SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES AMIDST A GLOBAL TRIPLE THREAT OF CONFLICTS, COVID-19, AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

POST-COLONIAL REGIONS

PART 4

Editors:
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Socioeconomic Challenges Amidst a Global Triple Threat of Conflicts, COVID-19, and Climate Change:

Post-Colonial Regions

(*Part 4*)

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FOREWORD

British colonialism shared core features across regions, most notably economic extraction, export-oriented economies, and governance structures designed to serve the metropole. It was also a mutually constitutive system, shaping both Britain's global power and the institutional, social, and economic trajectories of colonized societies. Despite its exploitative nature, it left enduring legacies such as legal frameworks, bureaucratic systems, infrastructure, and the widespread use of the English language. These common institutional inheritances continue to influence governance and development patterns across former colonies. However, colonial models varied significantly—settler colonialism in Australia, indirect and extractive rule in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and mandate-based geopolitical control in the Middle East—creating distinct structural foundations at independence. As a result, post-colonial trajectories diverged sharply across regions. Australia transitioned into a stable, affluent democracy but continues to confront deep-rooted Indigenous inequalities and unresolved historical injustices. The Middle East, shaped by artificial borders and strategic fragmentation, has experienced persistent instability, authoritarian governance, and recurring conflict. In Africa, extraction-driven colonial rule and arbitrarily drawn borders left a legacy of ethnic fragmentation—often forcing incompatible groups into single administrative units—along with political instability and enduring neo-colonial economic dependence. SSA countries, burdened by extractive institutions and arbitrary boundaries, faces ongoing challenges of weak state capacity, economic dependency, and complex ethnic-national divisions. Together, these patterns highlight how shared colonial foundations produced uneven and region-specific post-colonial outcomes.

Australia, the largest island on Earth, has an economy that remains strong, ranking as the 15th largest globally in 2025 with a nominal GDP of $1.8 trillion. It is supported by high GDP per capita, relatively low government debt compared to G7 peers, and strong employment-driven tax revenues. However, it faces notable headwinds, including persistent inflation, high living costs, tight labor markets, housing and household debt pressures, and a 2025–26 budget deficit exceeding $36 billion. This deficit is driven by disaster-related "unavoidable" spending, election commitments, rising interest costs, and weaker-than-expected commodity revenues. Australia is facing mounting economic pressure from both climate change and escalating global conflicts that are reshaping inflation, trade, and growth dynamics. Climate-related shocks are driving higher inflation through volatile food and energy prices, surging insurance premiums, and declining agricultural productivity. Extreme weather events are also causing increasing infrastructure damage, with projected GDP losses exceeding $19 billion by 2030 and long-term risks to labor productivity. The 2022 Ukraine war intensified global inflation, pushing up energy and food prices, disrupting supply chains, and forcing rapid interest rate hikes, even as Australia benefited from higher energy export revenues. The 2023–2024 Red Sea crisis has further raised logistics costs, delayed trade flows, and increased import-driven inflation. Ongoing Middle East tensions, particularly around Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, are amplifying risks of fuel price spikes, recessionary pressure, and additional supply chain instability. Meanwhile, US–China strategic rivalry is creating dual pressures on Australia's economy by threatening exports like iron ore, coal, and LNG during Chinese slowdowns while opening opportunities in critical minerals, including an $8.5 billion US-backed investment deal in October 2025 to reduce China's 90% dominance in processing. The chapter on Australia details how overlapping shocks from COVID-19, global conflicts, and climate extremes severely strained the nation's socioeconomic stability, triggering sharp GDP contraction, massive fiscal spending, and rising unemployment that hit vulnerable groups hardest. It further shows how global conflicts fueled inflation and trade instability, while climate extremes intensified health risks, infrastructure damage, and agricultural losses, deepening inequality and financial stress. The chapter concludes that these intersecting crises eroded public health systems, exacerbated mental health challenges, and exposed structural weaknesses in Australia's resilience.

Sub-Saharan Africa, comprising 49 countries across the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, is home to more than one in seven people globally—yet it accounts for two-thirds of those living in extreme poverty, with the World Bank estimating that nearly half its population survives on minimal income. By the end of 2024, over 45 million Africans were forcibly displaced—more than one-third of the global total—while the region below Sahara hosts nearly half of the world's internally displaced people. It also bears a disproportionate burden of infectious diseases, including endemic, emerging, and re-emerging vector-borne diseases. These challenges are compounded by frequent climate-related disasters, weak infrastructure—evident in countries such as Chad, South Sudan, Malawi, and Liberia, where electricity access remains below 10%—and deep rural-urban disparities. Persistent political instability, high unemployment, severe debt distress, and acute food insecurity further intensify socioeconomic vulnerability. Widely regarded as having one of the most complex conflict landscapes globally, the region has become a central hub of violent extremism and protracted, overlapping crises. Nearly half of the world's fragile and conflict-affected states are located here, eroding social cohesion and constraining economic growth, with 28 state-based conflicts recorded in 2024—almost double the number a decade earlier. The analysis on SSA region shows that COVID-19, global and internal conflicts—especially the Russia-Ukraine war—and climate extremes have collectively strained its economies, driving GDP declines, inflation, and rising food insecurity while overwhelming fragile healthcare systems and informal sectors. These overlapping shocks have hit low-income groups, youth, and women the hardest, intensified migration and mental health pressures, and exposed deep structural weaknesses such as import dependency and weak governance. As a result, inequality has widened, recovery remains constrained by debt and limited policy capacity, and the region's long-term development prospects are increasingly at risk.

Ghana, the first sub-Saharan country to gain independence in 1957, presents a complex economic trajectory shaped by resilience and structural vulnerabilities over time. Following commercial oil production beginning in 2010–2011, the country experienced strong foreign exchange inflows that bolstered the currency but reduced competitiveness in agriculture and manufacturing. By 2022–2023, Ghana faced a severe debt crisis, yet entered a recovery phase with real GDP growth projected between 4.8% and 5.9%, including a notable 5.8% expansion in the first half of 2024, driven largely by a services sector contributing over half of economic growth. Environmental degradation from illegal mining has significantly impacted agriculture, especially cocoa production, while also reducing tax revenues. However, by mid-2025, persistent challenges remained, including high public debt requiring restructuring, inflation consistently above targets, and ongoing currency volatility, compounded by rising living costs that have increased urban poverty and suppressed consumption. External shocks—particularly the Russia-Ukraine war—intensified inflationary pressures, depreciated the currency, and raised energy and transportation costs despite domestic oil production, while also constraining access to key agricultural inputs such as fertilizer. Additional strain emerged during 2023–2024 from global shipping disruptions in the Red Sea, further elevating import costs and exchange rate instability. Looking ahead, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East pose risks of renewed energy price shocks, potentially slowing growth and weakening macroeconomic stability. Trade dynamics have shifted notably, with Asia accounting for nearly half of Ghana's trade by 2025, China remaining its largest partner with bilateral trade reaching \$11.8 billion in 2024 (a 7% year-on-year increase), and the UAE rising as a key export destination. Meanwhile, evolving US–China trade policies have unevenly benefited sub-Saharan economies, with Ghana seeing rising oil and gas exports, while still relying on

U.S. bilateral assistance—amounting to approximately $138–149 million annually between 2022 and 2025—to support economic development, trade, and regional stability. Analysis on Ghana's socioeconomic challenges as the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and worsening climate stress, which disrupted growth, increased poverty, and exposed structural weaknesses. These overlapping shocks drove inflation, weakened agriculture and public finances, and deepened reliance on imports. As a result, Ghana faces persistent debt, unemployment, and food insecurity, with recovery constrained by ongoing economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region occupies a pivotal geostrategic position linking Europe, Asia, and Africa, anchored by critical maritime choke points—the Suez Canal, Bab al-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, and Strait of Gibraltar—that together support over 70% of global maritime trade. It remains a cornerstone of global energy, holding roughly half of the world's oil and natural gas reserves, giving it an influence that rivals major powers like the United States and China in trade and energy terms. Yet this strategic strength is offset by stark internal inequality, as a persistent "two-speed" economic structure concentrates more than half of total income among the top 10% in oil-rich states—compared to about one-third in Europe—while fragile and conflict-affected countries face deep poverty and structural constraints, a divide projected to persist through 2026. Climate change intensifies these vulnerabilities, with severe water scarcity, extreme heat, and dependence on climate-sensitive agriculture reducing crop yields by up to 30–40%, threatening food security, and accelerating migration pressures. Gulf countries—including Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia—import up to 90% of their food due to environmental limitations, heightening exposure to global supply shocks. The Ukraine war has compounded regional instability by disrupting food supplies, raising energy costs for importers, and reducing tourism revenues, disproportionately impacting low- and middle-income oil-importing nations such as Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen, while benefiting oil exporters unevenly. The Red Sea crisis further strained economies by sharply reducing maritime revenues, particularly for Egypt, while increasing insurance costs, supply chain disruptions, inflation, and financial risks across import-dependent states. Simultaneously, ongoing regional conflicts have disrupted trade routes, energy exports, and tourism, raising the risk of recession and deepening instability in vulnerable economies. In response, MENA countries are strategically leveraging intensifying US–China competition to diversify partnerships, attract investment, and expand economic autonomy, with states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE engaging China's BRI project while maintaining ties with the United States. However, this balancing act introduces new geopolitical risks, as great-power rivalry may amplify regional security tensions even as it creates economic opportunity. The chapter on MENA region highlights how overlapping shocks from ongoing global and regional crises disrupted growth, intensified poverty and food insecurity, and widened inequalities, particularly affecting women, youth, and informal workers. At the same time, war-related disruptions and accelerating environmental stress have strained already fragile economies, increased displacement, and further undermined social stability across much of the region. Notably, the World Bank places Pakistan and Afghanistan in the MENAAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) grouping—with the shift taking effect around July 2025; since this book was developed in 2022–24 and focuses largely on pre–July 2025 conditions, it retains the earlier classification.

Therefore, post-colonial regions share common socioeconomic challenges amid contemporary global shocks, which together intensify inequality, inflation, and structural fragility across otherwise diverse economies. At the same time, their trajectories diverge markedly: Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of MENA struggle with conflict, poverty, and weak state capacity; Ghana reflects a mixed case of resource-driven growth constrained by debt and volatility; while Australia represents a high-income, stable system still exposed to climate, cost-o-

-living, and external trade shocks. Studying these contrasts deepens understanding of how inherited structures interact with present-day crises to shape unequal development outcomes and varying capacities for resilience. It also points toward the need for governance and development strategies that are historically aware, structurally sensitive, and capable of addressing both global interconnected risks and region-specific vulnerabilities.

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PREFACE

This book opens with a rethinking of post-colonial regions not as isolated national stories, but as interconnected outcomes of shared historical structures that continue to shape contemporary socioeconomic realities. Across territories once shaped by British colonial rule, economies still reflect inherited patterns of extraction, uneven institutional development, and externally oriented growth, now compounded by modern shocks such as climate change, pandemics, and geopolitical instability. Yet these shared pressures do not produce uniform outcomes: Australia's post-colonial trajectory reflects a consolidated high-income system that, while institutionally stable and globally integrated, is increasingly exposed to structural pressures from climate volatility, rising living costs, and external trade and energy shocks that test the limits of its resilience. Sub-Saharan Africa represents a structurally constrained region where overlapping burdens of chronic poverty, political instability, displacement, weak infrastructure, and conflict interact with deep institutional fragilities, amplifying vulnerability to global economic and environmental disruptions. Within this broader context, Ghana illustrates a differentiated sub-national pathway, where resource-linked growth and trade diversification coexist with persistent fiscal stress, debt accumulation, currency volatility, and exposure to commodity and external price shocks. The MENA region, by contrast, occupies a geopolitically central but internally fragmented position, where strategic energy and trade significance is continually offset by entrenched inequality, environmental scarcity, and recurrent conflict-driven instability shaped by both regional dynamics and global power competition. These contrasts reveal that development is not a linear progression but a historically conditioned process where resilience is unevenly distributed and continually reshaped by both legacy structures and contemporary crises. Seen together, these regions illustrate how global shocks interact with inherited institutions to reproduce inequality while also generating differentiated capacities for adaptation. This comparative lens reframes development as a complex negotiation between history, geography, and global interdependence, rather than a uniform pathway toward prosperity

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Section 1 (Post-Colonial Regions)

CHAPTER 1

Examining the Ramifications of Global Challenges on Australia's Health and Economy

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Abstract: Australia's healthcare sector and economy have experienced substantial consequences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concurrently, ongoing global conflicts have presented additional hurdles for Australia, leading to energy and food crises, as well as inflationary pressures. Furthermore, Australia has faced a series of climate-related incidents, including bushfires, heatwaves, and extreme weather events, which have had severe ramifications on public health. These events have contributed to increased mortality rates, respiratory illnesses, mental health challenges, and substantial economic losses. Despite Australia's considerable strides in promoting equitable healthcare, inequities endure among different socioeconomic groups and indigenous populations, specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is crucial to address the social determinants of health and diminish inequalities in healthcare access and available resources to enhance equity. To overcome obstacles within the healthcare system, Australia can utilize the WHO's health system framework, which encompasses six fundamental building blocks: service delivery, health workforce, governance, health information, financing, medical products, and technologies. Through the implementation of appropriate tactics and the resolution of these obstacles, Australia can successfully alleviate the repercussions of these challenges and strive towards attaining health equity for all its population.

Keywords: Food crises, Health inequity, Health systems building blocks, Inflation, Job losses, Mental health challenges, Unemployment, Workforce shortage.

INTRODUCTION

Australia ranks as the sixth-largest country globally, following Russia, Canada, China, the USA, and Brazil (Fig. **1**). While mainland Australia stands as the world's largest island, it holds the distinction of being the smallest continent.

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According to the consensus among scientists and archaeologists, the initial human migration to Australia occurred between 50,000 and 65,000 years ago, originating from an external location. The nation is geographically segmented into six states and two territories. Australia was the third-largest contributor to the Commonwealth budget, as noted by the Australian High Commission in the United Kingdom. The healthcare system was recognized as one of the world's best, with registered health practitioners increasing by 22% from 2016 to 2021 and by 37% from 2013 to 2022 (Anderson *et al*., 2023; AIHW, 2024). As of November 2023, they comprised 6% of the workforce, with one in sixteen Australians employed in this sector as of November 2021 (AHPRA, 2023; AHPRA, 2021). Australia ranked first in equity and healthcare outcomes and second in administrative efficiency among eleven OECD countries (Schneider *et al*., 2021). The country excelled in providing affordable and timely care, ensuring quality, and engaging patients across income levels. Nonetheless, global events posed significant challenges to Australia's health sector and economy.

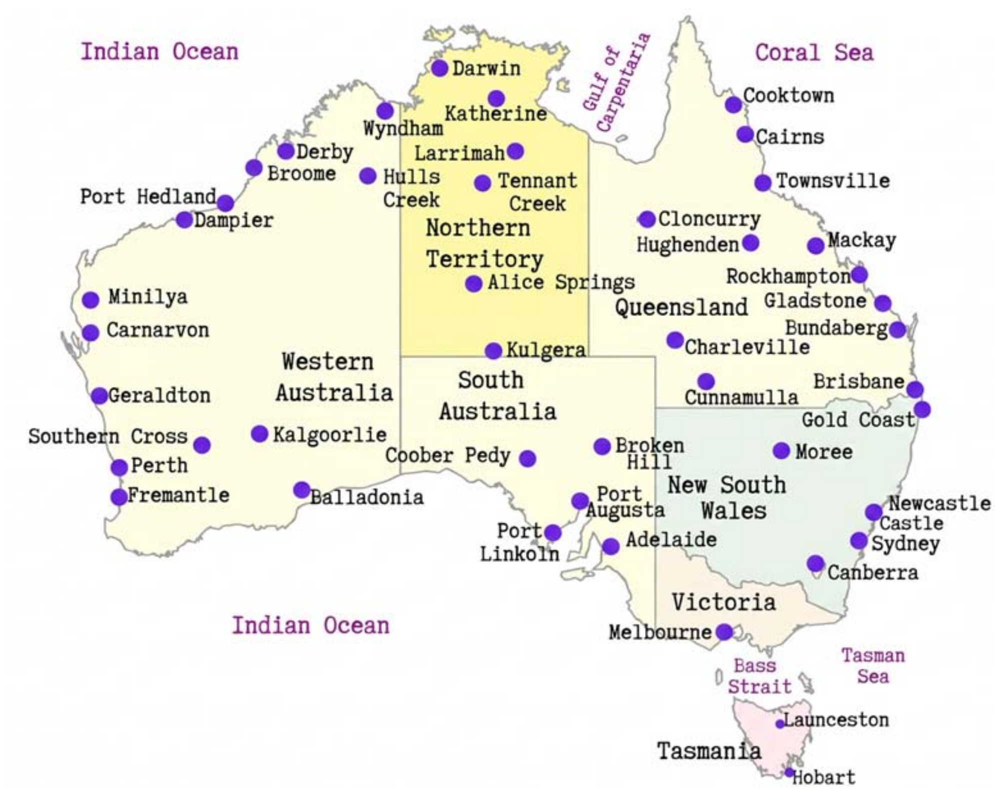

Fig. (1). The Commonwealth of Australia (author's own work using MapChart).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, persistent global conflicts, and climate change-related incidents on Australia's economy and healthcare delivery is evident. In 2022, Australia reported over seven million COVID-19 cases and 9,599 associated deaths, accounting for more than 1 in 20 of all deaths in the country (Storren, 2022). By April 2024, the total death toll had exceeded 24,000, with more than 11.8 million cases reported (Worldometer). The Actuaries Institute's Mortality Working Group estimated that there were 8,400 excess deaths in 2023, compared to almost 20,000 excess deaths in 2022. This resulted in an excess mortality rate of 5% for 2023, a decrease from 11% in 2022, based on provisional data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). COVID-19 related deaths decreased from 10,300 in 2022 to 4,600 in 2023, with COVID-19 specific deaths halving to 1,500. Of the 6,100 deaths involving COVID-19 in 2023, three-quarters were attributed to the virus, while the remaining quarter did not have COVID-19 mentioned on the death certificates (Actuaries Institute, 2024). Implementing widespread social and commercial restrictions due to the pandemic has caused significant disruptions to the health sector and the economy.

Concurrent global conflicts, particularly the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and the intensified Red Sea crisis, compounded by the Israel-Palestine conflict that deepened in 2024, have severely strained Australia's economy. The Ukraine war initially drove Australian natural gas and agricultural exports to record highs, culminating in a trade surplus of approximately $8.25 billion by September 2022, the fifth-highest on record. However, by June 2023, this conflict, combined with pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions, contributed to half to three-quarters of Australia's inflation spike, according to research by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) (Mizen, 2022; Kehoe, 2023). The Red Sea crisis, which escalated in July 2024 with increased Houthi attacks on shipping, had a significant impact on Australia. The nation's failure to deploy maritime assets to this strategically vital region disrupted its trade, particularly with Europe, its third-largest trading partner, and undermined its maritime security deterrence strategy (Parker, 2024). The OECD predicted that by May 2024, Australia would face the second largest projected national income decline globally, approximately $19.9 billion or 1.2% of GDP, if U.S.–China trade tensions escalated and led to a 10% reduction in bilateral trade flows. This projected decline was largely due to Australia's heavy reliance on China for mining exports, which comprised 80% of its mining exports and 26% of its total goods and services trade (Kehoe, 2024b). Also, the deterioration in the China-Australia bilateral relationship in 2020, triggered by Australia's ban on Huawei and tariffs on Chinese imports, resulted in Chinese trade restrictions on Australian exports such as coal and barley (Monzalsha *et al*., 2023). The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC), in a report commissioned by the Australia China Business Council (ACBC), found that in the financial year 2022-23, trade with China had increased Australian

CHAPTER 2

Synergistic Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Nexus of Pandemics, Conflicts, and Climate Change

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Abstract: Sub-Saharan Africa is characterized by a rich tapestry of diverse cultures and ways of life, yet it faces significant challenges such as diseases, conflicts, and the impact of climate change. The 2026 outlook was pessimistic, with growth holding at 4.1 percent, a slight decrease from 4.4 percent in 2025, as recovery momentum slowed due to rising conflict risks, higher fuel and fertilizer costs, and increasing debt pressures driven by geopolitical tensions and climate impacts. The wider region is home to more than two-thirds of the global extreme poor. Recent hardships, including climate-related disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing conflicts, have led to a surge in debt levels, reaching unprecedented heights. A glimmer of hope for economic recovery in the near future emerges from stabilization gains in 2025–2026, but this recovery remains fragile and faces new headwinds. Nevertheless, concerns persist, including high inflation rates, exchange rate pressures, debt vulnerabilities, and economic disparities. The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been profound, affecting the world's economy, healthcare systems, and overall living conditions, and Sub-Saharan Africa is no exception. Moreover, this region has seen a significant increase in armed conflicts, including major wars, resulting in substantial battle-related casualties. Climate change is exerting profound economic impacts on countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, evident in rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and recurrent extreme weather events. This comprehensive approach is crucial for building a sustainable and resilient future for the region.

Keywords: Child mortality, Energy crisis, Food insecurity, Foreign debt, GBV, FDI, Malnutrition, Poverty, Remittance, Unemployment, Violence.

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INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) encompasses countries south of the Sahara Desert, including those within the African Transition Zone (Fig. **1**). This zone, dividing the Sahara, encompasses much of SSA, which further breaks down into Central, East, West, and Southern Africa. The Horn of Africa lies at the eastern end and is often considered part of East Africa, while Madagascar, due to its distinct characteristics, stands apart. Surrounding Africa are the Indian Ocean to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, with notable features like the Cape of Good Hope. Additionally, several independent island nations, such as Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Seychelles, are associated with the region (Berglee, 2018).

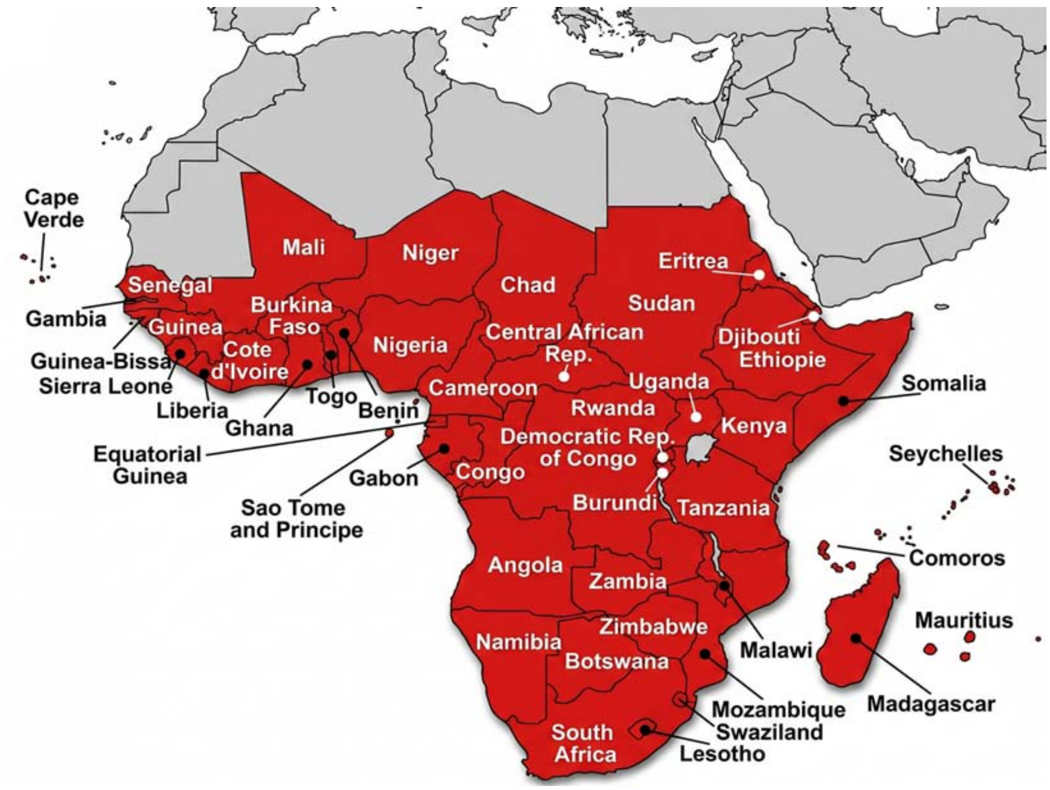

Fig. (1). Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa highlighted in red (Created with MapChart).

In SSA, a rich tapestry of diverse cultures and ways of life coexists, ranging from ancient traditions to more modern practices. Despite significant challenges such as disease, conflict, and climate change, the people of this region have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination. The region's substantial foreign debt, which rose from $5 billion in 1970 to over $171 billion in 1990, together with declining agricultural exports, has intensified structural economic pressures (Mabogunje, 1995). Public debt has increased since 2013, reaching around 60% of GDP in 2023, driven by commodity price shocks, COVID-19-related expenditures, and exchange rate volatility, resulting in uneven but widespread risks of over-indebtedness. Debt servicing burdens have more than doubled over the past decade, with interest and repayment obligations absorbing over 40% of government revenues in several countries. Although a systemic debt crisis is considered unlikely, elevated debt service-to-revenue ratios—around 18% in 2025—continue to constrain fiscal space, encouraging a gradual shift toward greater reliance on domestic borrowing (UNDP, 2025; Delepierre *et al*., 2026). COVID-19 sharply reduced global trade, with regional export values falling to about half of 2014 levels by 2020 and investment per capita remaining roughly 20% below 2014 levels due to the pandemic and the end of the commodity super-cycle. Conflicts and climate shocks further strained growth, with wars raising Brent crude from the low $70s to over $110 per barrel, disrupting trade routes, while climate impacts such as severe flooding affected 1.5 million people, displaced 170,000, and widened the adaptation financing gap to an estimated $310–365 billion annually by 2035, alongside worsening food insecurity and 62 million stunted children. The 2026 outlook was pessimistic, with growth holding at 4.1% (unchanged from 2025), revised down from 4.4% amid slowing recovery, rising conflict-related risks, and elevated fuel, fertilizer, and debt pressures driven by conflict and climate shocks. Inflation is expected to rise to 4.8% in 2026, reversing some disinflation gains, and debt vulnerabilities remain high, with half the region's countries at high risk of distress (World Bank, 2026). Efforts are underway in countries like Chad, Zambia, and Ghana to restructure their debts to enhance financial stability. The economic performance of major countries such as South Africa and Nigeria significantly affects the entire region. While elevated commodity prices may facilitate recovery, structural challenges and substantial debt burdens may impede South Africa's growth (World Bank, 2023a). Challenges in energy and transportation in South Africa, along with obstacles in Nigeria's oil sector, further complicate matters, and conflicts and political instabilities in nations like Sudan, Niger, and Gabon are anticipated to hinder growth in specific regions of SSA. As of 2022, SSA's GDP per capita exhibited significant disparities, ranging from approximately $238.4 in Burundi to well over $15,874.5 in the Seychelles, underscoring the substantial economic heterogeneity within the region (World Bank, 2023b).

As of 2023, SSA economies grappled with global challenges, including inflation triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, resulting in a downturn in economic growth. Despite this setback, there was a sense of hope for a resurgence in 2024, with anticipated improvements in growth across most countries. It is imperative to

CHAPTER 3

Unveiling the Dual Divide: Ghana's Struggle with Ongoing Global Crisis

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Abstract: Ghana, situated in West Africa, has felt the impacts of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The country's economy centers on key sectors such as oil and gas, agricultural diversification, and effective macroeconomic management. In 2019, the GDP stood at $67.08 billion, reflecting substantial foreign direct investment and drawing in trade partners like China, India, the US, the UK, and the European Union. The International Monetary Fund reports a notable dip in Ghana's real GDP growth, plummeting from 6.5% in 2019 to a mere 0.4% in 2020, largely due to the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although reported cases of COVID-19 have decreased, and no new COVID-19-related deaths have been recorded, the pandemic has taken a toll on the country's overall economic landscape. Ghana has grappled with health and socio-economic challenges, including a depreciating cedi, a shortage of dollars, and elevated living costs. The onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict has added to the strain on both the country's health infrastructure and its economic revival following the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, Ghana's reliance on imported goods outweighed its export capacity, leading to a deficit in its balance of payments. This, in turn, contributed to the economic contraction experienced in Ghana. Ghana confronts significant threats from climate change, with environmental degradation manifesting in the form of flooding, erosion, droughts, and extreme weather events. The depletion of forests, primarily driven by cocoa cultivation, underscores the urgency for climate action to avert impoverishment and safeguard household incomes.

Keywords: Catastrophic health costs, Currency devaluation, Food crisis, Foreign direct investment, Inflation, Poverty, Sustainability, Unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

Ghana is one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa and the world, with an average annual growth rate of about 7% between 2005 and 2019 (Fig. **1**). The

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main drivers of growth were the expansion of the oil and gas sector, the diversification of the agricultural sector, the development of the services sector, and the improvement of macroeconomic stability and governance.

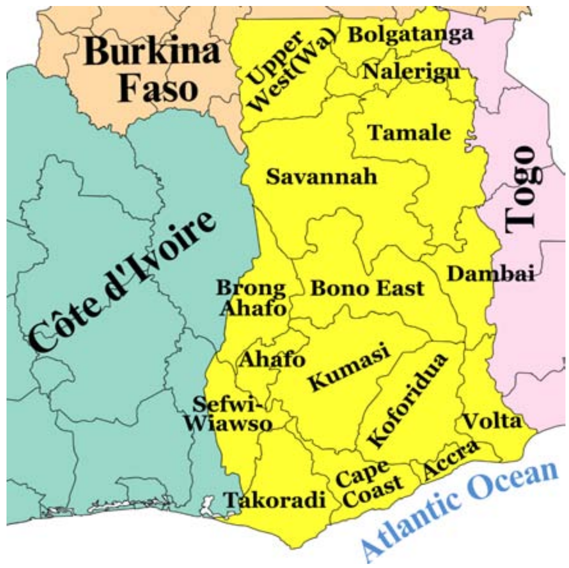

Fig. (1). The Republic of Ghana (authors own work using MapChart).

Sound economic management, including fiscal discipline, inflation control, and exchange rate stability, has fostered investor confidence and attracted FDI. The African country achieved lower-middle-income status (LMIC) in 2010 and graduated from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in 2004. According to the World Bank, Ghana's GDP and GDP per capita experienced slight declines between 2022 and 2023. In 2022, the country's GDP stood at \$77.59 billion, with a per capita income of \$2,445.39. By 2023, GDP decreased marginally to \$76.37 billion, accompanied by a reduction in per capita income to \$2,238.16. Ghana maintained strategic export-import dynamics, with China, India, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union remaining its leading trading partners. Gold, crude oil, and cocoa continued to dominate its export portfolio, accounting for over 80% of foreign exchange earnings, while capital goods, petroleum products, and food items comprised the bulk of imports (Boateng *et al*., 2022; CIA, 2022; World Bank, 2020; AfDB, 2022).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of the extreme poor lived in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and alarmingly, the share of poor people in the region increased by 9 million, according to a World Bank report from 2018. About 1.2 million people in Ghana were classified as food insecure, and an additional 2 million were considered vulnerable to food insecurity. Also, half of the nation's sixteen regions have poverty rates above the national average of 24.5% (Bukari *et al*., 2021; Onyango *et al*., 2023). Even before COVID-19, generally, only 58% of agribusiness firms had easy access to transportation, with as many as 42% reporting poor road networks and irregular transportation (UNDP, 2021).

The pandemic weakened demand and prices for Ghana's principal exports, particularly oil, cocoa, and gold. Ghana, the world's second-largest cocoa producer, recorded a five-year production low during the 2023–2024 crop season, with output falling to nearly half of the seasonal average of 800,000 tons, compared with the 2020/21 peak exceeding 1 million tons. The decline in cocoa output was largely linked to the conversion of cocoa farms into mining sites and the expansion of illegal small-scale gold mining activities, which destroyed extensive cocoa plantations. Additional contributing factors included adverse weather conditions, the spread of swollen shoot virus disease, and shortages alongside rising fertilizer costs, further intensified by the Russia–Ukraine conflict (Aboa, 2022; Beament, 2022; Siaw *et al*., 2023; Adombila, 2024c; Jabbi & Sawitri, 2025). Nevertheless, cocoa export earnings increased from $1.26 billion in 2023 to $1.7 billion, reflecting a 37.5% rise in revenue driven by elevated global prices and sustained international demand despite lower production volumes (GhanaWeb, 2025).

Ghana, Africa's leading gold producer, began commercial oil and gas production with the Jubilee field, aiming to double output by 2023 (Gidiglo *et al*., 2023). By April 2023, the nation produced 175,000 bpd, making it Africa's ninth-largest producer. From 2012 to 2021, production grew by 8.5% annually, but in 2020 it declined by 17.7% due to COVID-19 restrictions (Oxford Business Group, 2024a). Production increased by 10.7% in 2024, reversing a five-year decline, though it reached a five-year low in 2023, prompting plans to sell more exploration rights to fund energy transition efforts (Adombila, 2024a). The Ukraine war limited Ghana's oil sector windfall, exacerbating fiscal pressures, sustaining reliance on costly refined imports, and inflating production and living costs, despite an 80% surge in oil revenue in 2022 (Duho *et al*., 2022; Acheampong & Menyeh, 2022; Boapeah *et al*., 2024).

Studies reveal the multifaceted socioeconomic impacts of FDI, government expenditure, and revenue policies on Ghana's growth, inequality, and sectoral development. Gidiglo *et al*. (2023) noted that while FDI spurred growth across SSA, in Ghana, it eroded health and education services through tax exemptions, societal harm, and environmental degradation from mining. Mustapha *et al*. (2024) found that government expenditure and tax revenue shocks between 1996 and 2019 influenced growth, inequality, education, and exchange rates. Expenditure shocks modestly raised growth (0.009% per 1% shock in 2.5 years)

CHAPTER 4

MENA Region: Global Challenges and Local Implications

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Abstract: Countries in the Middle East and North Africa are regularly among those hosting the most refugees in the world. They are also among the most prolific source nations for people fleeing elsewhere. The region continues to face economic, political, and security challenges, and the needs of the internally displaced, refugees, and returnee populations remain high. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, limited work opportunities and low-productivity informal work played a significant role in increasing poverty and vulnerability in this region. Even the leadership changes brought about by the Arab Spring uprisings of more than ten years ago have not been able to dismantle the power structures that allow those in power to maintain their control and obstruct political integrity in the region, which is why authoritarianism is still a problem there. This has resulted in widespread civil unrest and violent conflict as people fight for their rights and to have their voices heard. Instability and power consolidation fuel political corruption, feeding the vicious cycle of authoritarianism, corruption, and conflict throughout the Arab world. In 2022, inflation, rising food prices, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 will exacerbate poverty and food insecurity across the Middle East and North Africa. The conflict in Ukraine has complicated the region's humanitarian situation even more. Food shortages were caused by disruptions in supply chains and imports, which raised the prices of basic commodities such as wheat, edible oils, and fuel.

Keywords: Child marriage, Civil unrest, Corruption, Fossil fuel supply, Refugee crisis, Unemployment, Water scarcity, Women's rights violation.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region spans a vast expanse from the Atlantic coast of Africa to the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan in Central Asia. Its geographical reach extends from the Mediterranean coastline in the north to the southern bounds of the Sahara Desert (Fig. **1**). Over the years, numerous

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countries within the MENA region have faced political uprisings, widespread protests, and armed conflicts, with some nations still embroiled in large-scale conflicts. Economically, MENA countries display considerable diversity. High-income oil exporters, such as those in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), stand in stark contrast to countries grappling with conflict, such as Yemen, and developing nations that are either oil importers, like Jordan, or developing oil exporters, like Iraq. The region's significant role in global energy production is underscored by the fact that, spurred by the global impact of the Ukraine war, hydrocarbon fuel exports account for a substantial portion of the total exports in several MENA countries: approximately 80% of Saudi Arabia's exports, 90% of Kuwait and Qatar's exports, and 95% of Algeria's exports (Asiri *et al*., 2022; Ebrahim, 2022; Lawson, 2022).

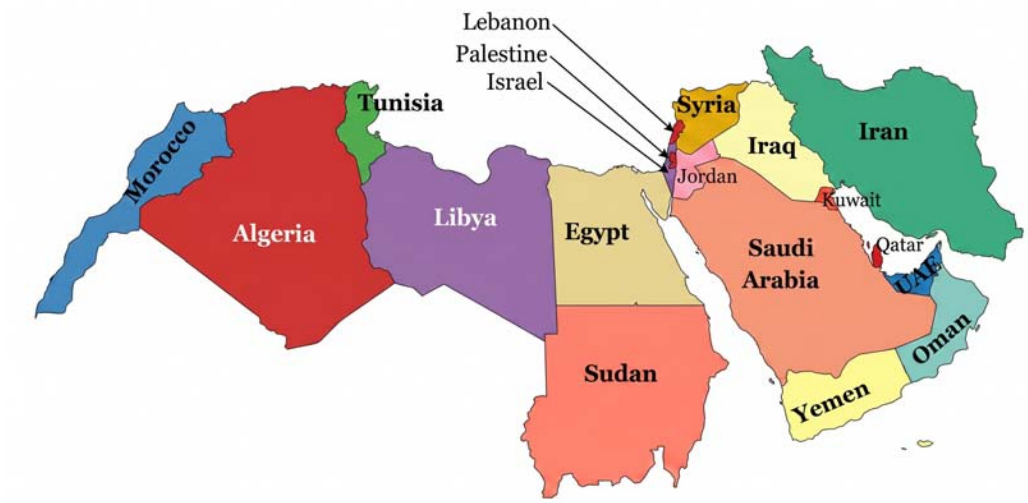

Fig. (1). Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region (Generated using MapChart). The MENA region, as depicted in this figure, is not strictly confined to a fixed set of countries. While the representation includes 19 countries commonly associated with the region, such as Algeria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, variations exist across studies. For instance, some analyses incorporate Mauritania, Türkiye, Bahrain, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. The World Population Review additionally includes Armenia and Azerbaijan, while certain World Bank studies also consider Djibouti. This diversity reflects the fluidity of regional classifications in various contexts.

Despite comprising just 6% of the global population, the MENA region harbors a disproportionate share of the world's food insecurity and undernourishment, with one in five people facing food insecurity and one in eight undernourished (Belhaj & Soliman, 2021; Mimoune & El Shehaby, 2023). Paradoxically, while contributing only 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, the region is poised to endure twice the global average rate of warming, potentially rendering some cities uninhabitable by the century's end (Rowsell, 2023). These intertwined crises underscore an urgent need for sustainable development strategies that balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental stewardship. Compounding these challenges, projections indicate that by the close of the 21st century, the region's population will surpass that of China and more than double Europe's (Hajat *et al*., 2023). This demographic surge necessitates a dramatic expansion of urban infrastructure, with urban land area expected to increase by 50% by 2050 to accommodate the growing populace (Corsi & Selod, 2023).

The Socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in the MENA region were profound, marked by a sharp rise in poverty and inequality, as highlighted by Hoogeveen & Lopez-Acevedo (2021), who identified a new group of "new poor" emerging from the pandemic's effects. The region also faced a contraction in GDP and significant job losses, with Haouas *et al*. (2021) estimating a 1.48% decrease in GDP per capita for every 1% increase in COVID-19 cases, alongside a $42 billion GDP loss and 1.7 million job losses in 2020. Vulnerabilities were exacerbated, particularly in oil markets, which disrupted economic stability and hindered progress on the SDGs. Naz *et al*. (2024) examined the growth of FinTech during this period, noting challenges such as cybercrimes, privacy concerns, and rising inequalities, but also identifying opportunities like employment growth and financial outreach. Katoue *et al*. (2022) underscored the strain on healthcare systems, revealing deficiencies in funding, surveillance, and human resources, with wealthier GCC nations faring better than others. The pandemic also worsened pre-existing issues such as poverty and inadequate healthcare investments, necessitating urgent reforms. Soetikno *et al*. (2024) provided a post-2020 update, showing that by May 2023, COVID-19 transitioned to endemic status, with Omicron becoming the dominant variant by December 2021, and the spread was statistically insignificant by October 2022, confirming the end of the pandemic phase.

The MENA region, despite being endowed with abundant natural resources, has faced considerable challenges in advancing poverty alleviation efforts, especially when compared to other regions. Protracted conflicts have significantly hindered access to quality healthcare, with hospitals and clinics in war-torn areas remaining scarce and overwhelmed. Health systems, plagued by chronic underfunding, struggle to meet the escalating demand, while essential infrastructure is often dismantled due to ongoing hostilities. Displacement has compounded these health challenges, leaving millions without access to stable healthcare, which, in turn, deepens their vulnerabilities (Katoue *et al*., 2022). According to two World Bank reports, the MENA region has faced significant economic challenges, particularly between 2015 and 2016, when growth stagnated at a modest 3.1–3.3%. During this period, fiscal deficits escalated to 8% of GDP—the highest level in four years— primarily due to the compounded effects of ongoing conflicts,

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Dr. Omar S. Rasheed is a clinical psychologist with extensive experience in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) within humanitarian settings. Over the years, he has worked with a range of organizations across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. His career spans multiple MHPSS roles, including psychologist, advisor, delegate, program manager, and coordinator, each contributing to a deep and practical understanding of how to address the mental health and psychosocial needs of individuals and communities affected by crises. He currently serves as the MHPSS Programme Coordinator at the ICRC, where he leads global MHPSS efforts, working closely with a dedicated team to ensure the delivery of effective and impactful support.