

**Gender and Macroeconomics:
A National Perspective**

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Table of Contents

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | Gender and Economic Analysis – An Overview | 1 |
| 3 | Women and the Economy | 2 |
| 4 | Gender Disparities in the Labour Market | 3 |
| 5 | Gender and Economic Adjustment | 4 |
| 5.1 | Gender-Related Market Distortions..... | 5 |
| 5.2 | Hidden Inefficiencies | 5 |
| 5.3 | Invisibility of Informal Sector Activities..... | 6 |
| 6 | Gender Dimensions of Food Security and Poverty | 6 |
| 6.1 | Gender and Poverty..... | 7 |
| 6.2 | Security of Tenure..... | 8 |
| 6.3 | Extension Services | 8 |
| 6.4 | Access to Markets..... | 9 |
| 6.5 | Cash crops..... | 9 |
| 7 | Millennium Development Goals | 9 |
| 8 | Gender and HIV/AIDS | 10 |
| 9 | The Need for Gender-Sensitive Budgets | 10 |
| 10 | Making Women's Work Visible | 11 |
| 11 | Policy Implications on Gender and Macro-Economics | 12 |
| 12 | Intensification of Further Research | 12 |
| | References | 13 |

The term “gender” is used when social categories are denoted; that is, it expresses the sense that, beyond the elementary functions of human reproduction, male and female roles are not biological categories, like sex, but are social constructs.

1 Introduction

The integration of gender considerations into macroeconomics is a relatively recent development. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) envisions “to ensure that the specific issues faced by poor women are addressed in its poverty and reduction strategies, a gender and institutional analysis of its macroeconomic framework”. Thus it is of importance that macroeconomics should be analysed from a gender perspective.

The paper focuses on the marginalisation of women in the economy, the gender disparities in the labour market, the impact of economic structural adjustment on women’s participation in development, the invisibility of the informal sector activities, gender and food security, as well as the millennium development goals. This is then followed by the need for gender budgets and policy implications on gender and macroeconomics are discussed. Lastly, further research areas in the area of gender and macroeconomics are suggested.

2 Gender and Economic Analysis – An Overview

Although economists have treated issues of male and female participation in the labour force since the early 1900s, gender was not itself used as a category of analysis. The early treatments of female labour force participation, male/female wage differentials and wage discrimination, rested on the dynamics of the market operating on men and women, rather than on the role played by gender in the way that markets function fundamentally. (Madden cited in Benería 1995).

In the 1960s Becker and other human capital theorists developed the ‘New Household Economics,’ which for the first time applied market concepts and models to household production and time allocation analysis. These new tools were used to explain the sexual division of labour, market behaviour of household members, and male-female differences within these (Benería, 1995). In the 1970s and 1980s, these concepts were applied to further analysis of labour market discrimination and to bargaining models of the household which allowed for dimensions of power and conflict in decision making. Meanwhile, the 1960s debate on the remuneration of domestic labour and the United Nations conferences during the Decade for Women (1976-1985) popularised the concept of social reproduction. All of these factors contributed to recognition of the pivotal role of women’s work in the “reproductive sector”.

Concurrent with developments in microeconomics, the work of Ester Boserup (1970), an economic anthropologist, posed a macro-level question: “what is it about the economic development process that differentially incorporates and impacts upon men and women?” (Katz, 1999). The Third World debt crises of the 1970s and 1980s and a series of

structural adjustment programmes fostered several rounds of impact assessment, which led to the identification of women as one of the groups vulnerable to welfare losses during the disruptive phases of such programmes (Cornia et al., 1987). Hypotheses that the source of welfare losses might lie in the design of the programmes, and not merely in their unexpected side effects, provoked attempts to incorporate gender more rigorously into macroeconomic analysis.

This work addressed such issues as inequalities in the allocation of consumption and resources within the household, the asymmetries of incentive structures at the micro level between men and women, and gender disparities in dependence on public services. Paul Collier, in several papers prepared for the World Bank (Collier 1990, 1993, 1994), proposed disaggregation by gender of income and expenditure data for use in assessing the progress of structural adjustment and Demery (1996) developed a methodology for analysing the gender-disaggregated benefit incidence of public expenditure.

Central to this new work was a questioning of the implicit assumption of a high elasticity of women's labour in response to economic shocks or adjustment signals. This led several authors to highlight the inherent 'gender bias' in apparently neutral stabilisation and adjustment models (Elson 1991, 1995; Palmer 1991, 1994).

Alongside the gender and adjustment debates, since the late 1980s several authors have examined the reliance on female labour in the growth of world manufacturing, trade and globalisation (Joekes 1987, 1995; Standing 1989, 1999; Wood) highlighting the relationships between export production, feminisation of the labour force and changing labour conditions.

The acceleration of globalisation in the 1990s also stimulated an exploration of modelling techniques to capture the structural dynamics of gender relations and their effect on growth and policy outcomes. Darity (1995) formalised a model of a gender-segregated, low-income agrarian society, with an export and a subsistence sector, which, along with others, was presented in a special issue of *World Development* (1995) illustrating developments in analysing the interaction of gender and macro policy. This special issue serves as a good introduction to the major topics referred to in the glossary, and includes several of the most important authors in the field. Modelling efforts are assisted by the increasing availability and improving quality of gender-disaggregated data, though much remains to be done in this area.

3 Women and the Economy

Women continue to be marginalised from macro and microeconomics. Table 3.1 shows the distribution of men and women in the economy in Zimbabwe. Women dominate the informal and the communal economies. These economies receive very little national resources, with most national policies supporting the formal economy, where men dominate. These policies include developmental and monetary and fiscal policies.

Table 3.1: Women and the Economy

| Economic Sector | Characteristics |
|------------------------|--|
| Formal Sector | Male dominated sector. It is the focus of all economic and development policies. (1.5 million) |
| Informal Sector | Female dominated sector (1.9 million) |
| Communal Sector | Women dominate this sector – totally ignored sector (8.4 million) |

Table 3.2 shows the dualistic economy in Zimbabwe. Women are more likely to be engaged in lowly paid jobs that require less skill compared to their male counterparts. They tend to dominate in the care economy and in work that is not recognised as productive. As a result, women are likely to have no social benefits and less opportunity to capacity build themselves.

Table 3.2: Women and Men in the Economy

| Women in the Economy | Men in the Economy |
|---|---|
| <p>Generally located in the low skilled, poorly remunerated and low status menial-type occupations.</p> <p>Women dominate in the ‘care economy’/unpaid domestic work, and in low paying sectors e.g. food production/agricultural activities; textiles and clothing</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No social security benefits • Not much opportunity for training | <p>Generally located in high or semi-skilled, high paying and high status occupations</p> <p>Men tend to dominate in the waged employment/paid formal labour market and cash/lucrative production activities such as money and banking; professions such as medicine, law and engineering; in agro-industries such as horticulture</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social security benefits • Opportunities for training, re-skilling and promotion greater |

4 Gender Disparities in the Labour Market

At the macroeconomic level, it is often the case that important jobs in the market or decision-making positions in organisations are reserved for men. All that is left for women are smaller and less influential positions.

- Women who are employed are mainly in certain industrial sectors. Work in both the formal and informal economy is highly gendered. As a result some work is considered as men’s and other as women’s.

- Most women and men work in jobs that are done predominantly by one sex. For specific professions, such as nursing, the proportion of female employees is high (over 90%).
- Men are normally associated with machinery and technology, whilst women are associated with domesticity and servicing. Therefore, car workers and ship builders are men and women are garment workers and cleaners.
- For some women, however, the growth of service industries indicates new opportunities in moderately high status, well paid office jobs. However, for many other women it means jobs, which are less than factory jobs and which involve hidden health risks. This includes data processing as well as traditional service jobs such as cleaning and domestic work.
- There are fewer women in skilled jobs and managerial posts. The majority of women are found in the agricultural sector (unskilled).

Therefore desegregation at occupational level is critical. Job analysis and distribution should take gender into account and not simply add on women as an after thought. At sectoral level, there is need for subdivision of jobs that reflects gender sensitivity even in those sectors that are dominated by women.

5 Gender and Economic Adjustment

Experiences from economic reforms – mainly the structural adjustment policies and programmes – have shown that the efforts to establish competitive and efficient markets and production structures did not necessarily lead to the intended outcome in terms of increases in production and growth. It also became evident that structural adjustment policies contributed to increasing poverty. It generally has not been “pro-poor”. Among those affected by increasing poverty, are women who constitute a particularly vulnerable group.

In early 1991, Zimbabwe embarked on a major Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) aimed at sustaining higher medium and long-term economic growth and reducing poverty. The programme included removal of consumer subsidies, severe cutbacks in government spending (including the social sectors), extensive liberalisation of price and import controls, and promotion of exports i.e. manufactured goods. ESAP was not successful. The droughts of 1990-91 and 1991-92 undoubtedly had a negative impact on macro-economic growth rates but many economists argue that the structural adjustment policies played their part in undermining economic growth in the country. The decline in the economy in Zimbabwe began in 1997. The economy experienced its peak in 1996 when a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 9.7% was achieved. Since then, the economy declined to 1.4% in 1997 and thereafter has experienced negative growth rates (Chizema, 2003).

The structural adjustment programme brought with it massive retrenchments in the agriculture, textile, clothing, leather and construction industries. Prices of food and basic

commodities escalated and therefore real income, the ability of the government to pay for essential imports such as grain, fuel and electricity, and the availability and quality of public service provision, especially healthcare, education and water (Drimie and Lafon, 2003). The removal of subsidies and the decontrol of prices resulted in a huge increase in the cost of living. This also saw the reintroduction of school fees in the primary school fees. Unemployment rates increased as industries in urban areas closed down and large-scale commercial farm workers were retrenched as a result of the land reform. This had an immense impact on the remittances flow to the rural areas.

These structural reforms have also compelled Governments to cut down on public sector employment, abolish free health and education services, as well to liberalise the market. Such measures led to reduction in safety nets previously enjoyed by the poorer people, thus exposing them to the harsh climate of a liberalised economy.

The structural adjustment programme has had a devastating impact on women and gender relations. SAPs promoted reforms that tended to remove serious price distortions, but gave inadequate attention to the provision of social services. Apart from the acknowledgement of the negative social consequences of adjustment, economic reforms and adjustment policies also have increasingly been criticised in the past years for not meeting efficiency targets due to gender-blindness. The main arguments focusing on the non-consideration of gender issues in adjustment/reform programmes include:

5.1 Gender-Related Market Distortions

Macroeconomic analysis has failed to take into account the gender-related distortions on goods', capital and labour markets which restrict women's economic activities. Male biases and gender discriminations in labour market legislation, property rights and inheritance laws, cultural norms and restrictions as well as reproductive responsibilities make that women are not always in full command and control over their own labour and property, may not have equal access to markets and therefore be not in a position to react flexibly to macroeconomic incentives, e.g. shift labour to economically more favoured sectors, produce more or other goods etc. The failure to consider gender-related barriers to markets may lead to over-optimistic assumptions about the impact of macroeconomic policies on production and growth.

5.2 Hidden Inefficiencies

The cut in public investments and social services has shifted societal costs of reproducing and maintaining the labour force into the private sphere mainly to the detriment of women. The invisibility of unpaid domestic labour may be hiding inefficiencies. For instance, measures to streamline the health sector through user fees may lead to shorter stays in hospital but extend convalescence periods at home, hereby increasing unpaid caring labour. Women bear the burden as they are the caregivers.

5.3 Invisibility of Informal Sector Activities

Negative effects in income distribution under structural adjustment programmes have forced women and men to also intensify paid work outside the household. Women were and are often incorporated into informal employment under insecure and worsening conditions of work. Since large parts of the informal sector are not measured or are undercounted, the true impact of policies on efficiency at the macroeconomic level cannot be assessed.

6 Gender Dimensions of Food Security and Poverty

“... the challenges of agricultural work for male and especially female farmers directly bear on food security, poverty reduction and Africa's preparedness for industrialised growth and equitable trade participation.”

Agriculture forms the backbone of Southern African economies and is a major foreign currency earner. Zimbabwe relies on seasonal rains, which have become erratic creating a food deficit in the region. Food security can be defined as "ensuring that all members of a household, nation and region have access to an adequate diet to lead an active and normal life.

Zimbabwe, like all Southern African economies, is mostly dependent on the agricultural sector. About 70% of the population derive their livelihood from agriculture. Agriculture contributes significantly to the GDP of most countries in the region. It is also a major foreign currency earner. The major set back is that crop production mainly relies on the seasonal rains, which have of late, become erratic and severe thereby leading to the current food crisis in the region. Food insecurity also results in poverty, especially female poverty as women are central to food production in many African countries. The 1997 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Food Security Strategy Framework defines food security as “ensuring that all members of a household, nation and region have access to an adequate diet to lead an active and normal life”. Thus the major challenge for Zimbabwe is to fight against this crisis to alleviate the suffering of its people and meet the set goal. Unfortunately, most often the macro-economic policies do not take into consideration gender aspects.

Women constitute the majority of food producers. However, they are constrained by socio-economic factors that include poverty, powerlessness to decision-making, limited access to land, capital credit or cash, fertilizer or manure, technological training, non-farm labour markets etc. These constraints act as stumbling blocks to agricultural development. Gladwin et al. (2004) referred to this as the “invisible factor” because he argues that the gender-related constraints that lower women’s productivity are almost never mentioned as factors of food security in Africa. These constraints need to be incorporated when developing policies to enhance food security among households and in any national strategies to boost production. In order that these responses work, they need to be backstopped by appropriate policy reforms aimed at addressing existing structural and economic anomalies. Governance and gender sensitivity are thus key

components of any policy-making initiatives. Both men and women must play a key role in the process of policy making as well as implementation. Appropriate monitoring and evaluation of systems/mechanisms should be put in place to monitor progress. Indicators of achievement can also be designed to guide progress and monitoring.

Questions should be asked why women are more vulnerable to food insecurity than men. The situation of women farmers varies from country to country and within countries, so this must not be generalised given existing country variations observed in various empirical researches done on the subject of gender and food security.

Issues of power and gender relations that expect women to do certain roles make them more vulnerable to food insecurity. In Malawi, like in most Southern African countries, women are expected to grow maize for food consumption while cash crops are seen as a male enterprise. This means that women do not have access to cash and are dependent on their husbands and sons to buy inputs. Even when they earn cash, they are powerless to make decisions on the usage of income earned from cash cropping. If they grow cash crops the money is meant for their husbands who may even use it on themselves alone.

The different roles that men and women play in the households should be considered when making efforts to enhance food production. While both men and women are actively engaged in agricultural production, women are also responsible for a range of other household chores and care-related activities, including family care and nutrition, collecting firewood and fetching water.

In times of food insecurity women combine farm and non-farm income generating activities as a means of survival. Thus they should be assisted with agricultural inputs and irrigation equipment in order to boost their crop production either by Government or civil society.

6.1 Gender and Poverty

Research shows that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households. IRIN (2004) reports that female-headed households continue to bear the brunt of poverty and ongoing food shortages in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Similarly, the 2003 Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment report indicate that the most food insecure people were the rural poor who were characterised by female-headed households, 70% of the female-headed households required food assistance compared to 58% of the male-headed households.

Women are driven into what is termed “feminised poverty” largely by the gender relations and power dynamics in households and communities. Programmes to eradicate poverty do not give reasons why certain groups of people are poorer than others and do not take into account the gender relations as an explanation for women’s poverty.

In order to understand why women are poorer than men, it is important that one takes into consideration the reasons that make women poorer than men. The non-economic dimensions of poverty include vulnerability, powerlessness and male-biased patriarchal

systems and these factors need to be integrated in the macro-economic policies. These non-economic may also help in explaining why women are more vulnerable to food insecurity.

6.2 Security of Tenure

Gender plays a central role in the food security of households. Women's security of tenure is one of the key elements that has to be prioritised in order to eradicate poverty among women and also to boost food production. Women in Africa constitute the about 70% of farmers, yet they have limited access to and control of the land.

If they own land they have the smallest pieces compared to their male counterparts. According to the 2003 Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment report, more pronounced differences in overall food access occurred by sector, with the worst-off group being the employed farm workers and those retrenched and without access to land. The most vulnerable are the rural poor without access to land, who in most cases are women. Thus, land should be made available to women in order to enhance their livelihood.

6.3 Extension Services

The fact that most of the women do not own land means that they have limited access to extension services, such as receiving loans and information. The SAPs have benefited large commercial farmers who have public support and receive extension services. On the other hand, the smallholders, who constitute the majority of women, are not able to receive loans because they do not own property, a necessity condition/requirement for security collateral farming.

SAPs have seen the removal of subsidies on basic commodities such as maize, fertilisers etc. This has resulted in the increase in prices of agricultural inputs in many countries, especially of fertiliser.

Women tend to be more vulnerable to food insecurity because their incomes are inadequate to provide for such inputs. Women are constrained by traditional and societal gender roles that keep them at the lower ranks of the societal ladder as well as roles that restrict them to tasks that are lowly valued or unpaid.

Women are also less educated than men are and this has a negative impact on job opportunities. As a result, most women are in the informal sector where there is great risk of their labour being poorly remunerated. They are also involved in subsistence food production where cash is not realised. This is compounded by their lack of access to agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seeds, chemicals etc., because they lack access to credit or cash from lending institutions. Thus, they do not have the resources and other support, such as seed handouts to maximise food production.

6.4 Access to Markets

Access to markets is an important part of the ability to spread the risks. However, SAPs tend to benefit the large-scale commercial farmers who are the exporters of the agricultural produce. Women are not able to access markets their links to a wider network of markets since they are mostly involved in subsistence farming and at a small scale.

6.5 Cash crops

Governments in Southern Africa have embarked on SAPs that have left them with huge debt burdens. In order to repay the debts, Governments encourage the growing of cash crops at the expense of food production and this has further exacerbated the food insecurity situation as more energy is diverted to the growing of cash crops at the expense of food crops.

Cash crops often call for capital-intensive methods which most of the women cannot afford. Cash crops also fetch high prices on the market compared to food crops. Instead of concentrating on cash crops, it is imperative for cash cropping to be combined with subsistence farming in order to earn cash, which can also be used in food production. The policy solution for a female-headed household is to diversify her land use, so that she could take some part of the land normally devoted to subsistence crops for cash cropping. Women can also increase their food produce by forming co-operatives with other women where they will pull resources in order to share the costs and diversify to growing both cash and food crops.

Women should thus be encouraged to combine cash crops with food crops as well as non-farm activities to boost income. This strategy has been applied by women farmers in Tikalore clubs in Zomba and Blantyre, Malawi. They have allocated part of the land to tobacco and the other part to maize production. This has seen increases in their income.

7 Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, all members of the United Nations in endorsing the Millennium Declaration, made a commitment that would ensure that all political leaders would commit themselves to the fight against hunger and poverty issues concerning the world today. This was a vow by world leaders to free people worldwide from the “abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty.”

The Millennium Development Goals include the following:

- **Goal 1** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- **Goal 2** Achieve universal primary education
- **Goal 3.** Promote gender equality and empower women
- **Goal 4.** Reduce child mortality - by two thirds the mortality rate of children under five.

- **Goal 5.** Improve maternal health - reduce by three quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth
- **Goal 6.** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- **Goal 7.** Ensure environmental sustainability
- **Goal 8.** Develop a global partnership for development

Goal 3 - challenges discrimination against women, and seeks to ensure that girls as well as boys have the chance to go school. Indicators linked to this goal aim to measure progress towards ensuring that more women become literate, have more voice and representation in public policy and decision making, and have improved job prospects. But the issue of gender equality is not limited to a single goal-it applies to all of them. It should be noted that without progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, none of the MDGs will be achieved.

8 Gender and HIV/AIDS

HIV and AIDS is not just a health threat, but also a developmental problem. The disease is undermining food security as it is disrupting thousands of farming communities, cutting food production and intensifying food insecurity. HIV and AIDS increase food insecurity while food security increases the chances of HIV infection and at the same accelerates the transition from HIV to AIDS. It is having a major impact on the economy. Thus there is need to modelling macroeconomics in the context of HIV and AIDS.

9 The Need for Gender-Sensitive Budgets

Gender budgets refers to a variety of processes and tools, which attempt to assess the impact of government budgets, mainly at national level, on different groups of men and women, through recognising the ways in which gender relations underpin society and the economy. Gender or women's budget initiatives are not separate budgets for women. They include analysis of gender targeted allocations (e.g. special programmes targeting women); they disaggregate by gender the impact of mainstream expenditures across all sectors and services; and they review equal opportunities policies and allocations within government services.

Women perform the majority of household chores, predominate in the informal survivalist sector and in the lower paid work in the formal sector. Since all these roles are all socially constructed, gender budgeting represents perhaps the most appropriate response to gender inequality and insensitive macroeconomic policies.

Gender sensitive budgets involve the analysis of government budget by sectoral allocation, with emphasis on the differential impact on women and men. Far from being a separate budget for women, a gender-sensitive budget is fundamentally about mainstreaming gender issues or the integration of gender realities into all national

policies, plans and programs. Women are not to be seen and treated as a special ‘interest group’.

A gender-sensitive budget seeks to ensure the needs and interests of women and men - girls and boys included. There is recognition of the variety of ways in which women effectively contribute to the society and economy through their unpaid labour in bearing, rearing and caring for citizens. Attempts to influence government budgetary allocations in favour of greater gender equity have tended to be more successful where there is a broad political commitment to equity and where gender budgets have supporters inside government or parliament. Recently, there have also been attempts to increase popular awareness of budgetary processes, including among women, in order to strengthen these efforts.

As things stand in most countries, national budgets often overlook or undervalue women’s contribution to the macro economy, discount the unpaid economy in which women perform most of the work of caring for and maintaining the labour force and the social framework.

The effectiveness of public expenditure ought to be measured against the needs of women as well as men. Gender budgets seek to eliminate “gender blindness” by ensuring that in formulating the national budget with due regard to the socially determined roles and responsibilities and capabilities of women and men.

Mainstreaming gender issues into all national policies, plans and programmes as opposed to regarding women as a special interest group, remains the primary aim of gender budgets. But what are the tangible benefits that accrue from gender sensitive budgets?

10 Making Women's Work Visible

Statistics underestimate the value of women's care work, especially in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Women’s contribution to family businesses, work in the informal sector and women's reproductive work are all not included in the economic analysis. This is because most of what women do is regarded as informal or communal, which by implication makes it less important and economically insignificant. Sometimes the argument used is that, it is difficult to measure activities of the informal economy. On the other hand, it is even more difficult to assign economic value to women’s work in the home and in the community since it is something they are not paid for. In other words, the work women do has no monetary value attached to it – it is ‘free’. As a result, it is difficult to include women’s contribution either in the GDP or GNP. Therefore, to all intents and purposes, women’s contribution is invisible and counts for nothing. However, if we are to make progress, it is important for economists to avoid being constantly preoccupied with production. They need to recognize and respect the importance of women’s unpaid work in what is termed human capital formation.

11 Policy Implications on Gender and Macro-Economics

- Conceptual and empirical work on gender and macroeconomics has begun to have in policy making and planning
- National statistical systems are now attempting to incorporate measurement of women's unpaid labour in satellite national accounts
- Processes are underway to make national budgets more responsive to women's needs
- Attempts have been made to integrate gender concerns into the design of structural adjustment programmes.

12 Intensification of Further Research

Research has to be intensified in order to improve the empirical and theoretical basis for future decision-making. Some of the areas of research are:

- Development of detailed gender-sensitive simulation models,
- Improvement of the engendered data collection on implications of policy changes on paid and unpaid labour,
- Analysis of reactions to policy changes which occur in the informal sector.

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