgets that affect their lives. This requires robust public participation policies and ensuring access to information for all.

Utilize feminist macroeconomic frameworks: These frameworks consider the economic realities of women and girls, ensuring resources are allocated fairly and women have access to tax justice mechanisms.

Prioritize economic justice: Economic empowerment is essential for women's development and overall societal progress. By promoting equal opportunities and financial inclusion for women, we can build a stronger and more equitable Africa for all.



CONCLUSION

At FEMNET, we recognize that gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, their full enjoyment of all human rights and the eradication of poverty are essential to economic and social development, including the full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Promoting women's economic equality not only benefits women, but the entire society. It serves as the basis for a better, wealthier, and fairer world.

How?

- **A Catalyst for Sustainable Development:** When women have economic freedom, they invest more in their families' health, education, and well-being. This ripples throughout communities, creating a virtuous cycle of progress that lifts everyone up. It contributes directly to achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from reducing poverty and hunger to promoting gender equality and environmental sustainability.
- **Beyond Just Money: It's About Rights and Equality:** Economic empowerment isn't just about income. It is about ensuring women have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the economy, own property, and make their voices heard. This dismantles barriers to equality and fosters a more just and inclusive society for all.
- **Investing in Women:** The involvement of governments is essential in advancing women's economic empowerment. Investing more in initiatives that help female entrepreneurs, provide them access to productive and financial resources, and foster skills development would result in substantial benefits in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth.
- **A Long-Term Commitment:** Achieving a lasting change requires intentional political will that goes beyond formal equality to substantive equality. This not only involves sound policies and a comprehensive approach that addresses social, economic and cultural aspects in the lives of women and girls, but also a sustained commitment from governments, development agencies and the private sector. Additionally, it is crucial to adopt an intersectional approach to policymaking to ensure that women and girls in all their diversity are adequately covered and supported.



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The African Women's
Development and
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