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Women's empowerment, self-employment and incomes inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Women empowerment, women self-employment and income inequalities are now challenges that characterize Sub-Saharan Africa. This is why in this study we evaluate the effect of women's empowerment on income inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1981 and 2017. In particular, we analyze the interactions between women empowerment and women self-employment. The use of the Generalized Method of Moments gives the following main results: (i) Women's empowerment alone is not enough to reduce income inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. (ii) For an effective fight against income inequalities, women's empowerment must be accompanied by an increase in women's self-employment. (iii) Increase in women's informal employment tends to exacerbate income inequalities like unemployment.

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Introduction

Sub-Saharan African countries face problems of unequal distribution of wealth among the population. The rate of income inequality is higher in this region than anywhere else in the world (United Nations Development Program, 2017). For example, 10 out of the 19 most unequal countries in the world are from Sub-Saharan Africa. All Sub-Saharan African countries are concerned by this problem of income inequality, including those whose economic health is relatively good. This is the case of South Africa, the continent's leading economic power, yet, one of the seven most unequal income wise. Economic literature speaks of a "feminization of poverty" (Chamlou, 2016). Indeed, women are often poorer than men, in Sub-Saharan Africa compared to other regions in the world (Swapna, 2017; Efobi et al. 2018; Hwang and Nam, 2020; Ngono, 2021a). Moreover, entrepreneurship in the sub-region is one of the lowest in the world. This is particularly true for women, even though Sub-Saharan Africa has fairly high unemployment rates (Ngono, 2021a). Women's low participation in the labor market is often relegated to the informal sector, which sometimes accounts for 90% of women's employment (Meagher, 2010; De Grosot et al. 2017; World Development Indicators, 2020).

Women's poverty is often associated to their lack of autonomy. Women are poor because they do not enjoy the same freedoms as men. They do not thrive in the job market as well as men do and that is why they are poorer. Their exclusion from the political world and the difficulty of being seen otherwise by society explain their low shares in the distribution of income. This popular misconception is the main reason for the emergence of the women's empowerment movement (Duflo, 2012; Mokta, 2014).

This study mobilizes data from Cirights Human Rights (2018) to capture women's capabilities and data from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) for income inequality. These data are for a sample of 47 countries from 1981 to 2017. The problems of endogeneity posed by the endogeneity model of this study are solved with the help of a system GMM. Results reveal that an increase in women's economic and social empowerment reduces income inequality if accompanied by an increase in women's self-employment. Moreover, this study shows that the increase in women's informal employment tends to exacerbate income inequality like unemployment. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: we start by presenting a literature review in the first section, then, we present our methodology in the second section and discuss our results in the third section. Finally, we conclude in the last section.

1. Literature review

The feminization of poverty often discussed in the literature (Chamlou, 2016) can be explained in some regions by low female empowerment. In such a situation, women are restricted to unpaid activities. They are then responsible for taking care of the house, children, shopping, and household chores in general (Pathak et al. 2013). In this context, the woman's income often depends on her husband's income. Addressing this problem is important for both the woman and her household (Marlow, 2002; Tomavo and Degla, 2019). Indeed, if the wife also performs a paid activity, this increases the income available to the household. In addition, the economy as a whole would benefit as she will participate, among other things, in economic growth (Ngono, 2021b). Women empowerment is therefore an imperative, especially in developing countries where the situation is still critical (Swapna, 2017; Efobi et al. 2018; Hwang and Nam, 2020).

Women's empowerment is thus a process that should lead women to more freedom (Duflo, 2012; Mokta, 2014; Djodjo, 2017). It is generally understood in three aspects namely economic empowerment, social empowerment and political empowerment (Kabeer, 2005; Duflo, 2012; Pathak et al. 2013). Economic empowerment is concerned about the ability of women to move freely in the labor market, social empowerment lays importance on the ability of institutions to concede more freedom to women, and political empowerment lays importance on the ability of women to engage in politics and hold positions in public administrations (Kabeer, 2005; Duflo, 2012; Pathak et al. 2013).

The biggest challenge is societal. The image that society has of women is the primary struggle. This social aspect is characterized by two types of institutions namely formal institutions and informal institutions (Pathak et al. 2013). Formal institutions refer to the law and informal institutions represent tradition and unwritten social norms. The impact of societal stereotypes often affects women's belief in their economic and political capabilities (Pathak et al. 2013). Furthermore, access to education, access to inheritance, and rights within marriage among others, which condition women's economic and political capabilities, are often the purview of these institutions (Kabeer, 2005; Falk and Hermle, 2018; Workneh, 2020). With respect to economic capabilities, women's transition from unpaid activities to the labor market is a central element in the process of their empowerment. Duflo (2012) explains that a woman's power over household resources guarantees her empowerment. Thus, a woman who puts money on the table guarantees her autonomy and this autonomy favors her search for income. She finds herself in what Duflo (2012) calls a "virtuous circle". Women with money have a “decision-making” power within the family, including how to spend the money. Women with “decision-making” power, thus, can spend more and can spend better, for the well-being of their children as well as for themselves (Kabeer, 2005; Duflo, 2012).

According to Kabeer (2005), jobs in the non-agricultural sector are even more attractive because they push women out of the often quite patriarchal rural area into urban areas. Many women find the opportunity to make new friends and have new adventures. Working away from home offers the advantage of getting rid of the pressure of family and neighbors, and allows one to work for money to satisfy one's own needs and to have some fun. In addition, the household with the extra income can move from a poor to a “non-poor” household. It can then increase its spending on children's education, household health expenses, nutrition, and housing among others (Baloch et al. 2018, Klasen, 2018). Finally, in terms of women's political capabilities, they can play on one type of institutions namely formal institutions. The accession of women to public power, allows them to vote for their own needs. They prefer policies that put their priorities first. In particular, they are interested in the well-being of their children and their “decision-making” powers within the household (Duflo, 2012). For example, they put priorities on policies on the provision of water because often in the household, women are in charge of fetching water (Duflo, 2012). Literature also reveals that they tend to work for children's human capital and women's freedom (Brollo and Troiano, 2016; Rogan, 2016; Hong et al. 2019; Dahlum et al. 2020).

An increase in women's social, political, and economic capabilities should therefore promote a reduction in income inequality through its actions on women's income, household income, as well as human capital. However, this point of view is not as obvious as it seems. First of all, there is the social aspect. Women may have access to education, for example, but not the benefits (Kabeer, 2005). They may have access to paid employment but not benefit themselves or their

households. Indeed, the benefits of education may be limited by the society in terms of employment. Women may be limited to jobs such as nursing or teaching (Kabeer, 2005). In terms of employment, women who enter the job market still face sexism, harassment, and wage inequalities (Adema & Thévenon, 2016). Furthermore, Kabeer (2005) adds that in the case of women who move from rural areas to the city, they may not have time for adventures and experiences they had hoped for. They go out early and come back late. To this must be added disastrous working conditions, often in unsanitary conditions. Illnesses are often common for these women and in developing countries especially, these women find themselves in the informal sector (Baloch et al. 2018).

In these countries, women are more likely to be in the informal sector than men (Cornish et al. 2021). Elveren and Özgür (2016) explain that between 1988 and 2007, the percentage of men in the informal sector remained relatively stable while the percentage of women increased by 25%. Asongu et al (2020) argue that the case for women in Sub-Saharan Africa is more critical than in most other regions of the world. The informal sector can be an obstacle to addressing income inequality. In particular, those in the informal sector lack social protections, have no insurance, and are often underpaid (Elveren and Özgür, 2016). Women's empowerment in such a case may thus be followed by an increase in women's poverty and not lead to a decrease in income inequality.

On the other hand, women who turn to self-employment rather than being employed by others tend to do better and to do more to reduce income inequality. The primary role of self-employment in reducing income inequality is reflected in the work of Banerjee and Newman (1993). Self-employment improves the economic situation of the entrepreneur and as a result, that of the society, notably with the reduction of unemployment thanks to the hiring that follows (Gawel, 2020). In the case of women in particular, it is an opportunity to escape wage inequalities, harassment and sexism. Moreover, as Kabeer's (2005) work explains, the division of labor between men and women is rarely renegotiated within the household, and women, even while working, must continue to fulfill their roles as housewives. The flexibility of self-employment is a very good solution to work despite their other tasks. Self-employment can therefore be a viable channel through which to empower women and significantly reduce income inequality.

2. Methodology

In this section, we discuss our choice of variables as well as data sources. We further discuss our model and the estimation method.

2.1. Choice of variables and data sources

To measure women's capabilities, we use data from Cirights Human Rights Dataset (2018). This database provides data on three dimensions of women's empowerment. Economic capabilities are captured in this database by freedom of profession or employment and the right to be protected in the labor market. Political capabilities encompasses the right to vote, the right to belong to a political party, to stand for elections, to hold decision-making positions in the government, and the right to disagree with government policies. Social capabilities includes the right to have the same rights as men in a marriage, the right to seek divorce, the right to confer nationality on one's

child or husband, the right to inheritance, the right to a passport, and the right to travel. It also includes the right to education, the right to participate in community activities, the right to be sterile and, among others, the right to choose one's place of residence. This database, developed by Cingranelli et al (2018), assigns for each dimension three scores to countries according to the respect of these rights. 0 when the rights are not guaranteed by the law of the country during a given period; 1 when the law guarantees these rights but this is not effective in practice; 2 when the law guarantees these rights but this is not true sometimes in practice; and 3 when these rights are guaranteed in law and in practice.

Income inequality is measured by the Gini index, data from SWIID. This measure of inequality is found in other works such as those of Baloch et al (2018). The informal sector is measured by the percentage of women's employment in the informal sector. According to literature, women in the informal sector do not benefit from social protection and are often dependent on low pay (Adoho and Doumbia, 2018). Moreover, these jobs are characterized by their vulnerability (Ngono, 2021a). This has implications for income distribution. Women who are unable to access paid employment even in the informal sector become unemployed. Unemployment usually means a lack of income and widens the gap between these women and those with higher incomes (Ngoa Tabi et al. 2020). Faced with the difficulty of obtaining paid employment, women often engage in self-employment. Self-employment ultimately leads to a decrease in unemployment, an increase in overall demand, but above all to an increase in income for women who successfully engage in it (Tita and Aziakpono, 2017). Unemployment and self-employment are measured respectively, according to International Labor Organization estimates, by the percentage of the female labor force in unemployment and by the percentage of self-employment in total female employment.

Due to data constrain, we settle on 47 Sub-Saharan African countries between 1981 and 2017. Table 1 shows that for the countries in this sample, the Gini index varies between 30 and 63.3 per cent. This indicates fairly high rates of income inequality. It also reveals that the percentage of women's employment in the informal sector varies between nearly 35% and 98%. This reflects the extent to which the informal sector is rooted in this region and the strong participation of women in this sector. This table also shows that in some countries women's rights are non-existent and thus their empowerment is only in its early stage.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Source
Gini	924	44.48182	6.801349	30.4	63.3	SWIID
Female economic capabilities	1,503	0.957419	0.582292	0	3	CIRIGHTS (2018)
Female political capabilities	1,524	1.838583	0.575428	0	3	CIRIGHTS (2018)
Female social capabilities	922	0.834056	0.577924	0	3	CIRIGHTS (2018)
Female informal employment	69	70.51565	22.32333	34.52	98.15	WDI (2020)
Female unemployment	1,242	8.997441	8.897883	0.149	47.649	WDI (2020)
Female self-employment	1,242	79.31828	22.20266	11.816	99.23	WDI (2020)

***Source**: Author, with Stata.*

2.2 Model and estimation method

Our sample consists of 47 countries over a period of 37 years. The superiority of the individual dimension over the time dimension makes it possible for us to use a dynamic panel model. This model is all the more relevant since the work of Mpabe Bodjongo (2017) has shown that income

inequalities at period t-1 favor income inequalities at period t in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, inspired by the approach of Baloch et al (2018), we have,

$$Gini_{i,t} = n_i + \beta_0 Gini_{i,t-1} + \beta_1 Female\ economic\ capabilities_{i,t} + \beta_2 Female\ political\ capabilities_{i,t} + \beta_3 Female\ social\ capabilities_{i,t} + \beta_4 Female\ self - employment_{i,t} + \beta_5 Female\ economic\ capabilities_{i,t} * Female\ self - employment_{i,t} + \beta_6 Female\ political\ capabilities_{i,t} * Female\ self - employment_{i,t} + \beta_7 Female\ social\ capabilities_{i,t} * Female\ Female\ self - employment_{i,t} + \beta_8 Female\ informal\ employment_{i,t} + \beta_9 Female\ unemployment_{i,t} + n_t + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

Where $t = 1981, \dots, 2017$ and $i = 1, \dots, 47$

Model (1) presents an endogeneity problem. Indeed, the dependent Gini variable is correlated with the error term due to the fact that this Gini variable is both a dependent and an independent variable. Moreover, Duflo (2012) has explained that the relationship between income gaps and women's empowerment can go in both directions, which is another source of endogeneity. To address these endogeneity problems, we use a GMM, specifically the system GMM developed in the works of Arellano and Bover (1995) and of Blundell and Bond (1998). Their works showed that the first difference estimator of Arellano and Bond (1991) did not really solve the problem of endogeneity, especially in small samples as in this study. In order to apply this method, we use the extension of this estimator, developed by Roodman (2009a, 2009b) because it addresses the problem of instrument proliferation often present in small sample sizes. Also, the time variables are assumed to be strictly exogenous and only have an effect on income inequality through their effects on the other explanatory variables. The other explanatory variables are assumed to be likely sources of endogeneity with the exception of the time variables. The two-stage estimator is chosen because it produces robust results. This is combined with the test of autocorrelation of second order of the error term of the difference equation developed by Arellano and Bond (1991), Hansen's instrument validity and Hansen's difference for the validity of the identification process.

3. Discussions of results

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show that the results are statistically robust. The number of instruments does not exceed the number of countries in almost all estimates. This implies that there is no problem of instrument proliferation. Indeed, the use of the estimator of Roodman (2009a, 2009b) has addressed this problem, which is recurrent in small samples. The autocorrelation test of Arellano and Bond (1991) leads to the rejection of the autocorrelation hypothesis.

Hansen's test reveals for all estimates that the instruments used in this work are valid. Indeed, the probabilities of this test are all above the critical threshold of 10%. Moreover, Hansen's test of difference validates the identification process carried out in this model. As for the Fisher test, it is significant at the 1% threshold for all the models. This result implies that at least one of the independent variables significantly explains income inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. The lagged value of order 1 of the Gini index, for example, proves to be significant at 1% on all three tables. A result that confirms that of Mpabe Bodjongo (2017). This result means that income inequalities generate income inequalities. The higher they are in period t-1, the higher they are in period t. It is therefore a vicious circle for the populations of the countries in this region.

The analysis of tables 2, 3 and 4 reveals that an increase in women's economic, political and social capabilities cannot significantly reduce income inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa. They do produce negative effects, but these negative effects are not significant. This result is consistent with the literature developed above that explains the difficulties women face in their empowerment process. Even with more freedom, they still face wage inequalities, poor working conditions and are still bound by their household chores (Adema and Thévenon, 2016). The access to more autonomy may not be beneficial for them and their households.

Table 2. Results with economic capabilities

Variables	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini
L.Gini	1.061***	0.980***	1.076***	1.039***	0.978***	0.976***	1.032***	1.004***
	(0.00381)	(0.0116)	(0.0288)	(0.00665)	(0.0165)	(0.00669)	(0.00674)	(0.00977)
Female informal employment	0.0144***	0.0134**	0.0143***	0.00663***	0.0172***	0.00104	0.0183***	0.00513
	(0.000768)	(0.00524)	(0.00381)	(0.00176)	(0.00347)	(0.00237)	(0.00186)	(0.00576)
Female self-employment	-0.00207*	-0.0139			-0.0193***	-0.00163	-0.00587**	-0.00184
	(0.00114)	(0.00805)			(0.00605)	(0.00213)	(0.00255)	(0.00322)
Female unemployment		0.00703**		0.0118***		0.0157***		0.00797**
		(0.00294)		(0.000408)		(0.00158)		(0.00353)
Female economic capabilities			-0.0606	-0.0182	-0.0528	-0.0405	-0.0619	-0.0193
			(0.0606)	(0.0352)	(0.0509)	(0.0368)	(0.0385)	(0.0261)
Female self-employment*Female economic capabilities							-0.00272***	-0.00212***
							(0.000324)	(0.000251)
C	-3.855***	0.774	-4.677**	-2.514***	1.035	0.978**	-2.322***	-0.430
	(0.175)	(0.712)	(1.686)	(0.368)	(0.955)	(0.401)	(0.369)	(0.640)
Obs	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Countries	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Fisher	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
AR(1)	0.315	0.318	0.319	0.311	0.325	0.318	0.317	0.317
AR(2)	0.317	0.317	0.309	0.311	0.312	0.313	0.318	0.302
Hansen	0.812	0.653	0.486	0.915	0.993	0.932	0.534	0.975
GMM instruments for levels								
Hansen test excluding group	0.738	0.876	0.841	0.863	1.000	0.955	0.321	1.000
Difference (null H = exogenous)	0.632	0.282	0.250	0.726	0.676	0.638	0.537	0.946
iv(years, eq(diff))								
Hansen test excluding group	0.613	0.553	0.947	0.862	0.969	0.893	0.414	0.584
Difference (null H = exogenous)	1.000	1.000	0.130	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.810	1.000
Instruments	12	14	9	14	15	17	12	14

***Source**: Author, with Stata. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.*

The solution, as these results show, may be self-employment. Self-employment offers more flexibility to combine the pursuit of motherhood, both for single mothers and married women, with employment. In addition, it is an escape from the harassment of employers that women often experience. Another positive point is that women's self-employment contributes to the reduction of unemployment. Thus, if an increase in self-employment is combined with an increase in women's economic and social capabilities, it could contribute to a significant decrease in income inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although on the social side (see table 4), this result is somewhat nuanced and reflects the latent character of institutions to adjust. The place of women in society has certainly evolved and continues to evolve, but it is still precarious. Table 1 reveals that women's social empowerment is least effective in Sub-Saharan Africa. This makes it the most difficult dimension to take shape and produce beneficial effects in the fight against income inequality.

As for political capabilities (see table 3), it still does not produce significant effects, even when accompanied by an increase in self-employment. Admittedly, the link is quite weak and must require other channels. Indeed, for political capabilities to affect income inequality, women's self-employment is not necessarily the most appropriate channel. Moreover, women's political empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa is still in its infancy and its impacts on income inequality are still quite small. Measures such as quotas for women in parliaments (Duflo, 2012) are having some effect, but unfortunately still quite small. Women probably still need time to become more aware of this aspect and to reap its full benefits. In empowering themselves, they are primarily interested in having access to education, health, more rights within their households and access to the labor market. Since these prerequisites are not yet fully achieved, they are struggling to rush to the political arena and benefit from it.

Table 3. Results with political capabilities

Variables	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini
L.Gini	1.076***	1.047***	0.991***	1.011***	0.984***	0.971***
	(0.0136)	(0.0133)	(0.00426)	(0.00776)	(0.00558)	(0.0163)
Female informal employment	0.00556***	0.00865***	0.00904***	0.0113**	0.0114***	0.00623
	(0.00117)	(0.00159)	(0.00179)	(0.00478)	(0.00153)	(0.00910)
Female self-employment			-0.0113***	-0.0101	-0.0141**	-0.00730
			(0.00313)	(0.00673)	(0.00578)	(0.0268)
Female unemployment		0.00990**		0.00789**		0.0195*
		(0.00344)		(0.00351)		(0.00934)
Female political capabilities	-0.0942	-0.439	-0.0651	-0.228	-0.188	-0.343
	(0.220)	(0.363)	(0.0935)	(0.311)	(0.111)	(0.236)
Female self-employment*Female political capabilities					-3.75e-05	-0.00360
					(0.00193)	(0.0124)
C	-3.819***	-1.925***	0.604	-0.278	1.272*	2.417
	(0.721)	(0.468)	(0.443)	(0.675)	(0.647)	(1.660)
Obs	39	39	39	39	39	39
Countries	17	17	17	17	17	17
Fisher	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
AR(1)	0.310	0.314	0.318	0.322	0.318	0.320
AR(2)	0.319	0.315	0.317	0.321	0.317	0.319
Hansen	0.553	0.724	0.557	0.773	0.412	0.965
GMM instruments for levels						
Hansen test excluding group	0.111	0.670	0.295	0.946	0.262	1.000
Difference (null H = exogenous)	0.922	0.566	0.652	0.557	0.435	0.452
iv(years, eq(diff))						
Hansen test excluding group	0.506	0.622	0.418	0.741	0.539	0.942
Difference (null H = exogenous)	0.404	1.000	0.611	0.516	0.154	1.000
Instruments	8	13	11	13	12	19

***Source**: Author, with Stata. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.*

The results also show that an increase in women's employment in the informal sectors increases income inequality in the region. This result is understandable, since employees in the informal sector are often underpaid or not paid at all. They have no social protection or insurance. Moreover, in the case of women, they are involved in small activities such as selling small necessities, the returns on which are only mediocre (Ngono, 2021a). This is in addition to the fact that they are involved in unpaid activities within their households (Pathak et al. 2013). Moreover, we observe that rising unemployment accentuates income inequalities. Women's lack of access to the labor market deprives the household of an additional source of income that could be

instrumental in moving from poor to "non-poor" status. Moreover, women's unemployment reflects an unused labor force to create more wealth for the country to dispose of during redistribution.

Table 4. Results with social capabilities

Variables	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini	Gini
L.Gini	1.021***	0.916***	0.838***	1.132***	0.845***
	(0.215)	(0.0132)	(0.0136)	(0.0109)	(0.255)
Female self-employment		-0.00850***	-0.00578*	-0.00293	0.0410
		(0.00300)	(0.00327)	(0.00624)	(0.0396)
Female unemployment	0.00739	0.0108**	0.0690***		0.109
	(0.107)	(0.00422)	(0.00503)		(0.144)
Female social capabilities	-0.0739		-0.00254	0.0350	-0.118
	(0.113)		(0.0247)	(0.0227)	(0.650)
Female self-employment*Female social capabilities				-0.000692**	-0.000499
				(0.000310)	(0.0107)
C	-1.023	4.272***	6.926***	-5.591***	2.782
	(8.957)	(0.776)	(0.735)	(0.658)	(8.804)
Obs	392	754	392	392	392
Countries	37	42	37	37	37
Fisher	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
AR(1)	0.036	0.003	0.316	0.002	0.921
AR(2)	0.389	0.140	0.104	0.915	0.932
Hansen	0.975	0.444	0.762	0.374	0.998
GMM instruments for levels					
Hansen test excluding group	0.729	0.535	0.560	0.559	0.794
Difference (null H = exogenous)	0.947	0.189	1.000	0.117	0.998
iv(years, eq(diff))					
Hansen test excluding group	0.949	0.646	0.711	0.302	0.996
Difference (null H = exogenous)	0.716	0.272	0.680	0.641	0.836
Instruments	8	36	35	32	13

***Source**: Author, with Stata. *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. The availability of data on female social capabilities and informal employment made it impossible to control the model with informal employment.*

Conclusion

The objective of our study was to analyze the effect of women's empowerment on income inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa. This was done in two main points. First, theoretically, we found that empowering women can produce very good results in society and in the women in particular. Then empirically, we mobilized data on 47 countries between 1981 and 2017. We used a system GMM to deal the problem of endogeneity posed by the model. It appeared that no dimension of women's empowerment significantly succeeds in reducing income inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa In particular with regard to the social and political dimensions which reveal a latent character and are struggling to take off. Indeed, this study finds that even by including the self-employment of women, these dimensions struggle to contribute to the reduction of income inequalities. In terms of economic empowerment, it emerged that when it goes hand in hand with women's self-employment, it is an undeniable asset in the fight against income inequalities. Female unemployment and informal employment have also been shown to increase income inequalities in the region. These two aspects penalize the economy as a whole, since the absence of women in production is an unused or underexploited workforce. Our findings suggest that more effort needs to be made to implement women's empowerment. Social and political aspects,

for example, are still at insignificant levels. Institutions, especially the formal ones, must fully play their role in this regard through legislations for example. Moreover, the economic empowerment and self-employment of women remain for the moment the best assets in the hands of decision-makers and they must work to give them greater dynamism. This can be done by promoting the transition of women from the informal sector to the formal sector through the fight against discrimination, based on gender, in the labor market. Such a measure would also be favorable to a reduction in unemployment among women.

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Table 5. List of countries

Angola	Cote d'Ivoire	Madagascar	Seychelles
Benin	Djibouti	Malawi	Sierra Leone
Botswana	Equatorial Guinea	Mali	Somalia
Burkina Faso	Ethiopia	Mauritania	South Africa
Burundi	Gabon	Mauritius	South Sudan
Cameroon	Gambia	Mozambique	Sudan
Cape Verde	Ghana	Namibia	Tanzania
Central African Republic	Guinea	Niger	Togo
Chad	Guinea-Bissau	Nigeria	Uganda
Comoros	Kenya	Rwanda	Zambia
Democratic Republic of Congo	Lesotho	Sao Tome and Principe	Zimbabwe
Republic of Congo	Liberia	Senegal	

***Source**: author.*