

# Cushioning the Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods: Africa's Socio-Economic Policies so far

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## Abstract

*The devastating impacts resulting from the coronavirus pandemic cannot be underestimated. The economies of most countries on almost all continents have been adversely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). With Africa's existing socio-economic challenges, the emergence of the pandemic has further weakened and worsened economies and livelihoods within the sub-region. Dwelling on secondary data sources, including journal articles, online news items, and reports, this paper examines socio-economic support programmes implemented by African governments to cushion the pandemic's impact on the already-vulnerable livelihoods in Africa. The study establishes that several successful and some ineffective socio-economic interventions have been implemented so far by countries, including but not limited to Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, and Morocco. These interventions include suspending public gatherings, lockdown regimes, strengthening healthcare systems through increased investment, cash transfers to the most vulnerable groups, free food distribution, reduction of different tax forms and distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.) to households. However, implementing these measures has put high economic burdens on governments due to their associated cost. It is therefore projected that, beyond the COVID-19 regime, most African governments will pursue internal economic policies to chart the course towards economic recovery. The paper recommends that case-by-case empirical studies be conducted to gauge the level of impact the identified COVID-19-driven socio-economic policies had on livelihoods within the African context.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, cushioning, socio-economic impact, livelihoods, Africa

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## **Introduction**

Wuhan, a city in the People's Republic of China, recorded many cases of pneumonia and was brought to the attention of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on December 31, 2019 (WHO, 2020). By January 5, Wuhan had recorded 59 cases (Wang et al, 2020). By January 15, the attention of the WHO had been drawn to 282 confirmed cases, of which four (4) were from Japan, Thailand, and South Korea. Of the 282 cases, 51 were severely ill and 12 were in critical condition (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 was a novel coronavirus, SARS-Cov-2, which claimed several lives and by May 12, 2020, the death rate was over 4200 per day and 82, 591 new cases were being confirmed daily (Chaplain, 2020). Six common strains of coronaviruses have been identified and all are believed to have originated in animals. Four of the Coronaviruses are endemic and two are non-endemic. SARS-CoV, one of the endemics, came to the attention of the WHO in 2003 in Vietnam. MERS-CoV caused severe infection in Saudi Arabia and later spread to 27 countries (WHO, 2020). The SARS-Cov-2 resembles the wild bat virus more closely than the SARS-COV and the MERS-COV, suggesting it is a novel coronavirus (Hui & Zuma, 2019). By February, 2020, 24,554 cases had been confirmed globally. By May 12, 2020, more than 280,000 deaths had been attributed to COVID-19 worldwide (WHO, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic is beyond a health emergency; it wreaks havoc on society and the economy (U.N., 2020; WHO, 2020). While the pandemic's impact may differ from country to country, it will almost certainly worsen poverty and inequities globally, making the Sustainable Development Goals (S.D.G.s) even more critical. Global suffering will worsen. Without significant socio-economic remedies, lives and livelihoods will be in jeopardy for years (United Nations, U.N., 2020). Due to the pandemic, disadvantaged households, particularly those in relocated communities, resort to negative coping strategies such as cutting back on meals, raising debts, selling possessions, or interrupting their children's schooling (U.N.H.C.R., 2021). This is a severe setback to efforts made to achieve good health and well-being by 2030, as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (S.D.Gs).

The magnitude and impact of food insecurity are projected to grow when revenues dry up and food systems are affected by COVID-19 (Asegie et al., 2021). By the end of 2020, the World Food Programme anticipates that 270 million people will have experienced acute food insecurity. Food insecurity and malnutrition are exacerbated among displaced communities. They are more likely to rely on food aid and to have abandoned their employment, property, and social networks in search of safety, often residing in displacement camps or metropolitan areas with inadequate access to essential amenities (U.N.H.C.R., 2021). Even though the COVID-19 pandemic is a global phenomenon that wreaks havoc on people's lives, livelihoods, and well-being, its effects vary by group and sector. For instance, Asegie et al. (2021) project that the pandemic would result in increased unemployment, decreased income for daily labour, increased food insecurity, depletion of saving and relief measures, and disruption of the marketing system, among other things, in developing countries where poor infrastructure is combined with a low level of education and a high incidence of poverty. COVID-19 has, therefore, put constraints on goal eight of the S.D.G.s, which aims at achieving decent work and economic growth for all people as evident in some other jurisdictions (Harris et al., 2020).

Despite Africa's challenges, it is expected that countries within the sub-region take practical steps to introduce socio-economic policies to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the already vulnerable populations (U.N., 2020). According to the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F., 2020), Africa's government debt-to-GDP ratio would climb from 57.6% in 2019 to about 85% in 2020 if African countries implemented the same immediate fiscal policy measures the top E.U. economies have done so far. While many African governments may be able to respond promptly to the crisis, health and economic shocks may force them into unsustainable debt. While a large economy like Nigeria may have more fiscal flexibility due to lower government debt as a percentage of G.D.P., the I.M.F. (2020) projects that very indebted countries like Sudan, Eritrea, and Cabo Verde may face even higher unsustainable public debt levels. Despite these projected fiscal challenges, African governments are expected to take proactive steps towards containing the disease and minimising its adverse impact on

livelihoods. This, therefore, calls for the implementation of socioeconomic support programmes. In doing this, the U.N. (2020) offered a framework for an immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. According to the report, governments' efforts to cushion the pandemic's impact should focus on five pillars: health first, protecting people, economic response and recovery, macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration, and social cohesion and community resilience.

This paper, therefore, attempts to explore and analyse some of the socio-economic support programmes implemented by some African governments in response to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on livelihoods. Coupled with the dearth of existing literature on the subject, there is the need for more reports on Africa's strategies for combatting the impact of the novel coronavirus on livelihoods in Africa. The paper is organised into the following themes: the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, socio-economic support programmes implemented by some African governments so far, and conclusions and recommendations.

### ***Covid-19 pandemic in Africa***

The COVID-19 situation in Africa has been nauseating. The devastating nature of the disease coupled with Africa's under-resourced health facilities, has made the disease more fatal in Africa. According to the WHO's regional office for Africa, Namibia, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zambia accounted for 83% of the new deaths recorded in early July 2021. The proportion of deaths (Covid-19 death rate) among confirmed cases in Africa currently stands at 2.6%, against the global average of 2.2%. Africa has recorded a 43% week-on-week rise in COVID-19 deaths. Hospital admissions increase rapidly, and, countries face shortages in oxygen and intensive care beds. In the first week of July 2021, 4384 deaths were recorded in Africa. By July 11, 2021, the fatalities had increased to 6273. In July 2021, the COVID-19 cases had risen for eight continuous weeks, reaching six million (6 million). In June 2021, Africa recorded an additional one million cases. Most notably, the transition from four (4) million to five (5) million cases took three (3) months (Danquah & Schotte, 2020).

As of August 2021, death trends had risen in fifteen countries, and twelve had reported higher case fatality rates than the African average of 2.5% over the previous month. Africa accounted for over 4% of the 4.2% million COVID-19-related deaths recorded globally. In the week ending on August 1, COVID-19 cases had risen by 19% to over 278000. South Africa accounted for 29% of the cases. There was over 20% rise in cases in twenty-two African countries. The Delta, Alpha and Beta variants were found in 29, 39 and 35 countries, respectively (WHO, 2021).

As of October 5, 2021, the World Bank had put in place measures to assist African countries in supplementing their COVID-19 response through vaccine procurement and deployment. The World Bank disbursed \$2.92 billion for the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in 41 countries in the region. As of November 5, 2021, 10.36 million out of 13.12 million doses delivered to Africa were financed through World Bank projects in 26 countries (World Bank, 2020).

## **Methods**

This study contributes to the literature by simply assessing the various socio-economic policies deemed relevant to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. A comprehensive review of existing literature on the socio-economic policies implemented by African countries to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods was conducted. The literature review focused on peer-reviewed articles, reports, and policy documents published between January 2020 and December 2022. Relevant data on the socio-economic policies implemented by African countries to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods were extracted from the literature. The data extracted included the policy measures implemented, the target population, and the impact of the policies on livelihoods. The extracted data were analysed using a thematic approach.

To achieve the objectives, this paper focuses purposively on five countries: Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, Morocco, and South Africa. These countries were selected based on the initial reports by the United Nations (2020) on the quest to implement socio-economic support programmes. In their reports, Ghana, Botswana, and Kenya were said to have taken early measures to combat the pandemic's impact on livelihoods. South Africa was the most hardly-hit country regarding reported cases of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa (WHO, 2021). We added Morocco to achieve a relative spatial balance within the sub-region. Like all nonprobability sampling techniques, the researchers admit the biases associated with selecting these countries as study areas (Creswell, 2003) as pertains to the level of generalisation. However, the researchers primarily sought to give a snapshot of African governments' efforts to cushion citizens from the impact of the pandemic. Figure 1 below is a map showing the study areas.

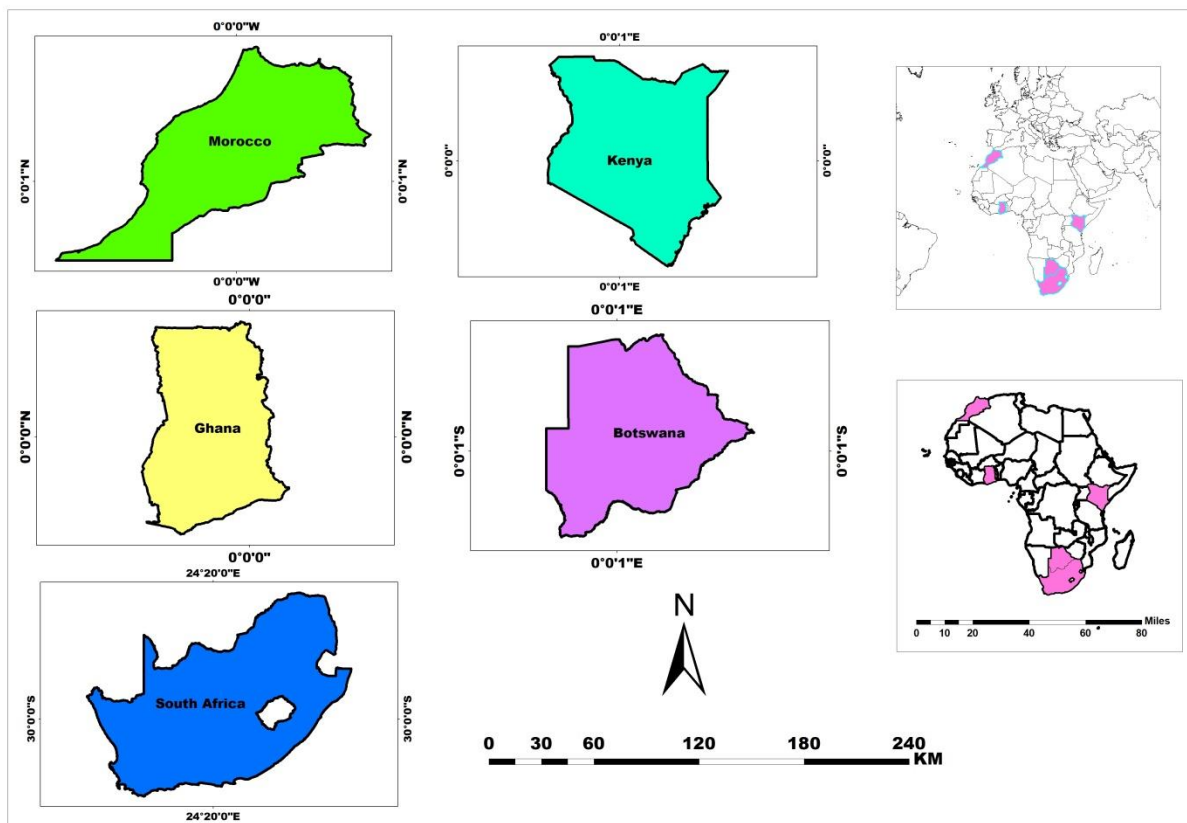


Figure 1: The study areas

Source: Authors' construct

## **Results and Discussions**

### ***Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Africa***

#### ***Health implications of COVID-19***

The effects of COVID-19 are devastating. The overwhelming effects transcend the social, political, economic, and health systems. According to the Ghana Health Service (2020) and the Government of Ghana (2020), as of December 2020, more than 54,000 Ghanaians had tested positive for COVID-19, of which 323 had died. At the end of December 2020, Ghana recorded the fifth-highest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to UNICEF and the Social Policy Research Institute (S.P.R.I.) (2019), the COVID-19 pandemic caused strained health services. According to the UNICEF (2020) report, before the COVID-19 pandemic, about one-in-three children in Ghana lived in lower-income homes. Two-in-three children could not realise their full rights, lacking access to essential goods and services and, consequently, to their ability to maximise their developmental potential. According to a recent Save the Children and UNICEF analysis, the economic fallout from the pandemic could push up to 24 million additional children in Sub-Saharan Africa into poverty. This is up from 250 million children living in poor households to around 274 million children by the end of 2020.

According to WHO (2021) Coronavirus Disease Dashboard, a total of 4,492,322 cases had been confirmed and 109,107 deaths had been recorded as of July 2021 in Africa. Out of the total number of cases reported, South Africa accounted for 51.8%, Ethiopia 6.2%, Kenya 4.3%, Zambia 4.2%, Nigeria 3.8%, and other countries accounted for 29.7%. The data from the WHO further reveals that as of July 2021, South Africa had recorded 62.5% of COVID-19 death cases in Africa. Ethiopia accounted for 4.0%, Kenya 3.5%, Zambia 2.9%, Zimbabwe 2.6%, and other countries 24.5%. Mashige et al. (2021) discovered that 38% of the respondents were hospitalised due to COVID-19 and 22% contracted the disease, while 29% were separated from their families.

### *Cushioning the Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods: Africa's Socio-Economic Policies so far*

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the challenges in many African countries, infecting over 115,000 health workers and disrupting routine health services such as childhood immunisations. Some areas with limited clean water and sanitation access have been saddled with infection prevention measures. Crowded urban settlements, prisons, and humanitarian settings are no exception. The COVID-19 infections and their adverse effects in Africa have resulted in the implementation of stringent measures in many African countries, such as a ban on all public gatherings, the indefinite closure of public institutions, including schools and universities, the suspension of all air travel, and the shutting down of cities and towns across countries. This consequently, resulted in the launch of testing programmes to identify, isolate, and treat infected people. These immediate effects have had dire consequences on the economy (UNESCO, 2021).

Even though vaccine deliveries were accelerated in 2022, many African countries need help distributing and administering shots en masse. Significant challenges include ensuring adequately trained health workers and vaccine supplies, maintaining vaccines at cold temperatures, and overcoming local vaccine hesitancy (IN FOCUS, 2022). In Africa, vaccine hesitancy is premised on the perceived danger of the vaccines, previous immunisation experiences, general immunisation approach, religious beliefs, safety and effectiveness of vaccines, immunisation accessibility, and socio-cultural constraints (Lazarus et al., 2021).

### *Social implications of COVID-19*

It is worthwhile to elucidate that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's report (2021) on COVID-19 reveals that the effects of COVID-19 on Africa are multi-faceted and affect every fabric of African society. It has threatened social norms, ethics, and human rights; threatened the culture sector; caused substantial losses in education and training; stifled economic growth; and placed the media space and the scientific community in a critical situation.



In Ghana, the pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities, particularly, regarding the access to healthcare and education. School closures have disproportionately affected students from low-income families who lack access to technology for remote learning (Bampoe, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). Additionally, the pandemic has decreased economic activity, leading to job losses and increased poverty levels (Kumah & Agyei, 2021). Mental health concerns have also risen, with a study showing that the pandemic has increased anxiety and depression among Ghanaians (Abor & Quaye, 2021).

In Morocco, the pandemic has led to a surge in domestic violence, with reports indicating a 30% increase in cases during the first lockdown (U.N. Women, 2020). The pandemic has also exposed the inadequacy of the country's healthcare system, with a shortage of medical equipment and staff, thereby exacerbating the spread of the virus (Mansouri & Moutaouakkil, 2021). The pandemic has had similar economic consequences, with many businesses struggling to stay afloat and tourism, a significant source of revenue, taking a significant hit (Benaabou & Oulidi, 2021). School closures have also been challenging, particularly for girls, who are at a higher risk of dropping out of school due to the pandemic (UNICEF, 2020). Mental health concerns have also risen, with a research establishing that the pandemic has increased stress and anxiety levels among Moroccans (Moussaoui et al., 2021).

The pandemic has disproportionately impacted the marginalised communities in South Africa, including people living in informal settlements and those without access to basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation facilities (Langa & Prinsloo, 2021). The pandemic has also aggravated the existing poverty, unemployment, and inequality (Ndlovu, 2021). The economic impact of COVID-19 has been particularly severe, with the country experiencing its worst economic downturn in over a century (Khumalo, 2021). School closures have also been a challenge, particularly for students in rural areas who may have limited access to online learning resources (UNICEF, 2020). Mental health concerns have also risen, with a study finding that the pandemic has led to increased levels of depression and anxiety among South Africans (Shava et al., 2021).

In Botswana, the pandemic has led to gender-based violence, with reports indicating a 40% increase in cases during the first wave (Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust, 2020). COVID-19 has significantly impacted the tourism industry, which is the country's primary revenue source (Lekoba et al., 2021). The closure of schools has also impacted students' education, with concerns raised about the potential long-term effects on academic performance (Lepetu, 2020). It has also left many students struggling to access online learning resources due to limited internet access (UNICEF, 2020). Mental health concerns have also risen, with a study establishing that the pandemic has increased stress and anxiety levels among Botswana (Mosepele et al., 2021).

In Kenya, the pandemic has resulted in increased job losses, with the tourism and hospitality industries being the most affected (Mumbi, 2020). The closure of schools has also had significant implications for students, with many lacking access to remote learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities in healthcare, with rural communities and low-income families particularly vulnerable (Othieno, 2020). COVID-19 has significantly impacted the informal sector, which employs a significant portion of the population (Mutavi et al., 2021). School closures have also been a challenge, especially for students from low-income families who lack access to online learning resources (UNICEF, 2020). Mental health concerns have also risen, with a study finding that the pandemic has increased anxiety and depression among Kenyans (Mbwayo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the potential adverse effect of the COVID-19 school closures on vulnerable groups, especially young girls, cannot be ignored. Female learners were exposed to vulnerabilities such as sexual violence, violence, and teenage pregnancy, which positively correlate with school closures. World Vision (2020) reported that an estimated one million pregnant girls in sub-Saharan Africa might not return to school following the COVID-19 outbreak, even though some countries like Ghana and Kenya have re-entry policies.

*Economic implications of COVID-19*

The adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a fall in global prices and demand for critical natural resource exports, disruptions in trade and tourism, reduced remittances from African workers abroad, and local lockdown measures severely affected African economies in 2020. More importantly, the World Bank estimated in April 2021 that COVID-19 had pushed up to 40 million more Africans into extreme poverty. In addition, the World Food Program reports that the pandemic is contributing to a rise in severe food insecurity in parts of Africa (WHO, 2021).

It took 98 days for Africa to record the first 100,000 cases, and it took only 18 days for that number to double, and the rate continued to accelerate. The impact of the pandemic has been described by the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.) as the most significant test they have faced since the formation of the United Nations Organisation and the formation of the International Monetary Fund as "the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression". The United Nations Development Program acknowledges that the decline in the Human Development Index in 2020 erases all progress made in human development worldwide over the last six (6) years. Globally, more than U.S. \$8 billion has been committed to fighting the associated health, economic, and other effects. This amount is several times higher than the combined G.D.P. of Africa (WHO, 2020).

According to the WHO report (2021), in 2020, the International Monetary Fund updated its global growth forecast to include the potential impact of COVID-19 and forecast an average contraction of 2.7% of the gross domestic product for Africa. COVID-19 has caused revenue reductions and resource constraints. Africa has low-tax-to-gross domestic product ratios and high depth levels. This shows that Africa cannot respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A study by Bukari et al. (2021) report that COVID-19 had significantly amplified the poverty levels of households and consequently weakened living standards. They also showed that gender and locational variations exist with regard to the impact of COVID-19, where females and rural dwellers

were significantly disadvantaged. On the contrary, in terms of overall household consumption, the middle and upper classes are more greatly affected than those in the lowest class.

It is interesting also to note that consistent with studies on the impact of COVID-19 on bankruptcy and liquidity challenges among firms (Bircan et al., 2020; Apedo-Amah et al., 2020), nearly 88% of firms in South Africa have fallen or are expected to fall into debt, the average drop in sales in Tunisia and South Africa was beyond 60%.

### ***Socio-economic support programmes implemented by some African governments so far***

This section focuses on the efforts made by some African governments by way of formulating and implementing socio-economic support programmes (U.N., 2020) to alleviate the dire impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods. It was not possible to review the contributions each African country is making towards building resilience against the effects of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of the poor, especially. Many governments within the continent announced different measures to address the menace. In view of this, light is cast on the efforts made by Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, and Morocco (United Nations Policy Brief, 2020). These countries were purposively selected to represent the different blocs on the continent: Northern (Morocco), southern (Botswana and South Africa), western (Ghana) and eastern Africa (Kenya), and also for the reason of being cited by the United Nations (2020) as having been part of the countries, which took early measures to contain the pandemic.

It is worth noting that socio-economic support programmes are essential in times of crisis to cushion the shocks against the most vulnerable in society. It is, therefore, expedient to take a snapshot of what Africa is doing so far to lessen the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods that are already at the mercy of weak governance, corruption, political instability, and poverty (Gyimah-Brempong, 2002). These socio-economic support programmes take different forms: direct income support, social programmes, including subsidised utility costs, and soft loans granted to small and medium-scale enterprises (S.M.E.s) (United Nations Policy Brief, 2020). Whichever form these measures take, it is hoped to

go a long way to lessen the impact of the pandemic on lives and livelihoods in Africa. According to a United Nations report (2020), countries must make challenging decisions to balance the demands of directly reacting to COVID-19 while preserving vital health service delivery and avoiding system collapse. Countries are therefore, expected to introduce measures to cushion the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on livelihoods in five key areas: health first (protecting health services and systems during the crisis), protecting people (social protection and essential services), economic response and recovery (protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and informal sector workers), macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration, and social cohesion and community resilience (U.N., 2020). The subsequent sections focus on the socio-economic support programmes or measures implemented by four countries: Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, and Morocco. Civil society organisations' roles during the pandemic have been briefly discussed.

***Ghana's Covid-19-driven socio-economic support programmes: Freebies, subsidised utility, loans***

The government of Ghana's response to COVID-19 can be divided into two phases: the emergency response phase, which spanned from March 2020 to June 2020, and the Ghana CARES Programme, which started in July 2020. The COVID-19 situation exposed the Ghanaian economy's vulnerabilities and overdependence on importation. Immediate actions by the government of Ghana to ameliorate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 situation on the economy caused her to spend GHS 3 billion on urgent health interventions, feeding programmes, subsidies on electricity and water supply, Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Business Support Scheme (MSME-BUSS) and others (Ministry of Finance, MoF, Report, 2020).

The second phase of the government of Ghana's COVID-19-driven socio-economic response was the "Covid-19 Alleviation and Revitalization of Enterprises Support (CARES) programme." The Ghana CARES programme was designed into two facets, namely, the stabilisation phase (July 2020–December 2020) and the revitalisation and transformation phase (2021–2023); the latter is a three-

year policy that seeks to revamp the economy and create an enabling ground that will be an impetus to attaining a wealthy, inclusive, sustainable, empowered, and resilient (W.I.S.E.R.). The Ghanaian economy can stand the test of time against the COVID-19 devastation. Under the stabilisation phase of the Ghana CARES programme, the government of Ghana expended GHS 2 billion from July 2020 to December 2020. The government scheduled to spend an expected amount to the tune of GHS 100 billion on the Revitalization and Transformation agenda. It is pertinent to argue that the sense of urgency to bring the Ghana Beyond Aid agenda into fruition has indeed been aroused. The government magnanimously resorted to foreign aid in dealing with COVID-19 (MoF, 2020).

The pandemic had extensive effects and excruciatingly wrecked output on the country. Movements, transactions, education, production, and distribution become restricted and altered. Hardship was on the upsurge. Responding to this situation, the government of Ghana, in April 2020, launched an economic stimulus measure known as the Corona Virus Alleviation Programme (C.A.P.). Under the scheme, the government initiated and expended GHS 579.5 million for the COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (E.P.R.P.); GHS 200 million in relief for the provision of water and sanitation for households for three months; GHS 1,028 million as a three-month subsidy for electricity usage in various households and business units; GHS 54 million for the distribution of hot meals and food packages; a relief of GHS 323 million in the form of tax waiver, P.P.E.s, transportation, allowances and COVID-19 insurance for frontline health workers; and GHS 600 million for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (M.S.M.S.E.s). It is indispensable to elucidate that the government's socio-economic contribution is evident in four modalities. First, the utility bailout and food packages were two major initiatives that helped the urban vulnerable to have some relief from the hardship. Second, the initiative of urgent treatment and contact tracing helped to deal with the astronomical increase in COVID-19 cases partly. The implementation of a stimulus package to assist small, micro, and medium-sized businesses and the economy helped to alleviate the breakdown or crackdown of businesses and the economy. Finally, a policy of economic revitalisation and robust

measures towards expediting and achieving Ghana Beyond Aid was rolled out. As evident in the Executive Summary of the Ghana CARES "OBAATANPA" Programme Report of the Ministry of Finance, the projected deficit for 2020 increased to 11.4 per cent of G.D.P. compared to the 4.7 per cent of G.D.P. projected initially. This resulted in an additional financing gap of GHS 25.2 (Ministry of Finance Report, 2020).

***Botswana's socio-economic support programmes in response to the coronavirus pandemic***

Botswana is a landlocked country north of South Africa in Southern Africa. Botswana has a total area of 581,730 square kilometres (224,610 square miles), of which 566,730 square kilometres (218,820 square miles) is land. Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia are all countries that share constituent boundaries with Botswana. At the end of March 2020, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development announced the government's plan to grant tax relief as a way of alleviating the impact of COVID-19 (K.P.M.G., 2020). This relief package was a quick response to the pandemic since the WHO declared a coronavirus pandemic on March 11, 2020, 20 days after the declaration. Aside from tax relief, the government also implemented a COVID-19 Wage Support Scheme to provide financial help to employees in the travel and tourism industry, export-oriented organisations, small and medium-sized businesses, and other sectors of the economy who had been temporarily laid off due to the coronavirus. The government granted wage subsidies to businesses to strengthen their capacity to keep employees on post. Businesses that met the preconditions were entitled to access wage subsidies of up to P 2,500 (equivalent to USD 49.78) per month per employee for April, May and June 2020 (K.P.M.G., 2020). Government-guaranteed loans of up to \$25 million per borrower were to be made available to tax-compliant firms to help them stabilise. Other fiscal packages include reduced bank rates, penalty waiving, and loan repayment rescheduling. In addition, the COVID-19 Food Relief Programme was implemented to assist vulnerable populations.

As of April 27, a total of 47,393 households had received food packages containing agricultural items. In addition, funds were set aside for social services, which would be used to provide temporary food baskets. The government made efforts to reconnect areas where water was cut due to arrears to ensure the availability of clean running water for the primary prevention of COVID-19. This package did not include other residents, such as farm occupants and those who live on ungazetted lands, such as "illegal squatters" (United Nations report, 2020). Moreover, the government embarked on the decongestion of prisons to reduce the risk of the spread of the coronavirus, and 149 prisoners were released. Visitors were banned from visiting the remaining prisoners. In addition to these social interventions, the government of Botswana encouraged landlords to allow tenants who are unable to pay rent during the lockdown period to stay and not evict them.

***Kenya's socio-economic response to the coronavirus pandemic***

Kenya's first COVID-19 case was reported on March 13, 2020. The pandemic outbreak resulted in untold hardship for the people of Kenya, especially when *the* country recorded the highest numbers as of April 2020 among the East African Community (E.C.A.) (Nichefor et al., 2020). The Joint Research Centre (J.R.C.) Technical Report (2020) shows that the lockdown in April-June 2020 in Kenya impacted G.D.P. in 2020 by 5.6% in relation to the pre-COVID baseline, seriously dwindling economic growth for the year. The drops in labour productivity, exported commodities and tourism are the main stimulants of the reduction in economic activity. This has resulted in the Kenya Shilling (KSh) depreciation, reduced domestic investment and a rise in the government deficit by KSh 17.2 billion. Real income dwindled by 11.8%, while employment was reduced by 11.8% and 6.8% for rural and urban households, respectively. The Kenyan government established some measures to contain the spread of the pandemic through a litany of measures ranging from suspending public gatherings to a total lockdown (Economic Survey, 2019). The government also rolled out a robust economic recovery plan to sustain the country's economic stability by injecting 44.8 billion KSh to



beef up the healthcare system to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and its health-related crises. Other measures included increased healthcare and COVID-19 monitoring investment, enhanced social protection, cash transfers, and food relief programmes.

Other measures put in place to help citizens and businesses to recover after the lockdown included lowering the value-added tax (V.A.T.) on most goods and services from 16% to 14% and providing 100% tax relief to those earning up to KSh 24,000. In addition, there was a reduction in the resident Personal Income Tax Rate (Pay-As-You-Earn) top rate from 30% to 25% and a reduction in corporate tax from 30% to 25% for residents. The withholding tax rate on dividends payable to non-residents was increased from 10% to 15%. In contrast, the turnover tax was reduced from 3% to 1%, with taxable turnover thresholds increasing from an income of KSh 1 million (U.S. \$10,000) to KSh 50 million (U.S. \$500,000) for Micro-Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (M.S.M.S.E.s). The government also appropriated an additional KSh10 billion for the elderly, orphans, and other vulnerable members of society through cash transfers by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The establishment of a welfare package valued at KSh5 billion to support county governments, as well as the release of KSh500 million in arrears to persons with severe disabilities, were measures put in place by the government to cushion citizens economically (Nechifor et al., 2020).

Innovatively, Kenya is set to start the local manufacture of the COVID-19 vaccine starting in April 2022, according to the Kenya Ministry of Health (2021). This reinforces Kenya's quest to be self-reliant in medical supplies, as reiterated by the president of Kenya on November 30, 2021, during the State of the Nation address. To achieve this innovation, the National Biovax Institute Limited has been established to manufacture the vaccine by 2024 (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2021).

### ***Government of Morocco's socio-economic interventions against COVID-19***

Morocco has had an economic downturn due to the global economic crisis emanating from the emergence of COVID-19 (World Bank, 2021). The economy is experiencing such recession impacts

because Europe, its leading trading partner, is hard hit by the novel COVID-19 pandemic. The government of Morocco's efforts to contain the outbreak are having untold effects on the economy. This translates into unprecedented challenges for the country, which is characterised by water shortages and indicates that the local economy is likely to be hindered in many ways due to the coronavirus pandemic. For example, during the pandemic, the unemployment rate rose from 10.5% in March 2020 to 12.5% by March 2021. An estimated 600,000 jobs were lost. Concurrently, poverty increased from 3.3% in 2020 to 3.6% in 2021, translating to about a million people being vulnerable to poverty. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Moroccan government declared a state of health emergency on March 20, 2020, with just ten coronavirus cases (The Borgen Project, 2021). This swift decision brought the outbreak under control during the confinement period. The Moroccan government instituted crisis management guidelines and comprehensive financial benefits to support the population. Renewed solidarity and hope from communities and individuals have enabled Morocco to mitigate the effects of the health crisis that COVID-19 imposes on the economy.

The Moroccan government's ambitious plan to help sustain the economy during the COVID-19 health crisis, under the "Pact for Economic Reliance and Employment," announced on August 6, 2020, injected 120 billion dinars (U.S. \$32.688 billion) into the Moroccan economy. The recovery plan included 75 billion dirhams (U.S. \$20.43 billion) in loans and 45 billion dirhams (U.S. \$12.25 billion) in recovery fund (Essor) allocations (K.P.M.G., 2020). The Moroccan government also instituted other economic stimulus measures or packages to support its population during the coronavirus emergence period. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report (O.E.C.D., 2020), the Moroccan government induced 3.3 billion dollars to fight the novel COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated \$200 million was allocated to the Ministry of Health to supplement the country's medical system.

Additionally, on November 2, 2020, the Moroccan government secured an African Development Bank (AfDB) loan of EUR 117.82 million for its social protection improvement support programme (P.A.A.P.S.–COVID-19 SF) aimed at contributing to the COVID-19 response programme. The aims of the loan were to improve health facilities, procurement and supply of pharmaceutical products, and the mobilisation of medical and administrative staff. This programme is expected to end on June 30, 2022 (AfDB, 2022). The government also set up the Business Intelligence Committee (C.V.E.), which reduced interest rates from 2.24% to 1.5%. The Moroccan government also transferred cash to citizens who lost their incomes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from around U.S. \$80 to U.S. \$120 (The Borgen Project, 2021).

In an effort to fight the pandemic, since the hardest hit were people earning low incomes, the National Institute for Solidarity with Women in Distress (I.N.S.A.F.) distributed food items, flyers educating the citizens on the COVID-19 protocols, and donated packages consisting of thousands of masks, bleaches, and soaps (The Borgen Project, 2021). Conversely, Morocco began COVID-19 vaccination in January 2021 and has vaccinated 48.6% of its population since September 2021 (World Bank, 2020).

### ***South Africa's Covid-19 Support Programmes***

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy, and South Africa has not been immune to its effects. To address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, the South African government has implemented various support programmes. This essay will discuss some of the COVID-19 socio-economic support programmes implemented by South Africa.

One of the key support programmes implemented by the South African government is the COVID-19 TERS (Temporary Employer/Employee Relief Scheme) programme. The programme was established in March 2020 to provide financial assistance to workers who have lost their jobs or have had their salaries reduced due to the pandemic. The TERS programme has disbursed over R61 billion

to 5.6 million workers, covering the period between March 2020 and February 2021, according to Statistics South Africa (2021). The programme has helped to cushion the impact of the pandemic on workers' livelihoods.

Another significant support programme implemented by South Africa is the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant. The grant was introduced in April 2020 to provide financial assistance to unemployed citizens who were not receiving any other form of income or social grant. The grant was initially meant to run for six months, but it was later extended to April 2021. According to a report by the South African Social Security Agency (2021), the grant provided support to over 10 million beneficiaries, with a total payout of R35 billion.

To support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the South African government established the Debt Relief Fund and the Business Growth Resilience Facility. The Debt Relief Fund provides financial assistance to SMEs that are struggling to pay their debts, while the Business Growth Resilience Facility provides funding to SMEs to enable them to continue operating during the pandemic. These measures have helped to mitigate job losses in the country and ensure that SMEs can continue to operate.

In addition to these support programmes, the South African government has also implemented measures to support the agricultural sector, which has been severely affected by the pandemic. These measures include the Agricultural Disaster Support Fund, which provides funding to farmers affected by natural disasters, and the COVID-19 Agricultural Disaster Fund, which provides financial assistance to farmers affected by the pandemic.

In conclusion, South Africa has implemented various support programmes to address the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 TERS programme, the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant, and measures to support SMEs and the agricultural sector are among the programmes implemented by the government. These programmes helped in cushioning the impact

of the pandemic on workers, SMEs, and the agricultural sector. However, the government needs to continue providing support to citizens as the pandemic continues to affect the country's economy.

### ***Civil Society Organisations (C.S.Os) in Africa and the COVID-19 pandemic***

Instability caused by violence, insurgencies, or armed conflicts is regrettably an obvious fact of today's times, with ramifications for governments and non-governmental organisations (Golgeci et al., 2021). As a consequence, multiple scholarly works have attempted to address various dynamics connected to organisational management in volatile situations in recent years (Dai et al., 2017; Golgeci et al., 2020). C.S.O.s are expected to play an essential role in post-civil war economies owing to governmental incapacity and institutional gaps, provide a range of services to the general public and are particularly important in such volatile circumstances (Lovan et al., 2017). In the same vein, it is expected that with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, C.S.O.s in Africa will take critical supporting steps to help lessen the negative impacts of the pandemic on livelihoods. The contribution of African civil society organisations to cushioning the impact of COVID-19 could be categorised into two main stages. The first stage mainly involved items donated in cash and in-kind to empower and strengthen workers in the health sector. The second stage involved donations targeted at addressing the economic hardships caused by lockdowns instituted by various national governments to control the spread of COVID-19. Many of these have often been carried out through partnerships between national governments and the organised private sector. A November 2020 survey entitled "The Role of the African Philanthropy Forum" found that 71% of philanthropists that focus on the African continent have either increased their donations or are taking steps to do so in response to COVID-19 (Dalberg, 2020).

In East Africa, a joint effort by civil society organisations under Hives East Africa's Women at Work campaign and the Kenya Flower Council (K.F.C.) provided food packages and money worth €75, 000 to some flower farming workers in selected places. About 7000 workers in the flower sector received

rations as a relief measure. Many permanent workers had been sent home unpaid, and many seasonal workers had been rendered jobless on the eve of the pandemic. The flower sub-sector employs over 200,000 directly on farms nationwide (Nieuwsbericht, 2020). Due to financial constraints, some non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations in Africa did little to help deal with the impact of COVID-19 in Africa. This is because many of these organisations mainly rely on external funding (Kumi, 2017).

## **Conclusions**

This paper examined the socio-economic support programmes implemented by African countries, including Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, and Morocco, in an attempt to cushion the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods. The COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant effects have greatly threatened Africa's development. Given Africa's socio-economic challenges, the disease, COVID-19, has become part of the fetters worsening the continent's economic growth. It has exposed the inefficacies of Africa's scientific, financial, and technological prowess. The study revealed that different forms of socio-economic support programmes, including suspension of public gatherings, lockdown regimes, strengthening of healthcare systems through increased investment, cash transfers to the most vulnerable groups, free food distribution, reduction of different forms of tax (income, V.A.T.) and the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.) to households. These interventions are within the scope of the United Nations framework for immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. However, the implementation of these measures has put high economic burdens on governments due to the cost associated with them. It is therefore projected that beyond the COVID-19 regime, most African governments will pursue internal economic policies to chart the course towards economic recovery. The high-cost burdens arising out of the implementation of those measures tend to affect the extent of achieving the intended outcomes. Since this paper only set out to conduct an initial review of what some African countries have put in place to lessen the impact of

COVID-19 on already vulnerable African livelihoods, it was difficult gauging the level of success of those socio-economic programmes. Future empirical data would help measure the extent to which COVID-19-driven socio-economic policies were successful.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that more robust infection control measures are employed. In addition, there is the need for effective public education on safety protocols using community-based media and more investment in health and research. With the recent rollout of vaccination programmes in different countries, the spread rate is expected to reduce significantly. Fears of a new recession and financial collapse necessitate robust and resilient leadership in healthcare, business, governance, and society. A comprehensive socio-economic development plan, including sector-by-sector strategies and an environment that supports entrepreneurship, is also required for those with substantial and long-term business models to thrive beyond COVID-19. Governments and financial institutions should continually analyse and re-evaluate the current situation to guarantee that the "whatever it takes" commitment is kept.

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