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## **The Gendered Political Economy of Africa: How the Empowerment of Women in Smallholder Farms Can Spearhead Economic Growth**

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***The Gendered Political Economy of Africa:***

*How the Empowerment of Women in Smallholder Farms Can Spearhead Economic Growth*

Mayzie Shaver

Western Washington University Honors Program

2019 - 2020

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## ***Introduction***

The agricultural sector in Africa is positioned to determine the outcomes of perhaps the most consequential and deeply entangled challenges the global community will face in the coming decades: the environmental crisis, population explosion, world poverty and malnutrition, and international cooperation to promote stability within and between countries. As African nations grow, develop, and advance, the future trajectory of their industrialization and international cooperation will determine the prosperity of the global community. According to Dr. Kanayo F. Nwanze, Former President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), “clearly, it is necessary to have food systems that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable if we are to feed a growing world population at a time when the earth’s ecosystems are becoming more stressed” (Nwanze, 2018). Women, furthermore, are positioned at the heart of African agriculture: while participation in agriculture varies greatly from community to community, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (hereafter, FAO), depending on the region, women generally make up between 50% and 70% of the workforce in agriculture, producing roughly 80% of agricultural goods (Doss, 2011). African women are therefore positioned at the heart of the global future.

This paper seeks to explore the gendered impacts of global economic integration on women in rural poverty, with particular focus on the role of women in smallholder farms embedded in international trade. What is the relationship between gender, development, and globalization in sub-Saharan Africa? Jagdish Bhagwati, department of economics at Columbia University,

defines economic globalization as pertaining to the “integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment (by corporations and multinationals), short-term capital flows, international flows of workers and humanity generally, and flows of technology” (Bhagwati, 2004, p. 440). In an increasingly globalized world forming bonds of both economic and political stability through trade flows, trade in Africa, particularly in the agricultural sector, is a driving force of economic growth and both economic and political security. Much of sub-Saharan Africa has a comparative advantage in global exportation of agricultural products, providing opportunity to increase global competitiveness and promote economic growth. Additionally, with 98% of the world’s agricultural holdings covering 10 ha or less, smallholder farms in particular are vital towards the creation of economically sustainable production in Africa (Nwanze). While women are at the heart of smallholder farms in rural communities, according to the FAO, for every 100 rural men living in extreme poverty, there are 122 women, creating a sense of interdependency between the future prosperity of the world and smallholder farm women, and between the future prosperity of smallholder farm women and the world.

## ***Background***

### **i. Smallholder Farms**

Literature on African agronomy struggles to agree on a statistical definition of *smallholder farm*. For functional use, this paper will accept Nwanze’s general definition of a smallholder farm as a farm plot covering a land area of 10 ha or less, with consideration to the potential economic

consequences of this definition: a vegetable farmer with 5 ha of land is economically larger than a grain farmer with 15 ha of land. However, within sub-Saharan Africa, maize, groundnuts, sorghum, legumes, and root crops (such as yams) dominate small-scale and large-scale farming, neutralizing the problems with this definition for the focus of this paper. The department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in the Republic of South Africa further characterizes smallholder farms as generally resource-poor, family-operated farms in rural communities, often characterized by female labor and personal subsistence farming (rather than market-oriented farming) (Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, 2012). Furthermore, many non-governmental organizations operating in the agriculture sector of sub-Saharan Africa, such as the European Cooperative for Rural Development, work to create farming cooperatives, or conglomerates of smallholder farms overseen by a nucleus model farm. Farming cooperatives allow groups of smallholder farms to share advanced technologies, access to markets, knowledge of best-practice technique, and enduring hybrid seeds with one another, as a kind of mass smallholder farm. This paper will not omit smallholder farming cooperatives from the definition of smallholder farm.

## **ii. Globalization**

Literature on globalization tends to point to the *Konjunkturforschungsstelle* (KOF) Swiss Economic Institute's index of globalization as the most thorough, accurate, and accessible index empirically materializing the abstraction of globalization. The KOF offers a single aggregated index, measuring globalization for each country, and breaks into three additional sub-indices, measuring economic, political, and social globalization as independent variables, though notably

not incorporating environmental variables into its measure. Economic globalization is assessed through foreign direct investment (hereafter FDI) and international trade as a percentage of gross domestic product (hereafter GDP), and the presence of tariff and non-tariff barriers. Social globalization is measured through the volume of interpersonal contact, such as international calls, letters, news stations, study abroad students, tourism, information flows, and proximate access to multiculturalism, such as the existence of foreign restaurants, retail stores, or museums. Finally, political globalization is measured through national membership in international organizations, the number of foreign embassies and ambassadors in a country, and participation in international treaties. To adequately measure the gendered relationship between international trade and sub-Saharan African smallholder farms, I will predominantly consider the index for economic globalization cross-analyzed with indicators for women's rights and empowerment in sub-Saharan African states with female participants in smallholder farming.

### **iii. Female Participation In Agriculture**

Female participation in agricultural work is divided into three basic food production systems in Africa, with rough regional boundaries: Either women are responsible for all or most of agricultural production (in this food system, plots are considered to be women's), joint female and male participation in plots (controlled by male household heads), or men are responsible for all or most agricultural production (in this food system, plots are owned by men). The final food production system is primarily primarily North African, where Islamic practice often secludes females from engaging in field work, whereas female participation in and/or ownership of agriculture is primarily sub-Saharan African (Koopman, 1992). Agriculture in Africa tends to be

characterized by a sharp division of labor by gender, rooted in social, political, and economic norms: females are typically required to care for their households, thereby absorbing agricultural labor as an extension. By contrast, males tend to be the primary cash earners and holders, have stronger land-holding rights, and have greater access to education and finance, exponentiating their potential for success. According to the world bank, even when females are property owners, “on average, female holders have 1.27 fewer years of education, are nearly twice as likely to be illiterate, and inhabit households with both fewer people and smaller dependency ratios, than their male counterparts. Additionally, female holders manage smaller areas of land, spend fewer hours per week on agricultural activities, and have less access to non-labor agriculture inputs, such as number of oxen used to work the land” (World Bank, 2013).

As an illustrative example, Southeast Nigeria distinguishes between “male” and “female” crops, solidifying a *de facto* gendered division of labour: “female” agricultural crops, including cassava, beans, maize, plantains, and cocoyams, are central to the household diets of Southeast Nigerians, while “male” crops, such as yams, are cash crops generating greater revenue, and considered a prestige to grow and sell (Ezumah, 1995). In Malawi, additionally, women tend to only have access to local varieties of maize seed, which are less resistant to environmental adversity and generate lower masses of output, whereas men have greater access to more advanced hybrid seed with high yield for marketable surplus, allowing men to generate greater cash income (Galdwin, 1992). Table 1, from the World Bank’s *Integrated Survey on Gender Differentials in Agricultural Production*, outlines the differences between genders in African agriculture.

*Table 1*

Land	Land title and tenure tend to be vested in men, either by legal condition or by socio-cultural norms. Land reform and resettlement have tended to reinforce this bias against tenure for women. Land shortage is common among women. Women farm smaller and more dispersed plots than men and are less likely to hold title, secure tenure, or the same rights to use, improve, or dispose of land.
Extension	Women farmers have less contact with extension services than men, especially where male-female contact is culturally restricted. Extension is often provided by men agents to men farmers on the erroneous assumption that the message will trickle “across” to women. In fact, agricultural knowledge is transferred inefficiently or not at all from husband to wife. Also, the message tends to ignore the unique workload, responsibilities, and constraints facing women farmers.
Technology	Women generally use lower levels of technology because of difficulties in access, cultural restrictions on use, or regard for women's crops and livestock as low research priorities.
Finance	Women have less access to formal financial services because of high transaction costs, limited education and mobility, social and cultural barriers, the nature of their businesses, and collateral requirements, such as land title, they cannot meet.
Time	Women face far greater time constraints than men. They may spend less time on farm work but work longer total hours on productive and household work and paid and unpaid work, due to gender-based division of labor in child care and household responsibilities.
Mobility	Women are less mobile than men, both because of their child care and household responsibilities and because of sociocultural norms that limit their mobility.

Education and Training	Women are less educated in parts of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Illiteracy hampers their access to and ability to understand technical information. Worldwide, women have less access to education and training in agriculture.
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Even though women practicing subsistence farming for the livelihoods of their households tend to also sell off surplus output to generate greater revenue, a starkly gendered division of labour prevents them from realizing full economic, social, and political potential: according to the McKinsey Global Institute, a predicted \$316 billion USD could be added to the aggregated African GDP if women in agriculture had the same rights as their male counterparts (McKinsey, 2019).

**iv. The Dimensions of Women’s Rights and Empowerment**

Literature on women in disadvantaged economies, particularly within sub-Saharan Africa, suggests four dimensions of women’s rights and empowerment: economic, socio-cultural, education, and health (Jennings, 2014, and Pratley, 2016). In their study *Measuring Women's Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the Demographic and Health Surveys*, Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al. further elaborate how these four dimensions can be broken and measured: the economic dimension includes labour force participation, type of occupation, type of earning from occupation, and income ratio. In the context of smallholder farms embedded within international value chains, I will primarily consider women’s employment in the agricultural sector and women’s access to markets. The

socio-cultural dimension includes community and personal attitudes towards violence (particularly in the household) against women, and the weight of power women hold in household decision making. The education dimension is comprised of literacy, highest educational level achieved, and gendered discrepancies in educational attainment. Finally, the indicators for health are defined as sex negotiation (whether women have the ability to refuse sex or ask their partner to use a condom) and access to healthcare domains (Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al, 2018).

#### **v. The Relationship Between Globalization and Gender in Agriculture**

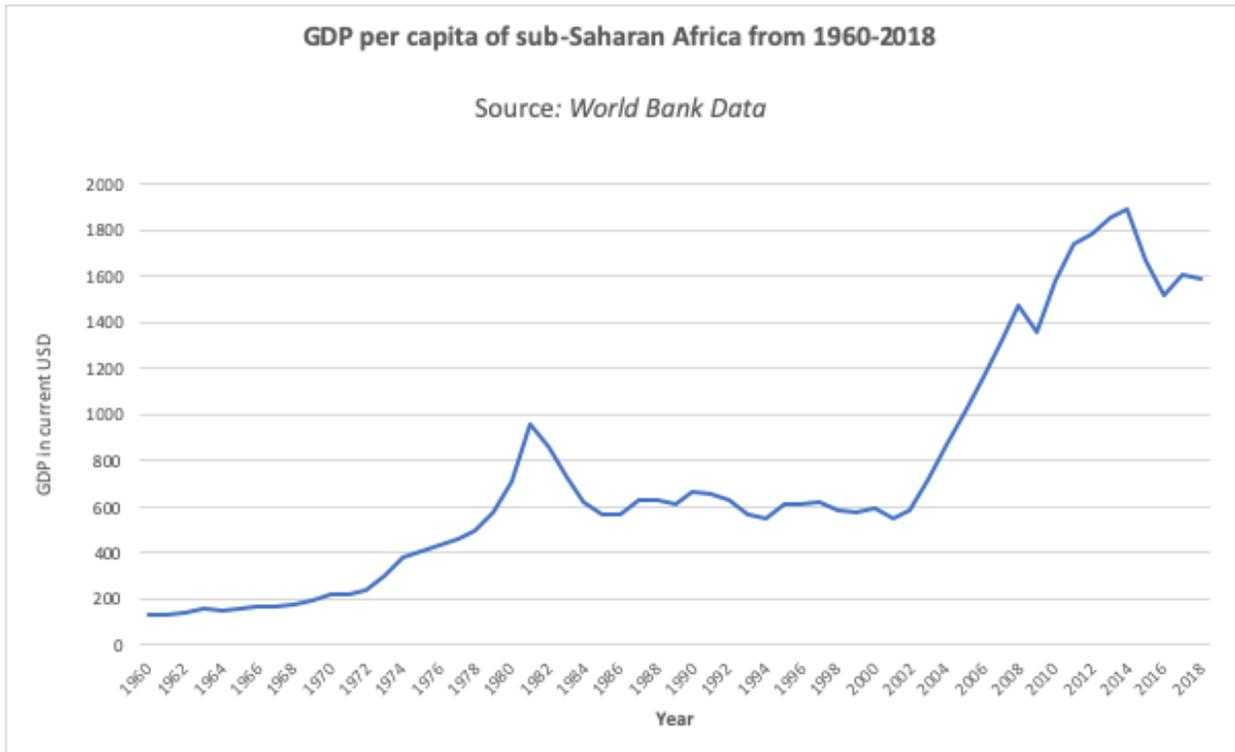
To assess levels of globalization and international trade relevant to the agricultural sector, I will consider the KOF index for economic globalization and data from NGO-based farming cooperative projects in sub-Saharan Africa. To assess correlating levels of women's rights, women's empowerment, and gendered impact of globalization, I will draw on the work of Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al., and consider other globally-used indicators of gender development: the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII), and the African-specific African Gender Equality Index (AGEI), and the African Gender and Development Index (UNECA, [2011](#); African Development Bank, [2015](#)). I will also use research published in November, 2019, on gender and economic activity in Africa published by the McKinsey Global Institute, and data gathered by the World Bank to assess gendered rights and gender equality. While there is an abundance of literature considering the rights of women, globalization, and agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, the causal and impactful relationships between these variables seems to be under-explored. This paper will use the aforementioned

framework to cross-analyze empirical data in consideration of the relationship between gender, development, and globalization in sub-Saharan Africa. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, this paper will also consider field reports, empirics, and statistics from relevant non-governmental organizations and international organizations participating in agricultural work in sub-Saharan Africa.

### ***Methodology and Data***

According to figures by the World Bank, in 2015, about 41% of sub-Saharan Africa lived in extreme poverty, with women being the dominant demographic in this figure. GDP per capita in an aggregated sub-Saharan capita has been on a gradual rise since 1995, with only a slight decrease from 2015-2018.

*Figure 1*

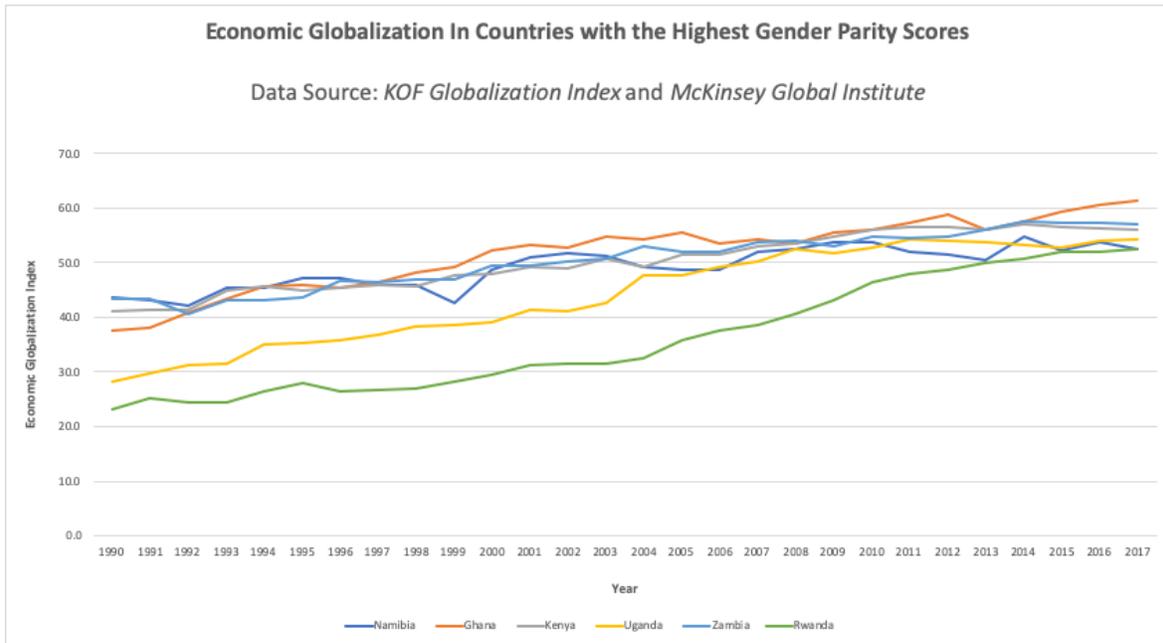


Within the context of increasing global economic cooperation and the dominance of comparative advantage domestic production and international trade, it is no surprise that poorer countries with fewer industrial resources have been able to expand economically. According to figures by the African Union Commission and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (hereafter OECD), since 2000, Africa as a whole has diversified its trade partnerships, and embedded itself more firmly in the global economy, tripling trade with China, India, and the US, and within the same timeframe, Africa's GDP has also tripled (African Union Commission, 2018). While this figure certainly does not account for all variables in contribution to economic growth and increased trade, an at least partially causal relationship between the variables can

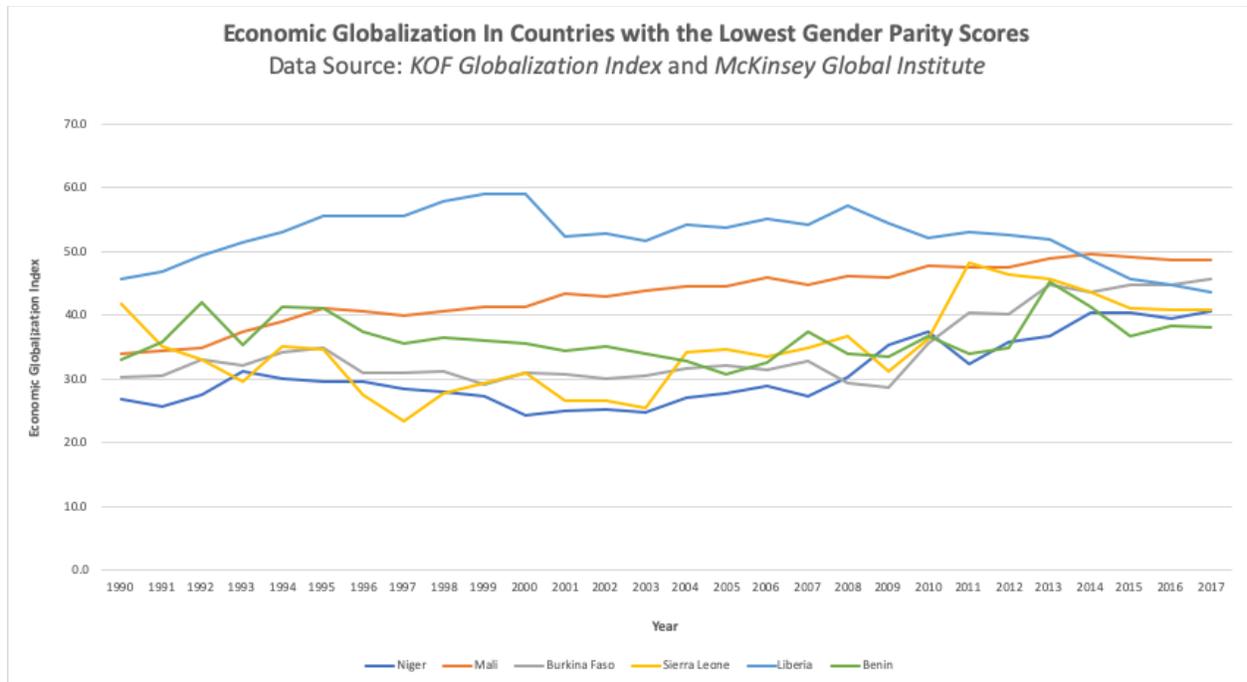
likely be inferred. Within this framework, it is necessary to better understand who the economic growth benefits, and what the impact is on women specifically.

In November, 2019, the McKinsey Global Institute published a research project beginning in 2015, seeking potential to boost gender equity and economic growth in Africa. The project assigned a gender parity score to each African state, indicating progress towards gender parity, with 1 indicating perfect gender parity and 0 indicating no gender parity. South Africa was the highest scoring state, at 0.76, though because of the outlying structural political, economic, and social differences of South Africa relative to its neighboring states and regions, it will not be included in my research (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). *Figure 2* illustrates six of the highest-scoring states, Namibia (0.72), Ghana (0.59), Kenya (0.62), Rwanda (0.69), Uganda (0.62), and Zambia (0.6), and their economic globalization indexes from 1990-2017. *Figure 3* illustrates six of the lowest-scoring states, Niger (0.45), Mali (0.46), Burkina Faso (0.5), Sierra Leone (0.5), Liberia (0.53), and Benin (0.51), and their corresponding economic globalization indexes from 1990-2017.

**Figure 2**

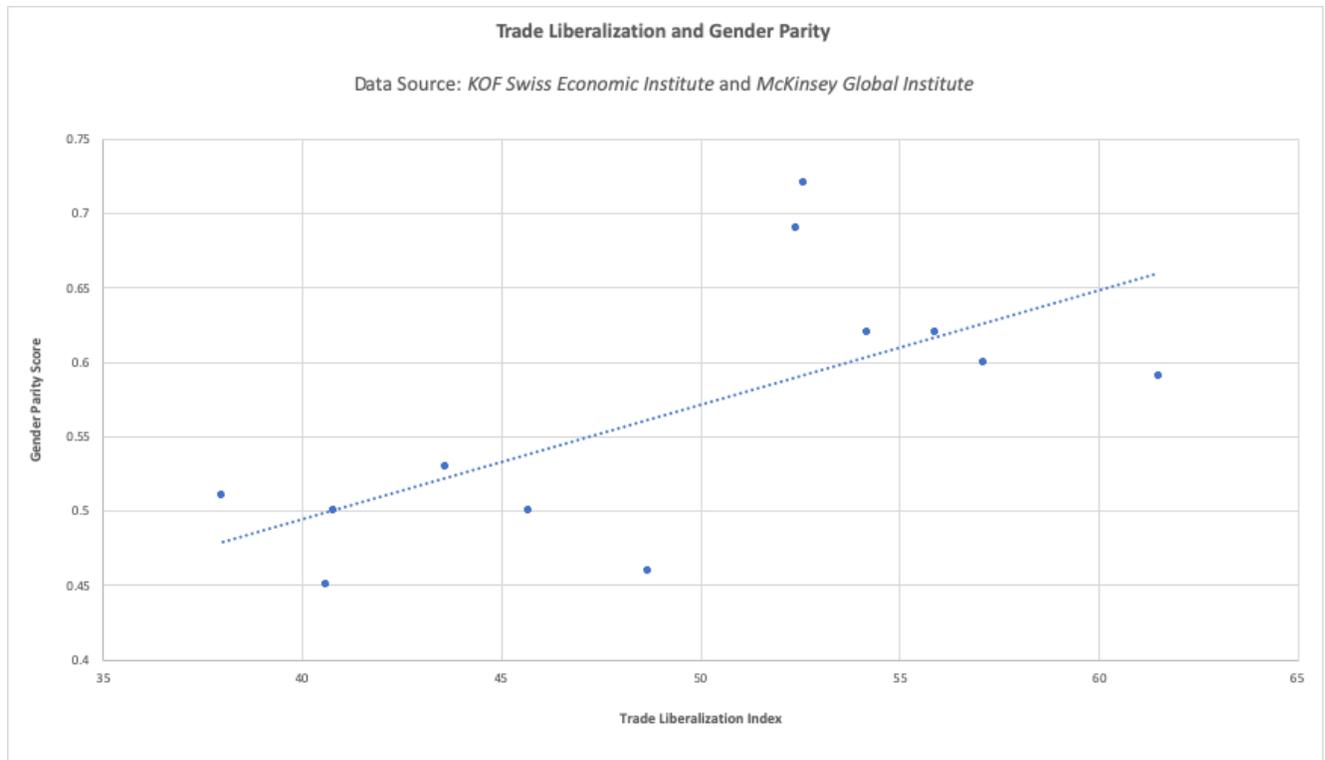


**Figure 3**



These figures give a sense of the general change and progression in economic globalization within the countries that are most gender-equal compared to those that are least gender-equal: in 2017, all of the the high gender equality countries were above an economic globalization level of 50, showing an absolute increase in globalization. In 2017, none of the low gender equality countries were above an economic globalization level of 50, and both Niger and Sierra Leone were less globalized than in 1990. While many variables impact both gender parity and economic globalization, in general, states that are participating in diversified international trade and foreign direct investment have higher levels of gender equality.

**Figure 4**



*Figure 4* illustrates the relationship between global trade liberalization from the KOF globalization index regressed against the same gender parity score from the McKinsey Global Institute, to illustrate a comparison of the highest and lowest gender-equal countries aforementioned. While correlation does not necessarily reveal a causal relationship, there is evidence within the figure that the gender rights and participation in global trade tend to increase together in a positive and upward trend, revealing a distinct relationship between the two variables.

The economic structure of these states is predominantly agricultural, with international trade overwhelmingly determined by agricultural production. Further, according to the FAO, women generally comprise between 50% and 70% of the agricultural workforce in Africa, producing

roughly 80% of agricultural goods, offering a more salient weight to the illustrated relationship between gender and trade (Doss, 2011). Women working in smallholder farms in sub-Saharan Africa are therefore the dominant actors in the economic variables (primarily international trade as a percentage of GDP), used above to indicate globalization and the dominant focus of the gender variable (gender parity) used above.

How do the variables interact, with women at the epicenter? Though we can see rural women propelling the region's economic expansion, is international trade concurrently empowering rural women? Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al. found anecdotal answers to this question within sub-Saharan Africa that were consistent with a similar study in Southeast Asia: in their research, they suggest that female labor force participation was a primary positive indicator of women's empowerment, within the category of economic empowerment. They also found, however, a number of social problems suggesting that globalization and international trade do not causally increase female empowerment, such as low education among women (sometimes perhaps as an opportunity cost of preferential involvement in the agricultural sector), cultural practices of burdening females with household chores, norms and laws preventing women from property ownership, and workplace sexual harassment. According to Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al., these difficulties thereby challenge female access to markets and interpersonal political and social empowerment.

### ***The Feminization of Labor***

Given the constraints women face at the heart of the African economy, perhaps it is not international trade that necessarily causally empowers women in the rural poor, rather, it is female momentum within the rural agricultural sector that helps to generate export value, spurring economic growth. The FAO found in 2017 that 70% of informal traders in the sub-Saharan African Development Community were women, with their work comprising of about 40-60% of the GDP of countries concerned in the study (FAO, 2017), revealing that women seem to be less represented in international trade, and more largely represented as labourers in household small-scale farming. Beyond just agricultural trade, according to Kuseni Dlamini in collaboration with the McKinsey Global Institute, almost half of the entire African economy is informal, meaning unregulated or protected by the state. Almost the entire informal African economy is composed of agriculture, and the informal African agricultural economy is almost entirely run by women (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). The World Bank also found that women tend to be far less productive as farmers than men, because of their lack of access to technology, markets, and funding.

This perhaps complements the findings of Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al., which elaborated on correlation between female economic empowerment and overall societal empowerment, but revealed many hurdles that females had to overcome within employment, such as lack of ownership rights over land, or difficulty acquiring collateral for loans from large financial institutions (van Rooyen et al., 2012, cited by Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al, 2014). According to the FAO, while the vast majority of farm labor is performed by women, they only hold 15% of

farmland (FAO, 2019). This could lead sub-Saharan Africa into a development trajectory referred to as the conceptual “feminization of labor.”

*“In developing countries the adoption of export-oriented policies from the 1960s onwards saw a massive number of female workers move into labour-intensive manufacturing production, a shift known as the feminization of labour .*

*Labour-intensive industries exposed to strong international competition rely on returns to labour rather than skills or assets. Thus, such an unprecedented preference for women workers in export-oriented production was due to intense international competition that required the use of cheap labour to cut costs”*

(UNCTAD, 2016, p. 6).

As a result of so-called “gender-based occupational segregation,” notions of “men’s work” and “women’s work” are able to evolve, compartmentalized in the division of labor, creating a gendered income disparity: men are often found in higher-skilled sectors, while women are often found in lower-skilled, more labor intensive sectors, such as agriculture. The beginnings of this phenomenon are already evident: the already feminized informal economy of sub-Saharan Africa faces limited land ownership (often due to laws preventing women from owning property), limited access to economic enablers (such as smallholder farm cooperatives), constrained mobility (under the expectation that women care for the home), disproportionately unfair pay (if they are paid at all), and limited access to labour and technology for farmwork. The already disproportionately masculinized formal economy of sub-Saharan Africa can enjoy the benefits of

economic growth such as financial rights, social protection, organization and representation in the workplace, access to education, and an enabling professional environment. Women, however, lack the adequate resources, training, education, mobility, and pay to economically grow on a micro level, and create economic growth on a macro level.

While it seems economic growth does not inherently positively impact women, perhaps the issue of feminization of labor is not rooted in the rapacious expansion of a global economy that demands low-skilled labor for comparative advantage in trade, rather, in poorly implemented policy alongside shakey development structures and institutions. If women are the dominant actors in sub-Saharan African agriculture, lacking representation in international trade but over-representing small scale farming, perhaps embedding small scale farming in international trade should be a point of greater focus.

### ***The Two Analytical Dimensions of Trade and Gender***

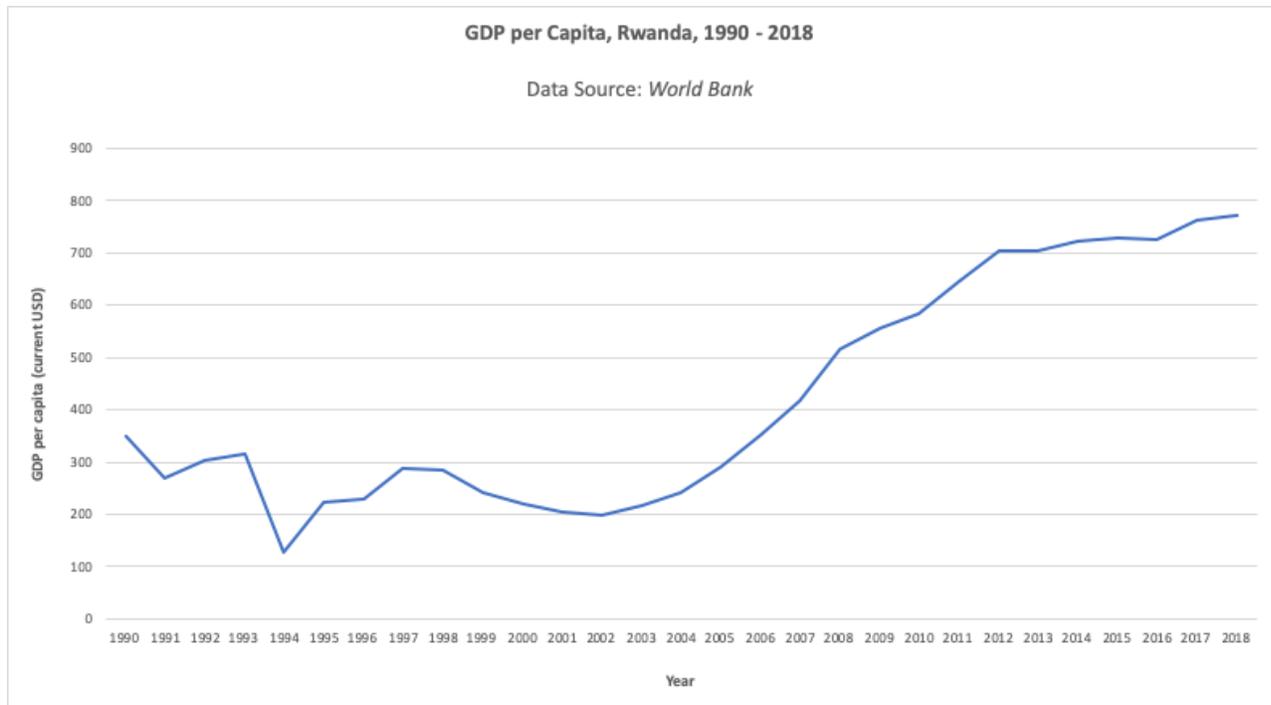
The positive relationship between international trade and the empowerment of women in sub-Saharan Africa can be best analyzed in two dimensions, according to Asongu et al. in their research, entitled *Globalisation and Female Economic Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The first dimension is that of economic openness: the impact of international trade, particularly on the rural poor, sparks inflows of investment, firms, knowledge, and capital growth, which in turn enhances employment opportunity, productivity, and economic opportunity in the labor force

triggering both supply and demand sides of domestic and international communities. The second dimension is more abstract, as a “social value reconstruction” effect of globalization. According to Asongu et al., “this implies that globalisation improves the social perception and tolerance for some groups like women to be actively involved in the labour market. This group of individuals may be strongly affected by social intolerance within the society, assuming globalisation is not enhanced” (Asongu et al., 2019, p. 14). This second dimension seems less self-correcting than the laws of supply and demand, requiring greater attention to detail for the future prosperity of rural women and the global community. In their research, Asongu et al. found that in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, and Rwanda, higher levels of gender inequity promoted patrimonial paradigms and heritage regimes that discouraged women from active involvement in the agricultural labor force.

### ***The Case of Rwanda***

Following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, Rwanda has experienced massive economic growth largely credited to its booming agricultural sector. Agricultural reform has emphasized and expanded the role of smallholder farming cooperatives, and formal political, economic, and social inclusion of women (Meader, 2019). *Figure 5* illustrates the recent growth in Rwanda’s economy: in the last 20 years, the GDP per capita in current USD has nearly doubled, dramatically reducing Rwanda’s extreme poverty.

### ***Figure 5***



While this phenomenon in Rwanda is also credited as due to political stability and low corruption levels, much academic literature, including a study by John Elliot Meader and David O'Brian, praises the political mandates emphasizing the importance of women in Rwandan political, economic, and social spheres. In 2003, the Rwandan government constitutionally established mandatory gender quotas requiring that at least 30% of the Rwandan government representatives consist of women. According to the World Bank, cited by Meader and O'Brian, Rwanda has been ranked first place in the world for representation of women in parliaments since 2012. Meader and O'Brian's analysis within the context of Rwandan smallholder farm cooperatives holds that greater government representation developed a strong sense of value of women in membership and leadership positions in other professional fields, such as agriculture. Their study sought to explore the relationship between gender, economic growth, and

smallholder farm cooperatives in Rwanda as a case study. Their primary indicators, through field questionnaires, involved confidence of women in voicing opinions to cooperatives, leadership positions of women, levels of trust in female leaders, cooperative management, and access to agricultural inputs. Their findings suggest that “cooperative policy, most notably the mandatory inclusion of high numbers of women in cooperative decision-making, is helping to promote strong agricultural institutions as well as sustainable economic development” (Meader, 2019).

Thus, to promote the economic expansion of sub-Saharan Africa within the context of a global trade regime, focus must be put into the empowerment of women within sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in smallholder farms. Asaolu, Alaofe, Gunn, et. al, suggest that development efforts push for “microfinance, local savings groups, and community banks to support poor African women who may not possess collateral for loans from advanced financial institutions” as well as “the scaling of successful small and medium scale businesses to be supported by advanced financial institutions and favorable trade policies” (Asaolu et. al, 2018). Women are already active economic agents in sub-Saharan Africa agricultural supply and demand chains, but their activity is less recognized, rewarded, or encouraged than that of their male counterparts.

### ***Improved Land Rights as a Development Tool***

Improved land rights could further empower female farmers and expand African economics: according to Landesa Rural Development Institute, a study of 33 countries found increased

property rights correlated to a 5% increase in GDP, a study of 108 countries found increased property rights correlated to a 6%-14% increase in GDP per capita, and studies of impoverished countries as specific case studies found exponentially greater increase.

For comparison, studies of land reform in South Korea provide evidence for the importance of property rights for local economic growth. In 1950, Kenya was a more affluent country than Korea. A cornerstone of Korea's rapid and successful development was a governmental reform favoring land rights for smallholder farmers. Upon the success of allocating land rights, consequential increases in proceeds from agricultural produce were used to invest in the manufacturing sector for export-oriented growth, and encouraged the financial sector to flow capital into smallholder agriculture and export-led manufacturing sectors. According to Landesa, in South Korea as a case study, "in the 20 years after land reform secured land rights for small family farmers, rice paddy yields nearly doubled. Exports rose an average of 40% a year in the 1960s and 25% a year in the '70s" (*Landesa Rural Development Institute*, 2016). This implies that securing land rights for female farmers in Africa could target both of the previously mentioned dimensions of the relationship between female empowerment and international trade: securing land rights could adequately allocate necessary physical space, legal protection, and a sense of individual competitiveness to bolster economic growth, while simultaneously building a sense of both intra and inter-personal empowerment and importance of women in agricultural communities.

While the World Bank notes that the majority of sub-Saharan African traders are women, the majority of figures regulating borders or overseeing cross-border economic activity are men. According to the Minister for East African Community affairs of Burundi makes clear the challenge, “women traders are the ones who face, every day, the problems of not knowing what their rights and obligations are in today’s EAC [East African Community]. Most of them haven’t a clue about their rights and obligations” (Brenton et al., World Bank, p. 6). This notion further gives way to the importance of deregulation of intra-African and international trade: fewer restrictions applied to women in their ability to trade freely across borders coupled with greater education about trading systems could enhance economic opportunity. Investments in land reform, economic empowerment, and the rights of smallholder farmers could provide the social, political, and economic infrastructure for successful development.

### ***Conclusion and Final Remarks***

The purpose of the paper was to explore the impact of global economic integration on women in rural poverty, with particular focus on the role of women in smallholder farms. In particular, does economic growth spurred by increasing levels of globalization positively impact women? While I initially hypothesized increasing global connectedness would bolster the rights and opportunities of women, the findings of this paper seem to suggest a more “bottom-up” relationship: men have far greater access to the concrete political and economic benefits of globalization in sub-Saharan Africa, whereas women aren’t experiencing the benefits that we might assume. Female smallholder farmers in Africa, however, share an intimately interactive

relationship with globalization: female success in smallholder farming seems to trigger economic growth and greater opportunity for international trade, but the corresponding benefits seem to circle back to their male counterparts.

According to the African Development Bank, “Eliminating gender inequality and empowering women could raise the productive potential of one billion Africans, delivering a huge boost to the continent’s development potential” (African Development Bank Group, 2015). In a climate of increasing global connectedness, increasing global challenges such as poverty alleviation, sustainable development, inclusive food systems, and zero hunger must be met cooperatively. This paper hypothesized that perhaps global economic integration has a positive impact on the empowerment of women in the rural poor, through means of economic growth and perhaps the infiltration of additional political and social globalization components. While gender equity and the empowerment of women certainly share a relationship with economic globalization, the findings of this paper seem to suggest they work in an cyclical and interactive relationship. While direct causation can not be proven by the data gathered for the scope of this research project, analysis of the data and literature gathered seems to suggest that smallholder farm women are at the heart of the issue of African development, but improvement of the condition of women will perhaps exponentiate economic growth more effectively than economic growth alone will improve the condition of women in poverty. The McKinsey Global Institute predicted an increase of \$316 billion USD to the aggregated African GDP if all countries matched the progress of gender equality of their best performing neighbor (McKinsey, 2019). According to the African Development Bank,

*“Rural women are essential to eliminating poverty, achieving zero hunger and creating sustainable, productive and inclusive food systems. They contribute both labour and knowledge of agricultural practices and biodiversity. They also play a unique and central role in managing natural resources, providing services, and building resilience within their families and communities” (African Development Bank Group, 2015).*

To address these important global issues, it is therefore instrumental to address equal opportunity for women in agriculture, the elimination of violence against women, womens’ access to resources and markets, and the empowerment of women in the rural poor.

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