



Full length article

Gender-Responsive Macroeconomic Policies and their Impact on Living Standards in East and West Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Kenya and Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Although gender justice has become an increasingly important aspect of economic development, significant research gaps remain in understanding how different stages of the business cycle, including macroeconomic policies, affect men and women in distinct ways. Africa's economic landscape is characterized by its diversity, featuring unique macroeconomic environments in both East and West Africa. This paper examines the interplay between gender and macroeconomic policy in Kenya, East Africa and Nigeria, West Africa. This research employs an explanatory mixed-methods approach by integrating quantitative analysis of disaggregated macroeconomic data such as GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, and poverty with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions on Kenya and Nigeria. The findings of this study reveal that (1) although economic expansion enhances employment prospects, its advantages are unevenly distributed, favouring men, especially in male-dominated industries. (2) Inflation demonstrably exerts a markedly more adverse effect on women's living standards owing to their predominance in informal jobs and caregiving positions. (3) Moreover, households led by females are over twice as likely to encounter poverty in comparison to those led by males. The study concludes with policy proposals aimed at strengthening gender-responsive budgeting, broaden social infrastructure, and improve institutional accountability to attain equitable and sustainable growth. Therefore, policy makers should advocate for a more inclusive macroeconomic framework that incorporates gender analysis into fiscal and labor policies.

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Introduction

Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a fundamental driver of economic stability, productivity, and sustainable development. The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) adoption of a gender mainstreaming strategy in 2022 underscores the growing global consensus on integrating gender into macroeconomic policy frameworks (IMF, 2023). This approach emphasizes systematic evaluations of gender disparities, particularly how macroeconomic shocks such as inflation, unemployment, and fiscal austerity affect women differently from men (Fabrizio, et al., 2024).

However, despite these global commitments, African economies continue to experience structural gender inequalities embedded within labour markets, fiscal systems, and social institutions. Women are disproportionately represented in informal sectors, encounter obstacles to asset ownership, and bear the burden of unpaid care work, which constrains their economic involvement and resilience (UN Women, 2024; Patel, 2023). These differences are additionally influenced by regional economic frameworks. For example, Kenya's comparatively diverse economy and commitment to digital innovation offer distinct gender policy opportunities in contrast to Nigeria's oil-reliant economy and substantial informal sector.

This study seeks to answer a central question: How do gender-responsive macroeconomic policies influence living standards across different economic and sociocultural contexts in East and West Africa? Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To examine the gendered impacts of macroeconomic indicators (GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, poverty).
2. To assess the effectiveness of gender-responsive macroeconomic policies in Kenya and Nigeria.
3. To analyse the structural, cultural, and institutional determinants influencing gendered economic results.

The structure of this paper is as follows: the introduction outlines the research problem, aims, and significance of the study; the literature review examines existing research and identifies conceptual gaps; the methodology details the qualitative approach and data analysis procedures; the findings and discussion present macroeconomic policy outcomes as they affect equity and improved conditions; and the paper concludes with recommendations for policy and practice.

Theoretical Background

Within the context of your study on East and West Africa, Feminist Economics Theory (FE) offers a critical perspective on how gender dynamics influence macroeconomic results and policy effectiveness. This theoretical approach, originating from the work of scholars like Elson (1999) and further refined by Seguino (2010), contests the presumption that economic systems are devoid of gender bias. It underscores that economic systems, labor markets, and policy frameworks are intrinsically gendered, frequently devaluing women's contributions especially unpaid care work and involvement in the informal sector.

FE emphasizes that macroeconomic policies, such as fiscal and monetary measures, can provide disparate effects for men and women. Austerity measures and inflation disproportionately impact women because they are

predominantly employed in low-income, informal, and caregiving positions (Elson, 1999). In this context, gender-responsive macroeconomic policies seek to rectify these disparities by incorporating gender analysis into budgeting, employment initiatives, and social protection frameworks. Seguino (2010) contends that inclusive economic growth necessitates the acknowledgment and redistribution of unpaid care work, in addition to investments in social infrastructure, including healthcare, childcare, and education. FE in African economies is exemplified by structural disparities that restrict women's access to productive resources, including land, finance, and formal employment. These barriers are further exacerbated by social norms and institutional prejudices that limit women's economic engagement, notwithstanding regulatory initiatives (Wilfred, et al., 2023) The idea emphasizes the necessity for transformative policy strategies that transcend growth-focused frameworks to tackle underlying gender inequalities. FE, while largely concentrating on gendered economic interactions, also corresponds with larger institutional approaches by recognizing that both formal policies and informal norms influence economic outcomes. Thus, the use of FE in this research offers a comprehensive framework for examining the impact of macroeconomic policies on living standards by gender, while recognizing the structural and institutional obstacles that impede fair development.

Literature Review

Macroeconomic policies play a critical role in fostering Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), influencing job creation, access to quality employment and the fiscal capacity to support gender equality initiatives. However, traditional policymaking has often side-lined these considerations, resulting in insufficient progress. Narrow economic goals such as growth without inclusivity have perpetuated gender gaps, leaving many women confined to informal sectors as subsistence farmers, street vendors and domestic workers. These patterns, coupled with jobless growth, public sector downsizing and privatization of essential services have exacerbated women's vulnerabilities (Lalthapersad-Pillay, 2025). The informal economy, where women dominate, remains a critical area requiring policy attention. Subnational governments must integrate gender-responsive fiscal policies into their frameworks to address the unique challenges that women face. Effective measures should include job creation initiatives, enforcement of labour standards and public investments targeting sectors that provide decent work for women, particularly in agriculture and caregiving roles (Verma, et al., 2024).

Advancing WEE also depends on women's active participation in economic decision-making processes. Collective action and stronger representation of women in governance are essential for holding policymakers accountable. Unfortunately, women remain underrepresented in macroeconomic policymaking, with fundamental rights such as collective bargaining and freedom of association often inaccessible to informal workers. United Nations Women's (UNW) report in 2017 and 2024 emphasises that empowering women's organizations through enhanced visibility and advocacy capacity can amplify their voice, ensuring their needs and demands are addressed in policy design and implementation. The intersectionality of gender, class and race further complicates traditional gender analysis, which often fails to address the multifaceted barriers that women face. Innovative empirical and policy analysis methods are required to address these intersections effectively.

Feminist economists advocate for fiscal reforms that recognize the value of unpaid care work, expand social infrastructure and prioritize marginalized groups, including those affected by ableism and heteronormativity (Patel, 2023). The African Union Development Agency (AUDA) reported in 2024 that Agenda 2063 offers a comprehensive vision for Africa's growth and inclusivity over the next five decades. With its emphasis on gender

equality, the agenda aspires to achieve full literacy, universal healthcare and gender parity in political representation by 2063 (Potgieter, et al., 2025). Specific targets include women comprising 50% of elected officials and managerial positions, increasing Africa's share in global gross domestic product (GDP) to 15%, and eliminating reliance on foreign aid by 2030. These ambitious goals align with the agenda's commitment to empowering women and youth while eradicating barriers such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and gender-based violence (GBV) (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic further illuminated the vulnerabilities of women in the labor market, particularly in informal and caregiving roles. Similarly, the UN Women report revealed that unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities increased for women globally, with their contributions amounting to an estimated 2.35% of global GDP or \$1.488 trillion (UNW, 2020). Sub-Saharan Africa, where women constitute 70% of community health workers also saw them working without adequate pay or resources, underscoring the need for policy reforms to ensure equitable compensation and recognition of their economic value (UNW, 2020). Gender equality is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for economic growth and stability. Studies indicate that reducing gender gaps could boost GDP by an average of 23% in emerging markets and developing economies (IMF, 2024). Increasing female participation in the labour force can significantly stimulate economic growth by expanding and diversifying the workforce and improving talent-job alignment, which drives higher productivity (Goyal & Sahay, 2023; IMF, 2024).

Estimates suggest that eliminating gender gaps in labor force participation across 128 emerging markets and low-income developing countries could raise potential GDP by an average of 23% (IMF, 2024). Even a modest reduction in these gaps by six percentage points, like the progress made by leading countries between 2014 and 2019, could generate output gains sufficient to offset the economic setbacks caused by the pandemic (Fabrizo et al., 2024). However, progress requires deliberate policymaking that incorporates a gender perspective to eliminate barriers and unlock growth potential. For instance, empirical evidence suggests that ensuring girls in Niger receive a complete education could increase female labor force participation by 86%, raising real GDP by over 11% and tax revenues by a similar margin (Fabrizio et al., 2024). Similarly, closing gender gaps in labor force participation in Kenya and Nigeria could significantly enhance productivity and resilience (Goyal & Sahay, 2023).

Kenya demonstrates notable progress in gender-responsive policies. Programs such as the Uwezo Fund and Women Enterprise Fund aim to improve access to credit and entrepreneurial opportunities for women (Omolo & Anyango, 2021). Legislative frameworks, including the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (2015) reserve 30% of government procurement opportunities for women, youth and persons with disabilities, fostering economic inclusion (International Center for Research on Women, 2020). Gender quotas introduced through Kenya's 2010 Constitution have also increased women's representation in county assemblies, although their application in national parliament remains limited (Kilimo, 2022). With regards to elective positions for women, the 2021 UNW's report shows that Kenya had 746 elected female officials compared to 1,478 men, therefore the women represented 33.54% of elected officials. While in Nigeria, there were 740 female officials compared to 6,828 elected men, therefore the women represented only about 9.78% of the total officials (UNW, 2021).

However, with regards to financial and entrepreneurship, challenges persist. Limited financial literacy, high data costs and societal norms restrict women's ability to engage in digital finance and entrepreneurship (Ojo, 2023). Moreover, gender-responsive budgeting in Kenya is hindered by the lack of binding policies, inadequate guidance from the 2023 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics on collecting gender-disaggregated data and corruption that undermines accountability (Were, 2022). Women in Nigeria encounter significant barriers in accessing formal credit, often relying on informal sources such as family, moneylenders or self-help groups, which come with high costs or stringent conditions (Ufodike & Ally, 2023). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing gender disparities in Nigeria, disproportionately affecting women in sectors such as trade, education and health services and leading to increased unemployment and a rise in out-of-school girls (Ekeruche, et al., 2023).

Both countries illustrate the critical role of macroeconomic policies in shaping economic conditions for women's economic empowerment. In Kenya, agriculture remains a vital sector, employing 71% of women in the labour force, yet less than 10% have access to agricultural credit and only 6% own land (East African Community, 2018). Similarly, Nigerian women face limited access to farming inputs, with male-managed plots recording higher usage of resources (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024/2025). Unpaid care work further compounds these challenges, with women dedicating significant time to domestic responsibilities, which are largely excluded from GDP calculations despite their economic value. Women's unpaid contributions to healthcare alone equate to 2.35% of global GDP or \$1.488 trillion (UNW, 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, women constitute nearly 70% of community health workers but receive minimal or no compensation, often subsidizing their caregiving duties with personal resources (UNW, 2020).

The persistence of gender disparities highlights the inadequacy of conventional approaches to macroeconomic policymaking, which often fail to consider the intersectionality of gender with class, race and employment status (Patel, 2023). Feminist economists argue for transformative fiscal policies that address unpaid care work, enforce labour standards and increase women's participation in decision-making processes. The International Trade Union Confederation underscores the importance of investing in social infrastructure, such as education, healthcare and childcare to enable women's full economic participation (UNW, 2017). Strengthening gender-responsive budgeting systems as seen in countries like Rwanda and Morocco provides a roadmap for addressing these gaps (Were, 2022). However, in Kenya and Nigeria, much remains to be done to institutionalize such frameworks and align them with the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

Agenda 2063 envisions an Africa where gender equality is integral to sustainable development, emphasizing goals such as achieving full literacy, universal access to healthcare and gender parity in political representation by 2063 (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). Both Kenya and Nigeria offer lessons in pursuing these objectives. Kenya's institutional reforms align closely with the agenda's goals of inclusive growth and social equity, while Nigeria's challenges highlight the need for robust frameworks to address donor dependency and expand economic inclusion. To achieve these ambitions, governments must integrate gender-responsive measures into fiscal planning, prioritize rural and informal sectors and invest in building capacity for data collection and policy evaluation (UN Women, 2023).

In conclusion, gender-responsive macroeconomic policies are essential for bridging the gap in living standards between men and women in Africa. Kenya and Nigeria illustrate the transformative potential of such policies when adequately implemented, but they also highlight persistent barriers that hinder progress. Addressing these

challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes expanding fiscal space for public investment, improving institutional accountability and promoting social infrastructure that reduces the burden of unpaid care work. By aligning policy interventions with the aspirations of Agenda 2063, African nations can create a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

Research Methodology

This section describes the research methodology adopted in the study which includes research design, sampling methods, data collection, data analysis, and the number of respondents selected to provide comprehensive insights on the gendered impact of macroeconomic indicators such as GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, and poverty.

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach (Saunders & Thornhill, 2023)., a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. This was to enable both numerical data (to identify the patterns and correlations) as well as narrative (to understand the underlying factors and the experiences that shape such influences). The quantitative data was structured to collect numerical data on macroeconomic indicators and various gender-specific impacts GDP growth, unemployment rates, inflation, and poverty levels. This data was used to run the statistical analyses needed in the study, while the qualitative approach provides qualitative data about cultural, social, and institutional barriers and effective gender-responsive policies. Thematic data analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data. Additionally, respondents were categorized and sampled to ensure a wide demographic representation of East and West African populations.

To guarantee the presence of particular demographic characteristics (like sex, age, and employment status), the study relied on these categories as they directly affect the results. Categories of Respondents: Gender: Male, Female, all the above (non-binary, gender spectrum, gender non-conforming, trans, etc.). Age Groups (18-55+), Region: East Africa (Kenya), Western Africa (Nigeria). Educational Level: (No formal education, Primary education, Secondary education, Tertiary Education, University/College), Employment Status: (Employed, Self-employed, Unemployed, Student, Retired), Sector of Employment: (Agriculture, Manufacturing, Services, such as hospitality, retail, Education, Healthcare, Government, Other sectors).

Sampling Method

The study adopted stratified random sampling according to the sample size in the target areas. Using this technique ensures that all subgroups (strata) of the population can be included in the sample, such as gender, region, education level, and employment status (Creswell & Inoue, 2025). Hence, the respondents were stratified by gender, age, region, education level, and employment sector. Random sampling within strata was appropriately conducted, the overall population were randomly sampled, but to include sufficient representation from each stratum, the respondents selected were proportionate to the size of that stratum in the population. So, this makes sure that minority groupings (like rural women) have their voice. Furthermore, a sampling frame was generated based on pertinent population data (e.g., national statistics and census data) from each country

meant to reflect the universe of subjects in which every subject in each stratum has an equal chance of being selected. Therefore, 1,000 respondents (500 from East Africa, 500 from West Africa) were selected which includes 50% male, 50% female, plus others. Statistically, 1,000 respondents give a 95% confidence level with a 3% margin of error.

Data Collection

The survey was conducted online using google document in which a total of 1000 respondents were targeted to respond. However, only 915 responded to the survey, and out of the 915 who responded, 17 were discarded due to incomplete response or answers not related to the survey questions. In addition to the survey, the study conducted two sessions of focus group discussions using Zoom technology with key stakeholders, policymakers, and community leaders to understand the cultural, institutional, and policy-related factors that are shaping gendered economic outcomes. Each session of the focus group comprised of 6 participants (3 males and 3 females) and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was adopted in the study to describe the basic features of the dataset (mean, median, frequency distributions). Chi-Square Tests were used to determine relationships between categorical variables like sex and poverty levels. Also, T-tests/ANOVA was used for comparing means between groups (e.g., the effect of inflation on men vs. women), and as well regression analysis for example, to isolate specific predictors of economic outcomes the extent to which macroeconomic growth creates new opportunities for employment for women and men, separately (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Thematic analysis, the study adopted a thematic analysis, open-ended responses, focus group discussions were thoroughly analysed for themes and patterns around how and why your experience of gender affects your economic policies and cultural and social considerations (Braun, Virginia, & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

The researchers provided informed consent to the participating respondents with information on what the study is about and how they contribute to the research. They were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any moment without any consequence (Saunders & Thornhill, 2023). Also, confidentiality of information provided by the respondents was duly taken care of as the data was anonymized, and sensitive information were treated confidentially, thus securing the privacy of respondents.

Limitations

The researchers tried as much as possible to make sure respondents were as diverse as possible in terms of geography, but the remote areas may be under-represented due to issues of accessibility. Also, in terms of social desirability bias, the respondents may respond in a way they feel is socially acceptable, especially with respect to gender and economic policy. Furthermore, the sample is sufficiently large for sound statistical analysis, but regional variations may be present that might not be fully represented.

Findings

The study's findings are presented in this section under the headings of the main themes that emerged from the analysis of data on the gendered impact of macroeconomic indicators such as GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, and poverty. The outcomes of the quantitative techniques utilized in the research study, particularly descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, t-tests/ANOVA, and regression analysis aimed to analyse the relationships (and differences) in macroeconomic factors between genders and other socio-economic factors. The quantitative results are supported with qualitative findings.

Cultural, Social, and Institutional Factors

Table 1: The descriptive statistics were used to summarise the basic features of the data set. It summarises the central tendency, dispersion, and shape of a dataset's distribution.

Variable	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
GDP Growth (last 5 years)	3.6%	3.3%	1.2%	1.0%	6.4%
Inflation Rate (last 5 years)	7.9%	8.0%	2.6%	3.0%	16.0%
Unemployment Rate (Overall)	10%	9.7%	5.2%	3.6%	26%
Unemployment Rate (Male)	8%	7.6%	4.4%	3.0%	22%
Unemployment Rate (Female)	11%	11.1%	6.1%	5.1%	32%
Poverty Rate (Male-Headed HH)	26%	23%	8.2%	10%	44%
Poverty Rate (Female-Headed HH)	34%	34%	12.2%	16%	52%

From table 1: While the average GDP growth of the countries is 3.6%, some grow higher (6.4%) and others slower. The mean for inflation is 7.9%, but there is a large dispersion around it (std. dev. = 2.6%). That implies different inflation in the regions under study. Unemployment rates overall is 10%, with women out of jobs (11%) at a higher rate than men (8%). Poverty rates is 34% of female-headed households are poor compared to only 26% of male-headed households.

The quantitative results are in line with the qualitative findings from the focus group discussion with women entrepreneurs from West Africa (Nigeria). During the discussions, the participants affirm:

“That access to credit and capital remains a challenge for women because the collateral demanded by financial institutions is often land, which women don’t have because of the inheritance systems present in a patriarchal society” (FGD Nigeria)

“Patriarchal cultural norms hinder rural women from accessing land or education, making it difficult for them to benefit from macroeconomic policies” (FGD Kenya).

Gender Disparities in Employment and Poverty Levels

Table 2: Logistic Regression — Effect of Household Head Gender on Poverty Status

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	z-value	P-value	Odds Ratio (e^β)	95% CI (OR)
Female-headed household	0.842	0.122	6.90	<0.001	2.32	1.83 – 2.94
Constant	-0.800	0.095	-8.42	<0.001	0.45	—

Statistic	Value
Number of observations (N)	800
Log-Likelihood	-512.34
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	47.65
Degrees of Freedom	1
Prob > Chi-Square	<0.001
Pseudo R ² (McFadden)	0.085
Classification Accuracy	68.4%

Dependent variable: Poverty Status (1 = Poor, 0 = Not Poor)

Reference category: Male-headed household

The logistic regression model in Table 2 above is statistically significant (LR $\chi^2 = 47.65$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that household head gender significantly predicts poverty status. Female-headed households have 2.32 times higher odds of being poor compared to male-headed households ($\beta = 0.842$, $p < 0.001$). The confidence interval (1.83–2.94) does not include 1, confirming statistical significance. These findings demonstrate that female-headed households are substantially more vulnerable to poverty.

The findings in Table 2 are supported by the qualitative evidence. Participants’ responses during the focus group discussions further reinforce the statistical results showing that female-headed households are more vulnerable to poverty. The regression results indicate that households headed by women are significantly more likely to experience poverty compared to those headed by men, which reflects structural and policy-related disadvantages faced by women. Participants noted that:

“Kenya policymakers are rarely aware that women may indirectly benefit from government programs aimed at poverty alleviation through their spouses or family, which do not always lead to proper investment in women” (FGD Kenya).

Impact of Inflation on Living Standards

Table 3: In the study, the T-tests/ANOVA compares means of two or more groups. The findings in the table below compares the effect of inflation experienced by men and women (Likert scale responses) and how GDP growth affects employment for men and women.

T-test: Impact of Inflation on Living Standards (Men vs. Women)

Gender	Mean Likert Scale Score (1 = No Impact, 5 = Strong Negative Impact)	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Men	3.7	1.3	2.34	0.03
Women	4.3	1.1		

From table 3, the T value is 2.34, and the p value is 0.03, which shows there is a significant difference between the effect of inflation on men and women. Inflation has hit living standards harder for women than for men. The qualitative findings agree with the results in table 3. During focus group discussion with Health Workers in Nigeria, the respondents indicate that:

"Perhaps the biggest impact on women is how inflation has made healthcare unaffordable." "A lot of women are single mothers who have no help".

Also, households in Kenya detailed similar response during focus group discussion that *"rising food prices' mean 'women are hit harder as they have to cut meal sizes or miss meals to ensure their children eat enough"*

Access to Employment Opportunities during Economic Growth

Table 4: ANOVA: Impact of GDP Growth on Employment Opportunities by Gender

Gender	Mean Likert Scale Score (1 = No Impact, 5 = High Impact)	Standard Deviation	F-value	p-value
Men	4.6	0.8	3.76	0.01
Women	3.9	1.0		

A comparison of implementation effect of GDP growth on employment of the two genders in table 4 indicated significant statistically differences, F-value = 3.76, p-value = 0.01. This further indicates that Economic growth has favored men significantly, and women have been affected in a more limited way.

Participants responses during FGD corroborates with findings in table 4, the participants affirm that: *When there is economic growth, employment opportunities favor men over women this is because the development economist sectors that tend to have more expansion during an economic upturn like construction and manufacturing are male dominated, leaving women with less work and therefore fewer opportunities” (FGD Nigeria)*

FGD with members of advocacy groups in Kenya, the respondents affirm that:

“We do not get hired because there are inherent biases in the hiring process, and if women are hired, we are perceived to be less reliable compared to males as they have family responsibilities”.

Effectiveness of Gender-Responsive Policies

Table 5: Multiple Regression Model — Predicting Employment Opportunities

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	P-value	VIF	Tolerance
GDP Growth	0.46	0.13	3.74	0.001	1.42	0.704
Inflation Rate	-0.33	0.15	-2.27	0.020	1.36	0.735
Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0)	0.28	0.09	3.37	0.010	1.18	0.847
Constant	1.12	0.31	3.61	0.000	—	—

Model Summary	
Statistic	Value
Number of observations (N)	800
R ²	0.214
Adjusted R ²	0.209
F-statistic	21.87
Prob > F	<0.001
Root MSE	0.84

Dependent Variable: Employment Opportunities (Likert scale: 1 = No Impact, 5 = High Impact)

The multiple regression model is statistically significant (F = 21.87, p < 0.001), indicating that the predictors jointly explain variations in employment opportunities. GDP growth has a positive and statistically significant effect (β = 0.46, p = 0.001), suggesting that higher economic growth leads to increased employment opportunities. Inflation rate shows a negative and significant relationship (β = -0.33, p = 0.020), indicating that rising inflation reduces employment opportunities.

After controlling for macroeconomic conditions (GDP growth and inflation), gender remains a significant predictor (β = 0.28, p = 0.010). The positive coefficient implies that males report higher employment opportunities compared to females.

Multicollinearity diagnostics show low VIF values (all < 2), confirming that the model does not suffer from multicollinearity and the estimated coefficients are reliable.

The qualitative findings are in line with the results in table 5. FGD with members of advocacy groups in Kenya, the respondents affirm that:

"We do not get hired because there are inherent biases in the hiring process, and if women are hired, we are perceived to be less reliable compared to males as they have family responsibilities".

Participants from Nigeria stated that:

"As we found, economic growth seems to be accompanied by a rise in wages in male-dominated sectors and underfunded ones, where women work, like in education and health"

Gender Policy Experts in Kenya on Maternity Leave and Childcare Subsidies responded that:

"Poor enforcement limits effectiveness of gender policies in the country. However, when programs are available, societal behaviors discourage women from participating, such as stigma around women working in nontraditional positions"

In terms of Policy Implementation in Nigeria, participants from Nigeria stated that:

"Funds earmarked for gender-sensitive programs are misappropriated due to corruption and lack of accountability"

Discussion of Results

The integration of quantitative and qualitative results provides a more rounded picture of how macroeconomic policies affect living standards across gender in East and West Africa. This per-capita disparity creates systemic barriers for women in both regions, and the findings highlight significant differences in employment, poverty, and access to resources. These findings are in line with the wider literature highlighting the importance of a gendered perspective in the design and implementation of macroeconomic policy.

Cultural, Social, and Institutional Factors

These two sets of data highlight the need for contextually grounded studies of policy and implementation. Even though policies in East Africa, for instance in Kenya, promote substantial women's participation via affirmative action, qualitative interviews indicated that prevailing patriarchal norms in rural areas undermine its implementation. However, the overdependence of West Africa on informal sectors means a lot of women are not covered by formal economic policies, as focus groups with community leaders in Nigeria have shown.

Gender disparity in employment and poverty levels

The unemployment rate is far higher among women (11%) than men (8%), and poverty on a much higher level is found among female-headed households (31%) than male-headed (24%), which is illustrated well with quantitative data. This is corroborated by qualitative insights confirming that systemic barriers, such as barriers to credit as well as recruitment practices, are limiting women at work.

Indirect Impact of Patriarchal Structures. For instance, interviews with female entrepreneurs in West Africa reflected on the challenges of accessing capital as a result of patriarchal inheritance laws and the necessity of stringent collateral requirements from financial institutions. Economic growth is job-created but has favored male-dominated sectors (construction and manufacturing). This is reflected in the Likert scale results, whereby men had an employment access score of 4.6 during periods of economic growth to women having only 3.9. Qualitative data corroborated this, as development economists and advocacy groups described structural biases that channel gains from economic growth away from typically female sectors.

Impact of inflation on living standards

Prices negatively impacted living standards, as seen in the 4.3 mean Likert score for women to 3.7 for men, characteristics of the respective genders, where women (4.2) characterized the impact of inflation as higher on living standards than men (3.7). First, qualitative data offered striking examples of the impacts of increasing prices on household consumption and the avoidance of healthcare and education by women. As an example, women traders in Kenya reported that their poor financial reserves made them particularly susceptible to price shocks, whereas health workers in Nigeria pointed out that they were unable to afford.

Access to employment opportunities during economic growth

Quantitative results scored gender-responsive social protection programs and labour market policies at a moderately effective level (mean score of 3.5 out of 5). Qualitative insights highlight implementation difficulties, including low levels of funding and enforcement. The LEAP program that provides low cash transfers to rural women in Ghana was also praised as good since it provided cash for rural women for development, while it was not good since not all families can be supported for budget reasons. Likewise, the women's focus groups in Nigeria highlighted cultural norms and stigma against participating in programs that are designed to support women's labour market entry.

Effectiveness of gender responsive Policies

They underscore the urgent need for gender-responsive policies that are specific to the context and that cater to the culture of the region. Quantitative data confirm the extent of gender disparities, while qualitative information highlights the structural and social drivers of inequality. For policymakers, this two-pronged approach highlights the immediate necessity of rectifying the allocation of resources by gender, increasing the rigorousness with which current policies are enforced, and adapting programs to the specific culture- and economy-specific needs of women.

Lessons learnt

This study demonstrates that gender-responsive macroeconomic policies have significant potential to improve living standards but remain by hindered by structural inequities, institutional deficiencies, and sociocultural norms. Although Kenya demonstrates advancement via policy innovation and Nigeria underscores systemic obstacles, both instances indicate that macroeconomic growth alone is inadequate for attaining gender justice. The FM theory offer similar perspective that neglecting unpaid care work and informal labor results in inadequate policy outcomes. Policymakers must incorporate gender analysis into macroeconomic planning, and

enhancing institutions is essential for policy efficacy. Ultimately, attaining inclusive growth in Africa necessitates a paradigm shift from gender-neutral to gender-transformative macroeconomic policy frameworks, in alignment with the objectives of Agenda 2063.

Implications for policy and practice

1. Practitioners (policymakers, development agencies, NGOs) must progress beyond “gender-neutral” methodologies and embrace gender-transformative frameworks that actively confront structural disparities, in alignment with feminist economics theory.
2. The findings of this study indicates that macroeconomic growth does not equitably benefit women. Practitioners must devise specific interventions to ensure that women reap the benefits of economic growth, especially in male-dominated industries.
3. Effective gender-responsive policymaking necessitates collaboration across governments, private sector entities, civil society, and international organizations to ensure inclusive implementation and oversight.
4. Practitioners should integrate unpaid care labor into national accounting systems and policy frameworks, ensuring it as a vital element of economic productivity.

Data availability statement

The data generated for this study is available by request

Author contributions

T.E. Kaburia: wrote the introductory and literature section and revised the manuscript. H.I Anusi: wrote the abstract of the study, analyzed the data and revised the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that this study was conducted in the absence of any financial commitments that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

AI Declaration

The authors used [Quillbot] to improve spelling, grammar, clarity, and readability. The authors carefully reviewed and edited the text and takes full responsibility for the final content.

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