For two days in August, Wits Business School (WBS) will host a vibrant and robust debate on the status of Africa's economic development. Under the theme of "Inequality and Poverty in Africa: The African Review of Economics and Finance (AREF) Conference 2018" brought together around 90 top scholars and policy makers from around the continent and the rest of the world.

WBS's Academic Director Professor Paul Alagidede, who chaired the conference, was excited to host the AREF conference to South Africa for the first time. “It was a coup for WBS to host the prestigious AREF conference, just prior to marking the 50th anniversary of our School,” says Alagidede.

“Every generation struggles to come to terms with the contradictions and develop new thinking that varies strongly from country to country. What is growth and domestic resource mobilisation in Africa. Woolard investigated the dynamics of inequality, back to the resurgence of growth in the 1990s and Professor Ingrid Woolard, the Dean of Economic and Financial Management Sciences and Professor of Economics at Stellenbosch University. Fosu took delegates back to the emergence of growth in the 1990s and examined the progress made on poverty, while WUBS's postgraduate experience of inequality and domestic growth and domestic mobilisation in Africa. “Growth is happening in Africa, albeit slowly, and overwhelmingly from country to country. What is disturbing is that the growth that has been celebrated is also the cause of the unequal distribution of wealth and income on the continent," comments Alagidede. “It has never been more pressing that we interrogate these contradictions and develop new thinking that will ensure that future economic growth results in a fundamental closing of the yawning inequality gap.”

**PROFILE: PROFESSOR FRANKLIN OBEONG-ODOMO**

**OBEONG-ODOMO with Franklin Obeong-Obem, Associate Professor/Development Studies at Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science, University of Helsinki, Finland**

1. Where did you grow up, and what or whom inspired your career path?

I grew up in Ghana where I was raised by my grandpa, a judge of the High Court of Ghana who, among other things, was also the choirmaster of the Ghana Methodist Church. Growing up in Ghana when the Ghanaian economy was a recession in a house of a judge strongly inflected in me my values and interests. I saw the resilience of land and people in the face of the challenges of urban development and urban decay. Being born in a family that also had my family to care for us. We lived in the city both in the city where we resided, and a village where we come from. We also worked in urban informal economies, so our household income was a mixture of my grandpa’s earnings from the formal economy, and the earnings of other family members —including my grandma — in the informal economy. Growing up in the house of a judge made questions of justice very important to me – but this justice was not simply juridical. My grandpa also settled community, church, and family disputes with a keen sense of social purpose and social cohesion.

2. What are your research interests and expertise in the field of economics?

Yes: Africa’s economies are based on peculiarities and conditions unique to the political-economic context of Africa, but answering these questions and their no better place to ask these questions than in South Africa where there is such an intense debate between race, gender, and class and income and wealth.

3. How do you wish to see the upcoming young African economics graduates’ academic future?

Webs Business School Academic Director, Professor Paul Alagidede at the AREF conference last week

**My hope is that these young economics graduates will continue to explore the field of political economy in Australia, to take a PhD with him at the Department of Political Economy at the University of Sydney in Australia. It was during this time that I broadened my study of urban economics to urban political economy, the political economy of natural resources, and the political economy of development. I was lucky to study at the University of Sydney because I met with a top critical economic education that would prepare me to appreciate but, ultimately, transcend orthodoxy and even heterodox economics. I was freed from the prison of economics. I became a political economist.**

**Delegates at the 2018 African Review of Economics and Finance conference held at the Wits Business School last week**

**Wits Business School Senior Lecturer Dr Osei Odei Mensah**

6. Do you have any advice or ‘words of wisdom’ for upcoming young African economics graduates/academics?

Yes: Africa’s economies are based on peculiarities and conditions unique to the political-economic context of Africa, but answering these questions and their no better place to ask these questions than in South Africa where there is such an intense debate between race, gender, and class and income and wealth.

**Wits Business School Senior Lecturer Dr Osei Odei Mensah**

5. What outcomes do you hope to see from the AREF conference?

Not only is the AREF conference a path for academic advancement and networking, but it also attracts policy-wise we had central bankers, advisers to the Presidency of Ghana, churches, and family disputes with a keen sense of social purpose and social cohesion. So, in determining my career path, I was gauging the periods when government is in a state of crisis, or any period of departure from a point of arrival. This background influenced my choice of university study, land economy, which they view is as just and fair as the economy, that emphasises economics, law, and environment. In Land Economy, we were exposed to the work of prominent economists, a judge of the High Court of Ghana who also helped my family to care for us. We lived in the city both in the city where we resided, and a village where we come from. We also worked in urban informal economies, so our household income was a mixture of my grandpa’s earnings from the formal economy, and the earnings of other family members –including my grandma — in the informal economy. Growing up in the house of a judge made questions of justice very important to me – but this justice was not simply juridical. My grandpa also settled community, church, and family disputes with a keen sense of social purpose and social cohesion. So, in determining my career path, I was gauging the periods when government is in a state of crisis, or any period of departure from a point of arrival. This background influenced my choice of university study, land economy, which they view is as just and fair as the economy, that emphasises economics, law, and environment. In Land Economy, we were exposed to the work of prominent economists,