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ACEIR is a research centre of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). With country partners in eastern, western and southern Africa, ACEIR aims to contribute to deep, multidimensional and interdisciplinary understandings of inequality in each country context, and a continental and global understanding of how inequalities can be overcome.



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WELCOME TO ACEIR'S FIRST NEWS BULLETIN

JUNE 2019

Seven of the world's 10 most unequal countries are located in Africa – this while the continent's population is bound to take a rapidly rising share of the world's population in the next 30 years. Understanding Africa's inequality dynamics, therefore, is a key

For this reason, the African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research (ACEIR) was launched in 2018 to contribute to deep, multidimensional and interdisciplinary understandings of inequality in the context of participating countries, and a continental and global understanding of how inequalities can be overcome. ACEIR is one of the 13 centres of excellence being established by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). The ACEIR hub is hosted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) and (initial) nodes are based at the University of Ghana, Legon; the University of Nairobi; and UCT.

This first news bulletin reflects on the work to date, which includes the process of setting up a central data hub for ACEIR researchers and collaborators; building nodes' capacity to host regional data centres; and various node-specific studies to produce – among others – country profiles on inequality.

We also share news of the first ACEIR working paper that is available online alongside relevant media articles, and encourage readers to follow us on various social media platforms.



ACEIR SETS SIGHTS ON DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The potential contribution of the African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research to evidence that will inform Africa's progress towards achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals has received a substantial boost. This comes as each of the 13 ARUA centres were invited to submit multi-million pound funding proposals to support capacity building and partnerships. The funding is made available through ARUA's partnership with the Global Challenges Research Fund, funded by UK Research and Innovation, and will channel £20 million to the ARUA centres.

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THE ACEIR MODEL

The African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research is configured as a hub-and-spoke model. The University of Cape Town hosts the hub, as well as the South African node, with two strong research centres based at the nodes at the University of Ghana, Legon and the University of Nairobi respectively. The research groups and members of the three research nodes bring together internationally eminent African scholars who are influential researchers in their country contexts and have excellent research connections to their respective national statistical offices.

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ADDRESSING THE DATA CHALLENGE

Given the current frailties of African data, a foundation of ACEIR's work in each node is getting the data right. This will require frontier data scholarship and holds great possibilities for capacity development across the continent. Plans are underway to support ACEIR partners and its network to create their own data hubs. Leading this work is Prof. Martin Wittenberg and colleagues at DataFirst, based at the University of Cape Town.

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PUBLICATIONS

The first ACEIR working paper is available online.

Clementi, F., Fabiani, M., Molini, V., & Zizzamia, R. (2019). *Worlds Apart: What polarization measures reveal about sub-Saharan Africa's growth and welfare distribution in the last two decades*. African Centre of Excellence for Inequality Research (ACEIR) Working Paper, No. 1.

Abstract

Sub-Saharan Africa's (SSA) development path over the past two decades has been characterised by sluggish poverty reduction alongside robust economic growth. While in this context we would expect inequality to increase, standard synthetic measures provide little evidence of a generalisable uptick in inequality over this period. We argue that the standard empirical toolkit available to development economists working on SSA has limited our ability to understand the role that distributional change plays in the persistence and reproduction of poverty on the continent. For this reason, we propose that supplementing inequality measures with the analysis of polarisation provides a cleaner distributional lens through which to make sense of SSA's poverty performance during this period of growth. Applying polarisation measures to comparable survey data from 24 sub-Saharan African countries, we find that there has been a generalisable increase in polarisation over the past two decades – and in particular, an increased concentration of households in the lower tail of the relative distribution. That this inegalitarian trend is overlooked when using standard synthetic inequality measures confirms our hypothesis that our current toolkit represents a technical bottleneck to understanding the effects of distributional trends on poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa – and that polarisation analysis may help overcome this.

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IN THE NEWS

[ARUA centres of excellence to benefit from £20m UK grant](#)

University World News, 201 May 2019

[16 African universities receive £20m UK grant for research](#)

Graphic Online, 15 May 2019

[South Africa is the world's most unequal country. 25 years of freedom have failed to bridge the divide](#)

CNN Online, 10 May 2019

[Celebrating Africa Month](#)

UCT News, 7 May 2019

[Tackling the world's big problems](#)

University of Leeds News, 30 April 2019



PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD

We are encouraging our readers across the continent to share the news about the establishment of ACEIR with colleagues and associates. They can be referred to an online form to sign up for future news from the Centre.

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