

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

WAR-TORN COUNTRIES

PART 2

Editors:

Abdul Kader Mohiuddin
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Omar S. Rasheed

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Amidst a Global Triple Threat
of Conflicts, COVID-19, and
Climate Change**

(Part 2)

War-torn Countries

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	i
PREFACE	iii
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	iv
PART 2 SECTION 1 (WAR-TORN COUNTRIES)	
CHAPTER 1 CONFLICTS IN ISRAEL-PALESTINE AND BEYOND	1
Atef Masad	
INTRODUCTION	1
The Economic Toll of COVID-19 on Palestine Amidst Ongoing Occupation Challenges	3
The Impact of the Israeli Barrier and Occupation on Palestinian Socio-Economic Conditions	4
Escalating Gaza Conflict: Rising Casualties, Regional Tensions, and Shifting Diplomatic Dynamics	5
Environmental Devastation in Gaza: The Human and Ecological Toll of Conflict	7
CRISIS PRECIPITATED BY COMMON GLOBAL ISSUES	11
The Socioeconomic Hit by the Pandemic	11
Complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Historical Roots, Contemporary Realities, and Prospects for Resolution	20
<i>Israeli-Palestinian Conflict During the Early 2000s</i>	22
<i>Gaza Wars: Escalating Conflict and Humanitarian Implications</i>	23
<i>Shifts and Struggles: Israeli-Palestinian Relations in the 21st Century</i>	25
<i>Geopolitical Shifts in Relations: From Abrahamic Accords to Emerging Alliances</i>	27
<i>A Deep Dive into Israeli-Palestinian Relations in 2022-2023</i>	28
Navigating Conflict Narratives: Perspectives from Ukraine, Palestine, and Beyond	31
Climate and Environmental Challenges in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Region	33
<i>Climate Crisis and Environmental Vulnerability</i>	33
<i>Navigating Water Security, Quality, and Scarcity: Challenges in Palestine's Changing Landscape</i>	34
<i>Navigating Ideology and Environment: The Impact of Conflict on Environmental Discourse in the Israeli-Palestinian Context</i>	35
SECTOR-BASED CRISIS DEEPENING BY THE 3CS	38
Agriculture	38
<i>Challenges and Resilience in Palestine's Agricultural Sector Amidst COVID-19 and Occupation</i>	39
<i>Impact of Israeli Occupation and Aggression on Palestinian Agriculture</i>	41
<i>Climate Change Challenges and Agricultural Resilience in Palestine</i>	42
Telecommunication and Networking	45
<i>Tech Entrepreneurship in Palestine: Navigating Infrastructural Challenges and Harnessing Digital Connectivity for Economic Growth</i>	45
<i>Telecommunications Challenges and Opportunities in Gaza</i>	46
<i>Insights from the Palestinian Telecom Sector amidst COVID-19</i>	47
<i>Digital Repression and Connectivity Challenges: The Palestinian Experience under Occupation</i>	48
Education	51
<i>Navigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Education in Palestine</i>	52
<i>Impact of Israeli Aggression on Palestinian Education: A Comprehensive Overview</i>	60
Energy Sector	65
<i>Navigating the Energy Crisis in the Gaza Strip: Challenges, Impacts, and Future Projections</i>	66

<i>Advancing Renewable Energy in Palestine: Strategies and Potentials</i>	67
<i>Israeli Restrictions Deepen Energy Crisis in Palestine: A Dependence on Imported Electricity and Renewed Focus on Renewable Energy amid COVID-19 Challenges</i>	69
<i>Navigating the Renewable Energy Transition in Palestine amid Geopolitical and Socioeconomic Challenges</i>	71
<i>Escalating Power Crisis in Gaza: Geopolitical Tensions, Israeli Restrictions, and the Push towards Renewable Energy in Palestine</i>	72
<i>Chronic Power Struggles amid Extreme Weather Conditions: Gaza's Energy Crisis and the Push for Renewables</i>	73
Health Sector	74
<i>Health Crisis amid Pandemic and Israeli Occupation in Palestine: Challenges and Disparities</i>	76
<i>Healthcare Crisis in Palestine amid Ongoing Conflict: A Dire Situation Exacerbated by Socio-Economic Challenges and Systemic Disruptions</i>	79
<i>Navigating Public Health Challenges in Palestine: Intersections of Climate and Environmental Factors, Conflict, and Disease Burdens</i>	85
CROSS-CURRENT ISSUES	87
International Aid	87
Food Crisis	88
Water Inequality in Palestine	90
Internal Displacement	93
Children Amid Grave Conflicts	95
<i>Navigating Turmoil: The Impact of COVID-19 on Palestinian Children Amidst Conflict</i>	95
<i>Coping Strategies and Child Welfare: Addressing Racism and Violence in the Palestinian Minority Community in Israel</i>	98
<i>Health Challenges and Inequities Facing Palestinian Children</i>	99
Women Health	101
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	104
Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Rehabilitation	108
CONCLUDING REMARKS	109
ABBREVIATIONS	109
REFERENCES	110
CHAPTER 2 HUNGER, REPRESSION, AND TEARS: EVIDENCE FROM TIGRAY, NORTHERN ETHIOPIA	137
Kassa Teka	
INTRODUCTION	138
CRISIS PRECIPITATED BY 3CS	141
Socioeconomic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic	141
Socioeconomic Impact of the Tigray War	143
<i>Destruction of Infrastructure: The Devastating Toll of Conflict</i>	143
<i>The Tigray Conflict: Uncovering Human Rights Abuses and Challenges to Accountability</i>	145
<i>Political Struggles, Humanitarian Crisis, and Media Coverage</i>	146
Natural Catastrophes and Environmental Issues	148
<i>Environmental Devastation in the Wake of Conflict</i>	148
<i>Environmental Devastation: The Impact of Conflict on Forest Depletion in Tigray, Ethiopia</i>	148
<i>Interplay Between Climate Change, Deforestation, and Livelihood in Tigray</i>	149
<i>The Nexus of Climate Change, Food Insecurity, and Conflict in the Tigray War</i>	151

SECTOR-BASED CRISIS DEEPENING BY THE 3CS	151
Agriculture and Livestock	151
<i>Impact of COVID-19, Erratic Rainfall, and Desert Locust Infestation amid Conflict</i>	152
<i>Ravages of Conflict: Impacts on Agriculture and Livelihoods in Tigray</i>	153
<i>Climate Change Impacts and Agricultural Productivity in Tigray and Beyond</i>	154
Health Sector	155
<i>Compounded Crises: The Impact of Conflict and COVID-19 on Healthcare in Tigray, Ethiopia</i>	156
<i>Healthcare Crisis Imposed by Ongoing Conflicts</i>	158
<i>Climate Crisis, Environmental Strain, and Conflict: The Complex Health Nexus in Tigray and elsewhere in Ethiopia</i>	163
Education	166
<i>Education Disruptions in Tigray and Other States of Ethiopia: Impact of COVID-19 and Conflict</i>	168
<i>Educational Disruptions in Tigray and Other Conflict Zones of Ethiopia</i>	170
<i>Impact of Environmental Disasters on Education in Tigray and Other Climate-Sensitive Zones</i>	175
SPECIAL ISSUES	177
Internal Displacement	177
<i>Impact of COVID-19 and Conflict on Vulnerable Groups</i>	178
<i>Humanitarian Fallout and Displacement Crisis in Tigray</i>	178
<i>Evolving Crises: Conflict, Climate Shocks, and Internal Displacement in Tigray</i>	181
Food Insecurity	182
<i>Impact of the Pandemic: Exacerbating Food Insecurity in Ethiopia and Tigray</i>	182
<i>The Impact of Conflict: Widespread Famine and Food Insecurity in Tigray</i>	183
<i>Tigray's Vulnerable Food Security: Navigating Climate-Induced Challenges and Conflict Disruptions</i>	184
Child Nutrition and Protection	186
Maternal Health	187
Water Scarcity and Infrastructure Damage	188
Poor Sanitation	189
Gender-based Violence	190
CONCLUDING REMARKS	191
ABBREVIATIONS	192
REFERENCES	192
CHAPTER 3 RECLAIMING POTENTIAL: OVERCOMING DECADES OF WAR, SANCTIONS, CONFLICT, AND TERRORISM IN IRAQ	208
Taysir Al Janabi	
INTRODUCTION	208
BRIEF HISTORY OF WARS IN IRAQ	210
Iran-Iraq War, September 1980–August 1988	210
First Gulf War, 1991	211
US-Iraq War, or Second Persian Gulf War, (2003–2011)	212
Iraq War with ISIS 2013–2017	213
CRISIS PRECIPITATED BY COMMON GLOBAL ISSUES	214
The Socioeconomic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic	214
Impact of the Ukraine War and Ongoing Conflicts in the Middle East	218
<i>Military and Security Implications</i>	218
Climate Challenges	218
SECTOR-BASED CHALLENGES	220

Water Security and Infrastructure	220
<i>Navigating Water Challenges in Iraq amidst COVID-19</i>	220
<i>Ripples of Conflict: Impact of Water Infrastructure Damage in Iraq</i>	223
<i>Climate Change Impact on Water Resources in Iraq</i>	225
Agriculture and Livestock	227
<i>Impacts of COVID-19 on Agricultural Production in Iraq</i>	228
<i>Impact of Prolonged Conflicts on Iraq's Agricultural Sector</i>	229
<i>Water Pollution Crisis Threatens Iraq's Agriculture: A Multi-Faceted Challenge</i>	231
<i>Understanding the Impact of Climate Change on Iraq's Agriculture</i>	232
Energy and Infrastructure	232
<i>Navigating Crisis: Iraq's Oil Sector Resilience amid the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	234
<i>Iraq's Strategic Shifts in Oil Exports amid Geopolitical Turmoil and Economic Challenges</i>	235
Health Sector	237
<i>Iraq's COVID-19 Odyssey: Navigating Adversity and Resilience amidst Healthcare Struggles</i>	237
<i>Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children in Iraq: Health Concerns and Vaccination Challenges</i>	244
<i>The Impact of Conflict and the Need for Systemic Reform</i>	245
<i>Environmental and Health Consequences of War and Climate Change in Iraq: A Comprehensive Analysis</i>	251
<i>Confronting the Consequences of Climate Change, Dust Storms, and Environmental Degradation</i>	252
OTHER SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES	255
Food Insecurity	255
<i>The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security in Iraq: Challenges, Resilience, and Urgent Needs</i>	256
<i>Impact of Conflict, Sanctions, and War on Food Security in Iraq</i>	257
<i>Impact of Ukraine Conflict on Food Prices in Iraq: Protests and Economic Strain amidst Import Disruptions</i>	258
<i>Iraq's Escalating Food Insecurity: Impacts of Drought, Water Scarcity and Dust Storms</i>	260
Climate Change-Related Migration	261
Dollar Crisis and Currency Devaluation	263
Currency Devaluation Impact on Food Prices	263
CONCLUDING REMARKS	264
ABBREVIATIONS	264
REFERENCES	264
CHAPTER 4 DETERIORATING HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OF DR CONGO	280
Sheikh Mohd Saleem, Shah Sumaya Jan and Hina Sharif	
INTRODUCTION	281
DEEPENING CRISIS BY ONGOING GLOBAL ISSUES	284
Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 Responses in the DRC	284
Disparities in Global Crisis Responses: The Overlooked Crisis in the DRC amidst Global Conflicts	286
Socio-economic Impacts of Ongoing Internal Conflicts	291
Impact of Natural Disasters and Environmental Issues	297
SECTORAL IMPACTS OF ONGOING GLOBAL CRISIS	300
Agriculture and Livestock	300
<i>COVID-19's Impact on Agriculture in the DRC: Challenges, Responses</i>	302

<i>Conflict Dynamics and Agricultural Challenges in the DRC</i>	303
<i>Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation Challenges in Agricultural Livelihoods across the DRC</i>	304
Education	308
<i>Navigating Educational Disruption: COVID-19 Impact and Recovery Efforts in the DRC</i>	309
<i>The Impact of Conflict on Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Persistent Crisis</i>	314
Health Sector	319
<i>Concurrent Epidemic Crises: Navigating Multiple Disease Outbreaks amidst COVID-19 in the DRC</i>	319
<i>Hampered COVID-19 Care amidst Ongoing Conflicts and Multiple Challenges in the DRC</i>	323
<i>Impacts of COVID-19 in Conflict-Afflicted Areas</i>	325
<i>Humanitarian Challenges and Persistent Health Vulnerabilities amid Ongoing Violence and Instability</i>	332
<i>Environmental and Health Challenges in the DRC: A Synthesis of Climate Impacts and Pollution Findings</i>	339
CROSS-CURRENT ISSUES	344
Food Insecurity	344
<i>Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security in the DRC</i>	345
<i>Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Food Security in the DRC</i>	347
<i>Complex Humanitarian Emergencies and Their Impact on Food Insecurity in the DRC</i>	348
<i>Climate Change and Food Insecurity in the DRC</i>	351
Internal Displacements	352
<i>Impacts of COVID-19 on IDPs in the DRC</i>	354
<i>Addressing the Multifaceted Health Challenges of IDPs in the DRC</i>	356
<i>Impacts of Natural Disasters on Displacement and Displaced People in the DRC</i>	359
Women as Victims of Conflict	361
<i>Addressing the Socioeconomic and Health Impacts of Sexual Violence</i>	361
<i>Understanding Domestic Violence and GBV amid Drought and Disease Outbreaks in DR Congo</i>	362
<i>Combatting Sexual Exploitation in the DRC amidst Conflict: Accountability from Perpetrators to Peacekeepers</i>	364
Children's Rights Violation in the DRC	366
<i>Recruited as Child Labor in Mining Activities</i>	366
<i>COVID-19 and Children's Rights Violations in Eastern DRC</i>	366
<i>Crisis of Child Rights Violations in the DRC amid Violence Escalation</i>	368
Maternal and Child Health	370
<i>Challenges in Child Health: Addressing Malnutrition, Immunization, and Infectious Diseases in Conflict-Affected Eastern DRC</i>	371
<i>Impact of COVID-19 on Child Immunization and Health Services in the DRC</i>	373
<i>The Complex Impact of Armed Conflict on Child Health</i>	374
<i>Addressing Maternal Health Challenges in the DRC</i>	375
<i>Impact of COVID-19 and Concurrent Crises on Maternal Health Services in the DRC</i>	377
<i>Conflict Dynamics and Maternal Healthcare Utilization</i>	378
CONCLUDING REMARKS	379
ABBREVIATIONS	381
REFERENCES	381
SUBJECT INDEX	406

FOREWORD

Wars and conflicts, long embedded in the fabric of human history, continue to shape the political, social, and economic trajectories of nations in profound ways. In the post-pandemic era, rising geopolitical fragmentation and renewed regional tensions have intensified the urgency of understanding the enduring legacies of conflict. War-torn countries today face deeply interconnected challenges, including economic stagnation, collapsing livelihoods, and widening developmental disparities. These conditions are compounded by widespread poverty, food insecurity, displacement, and the erosion of essential services such as education and healthcare. Fragile institutions, fiscal instability, and persistent inequality further entrench cycles of vulnerability, constraining recovery and long-term resilience. Yet amid these adversities, pathways to renewal remain, anchored in the prospects of peace and effective governance, and in the untapped potential of human and natural resources.

The Israel–Palestine conflict, rooted in the late nineteenth century and shaped by wars, displacement, and unresolved claims to self-determination, has evolved through repeated cycles of violence and fragile peace efforts. Key milestones, including uprisings, partial accords, and political divisions—particularly following Hamas’s control of Gaza—have hindered a durable resolution. Recent escalations, especially since 2023, have caused extensive destruction, mass displacement, and a severe humanitarian crisis, with continued instability despite a fragile ceasefire in place by late 2025. The chapter on the Israel–Palestine conflict examines the socioeconomic crises arising from prolonged conflict amid the pandemic and climate crisis in the West Bank, Gaza, and the territories Palestine has lost since the establishment of Israel. It also explores the combined impacts on key sectors such as agriculture, education, energy, telecommunications, and health, as well as cross-cutting issues including international aid, water scarcity, gender-based violence, and the health of children and women.

The Tigray conflict in Ethiopia stems from the 2020–2022 civil war and the 2022 Pretoria Agreement, which ended active fighting but left key issues unresolved, including power-sharing, disarmament, and territorial control. Today, fears of renewed conflict amid fragile peace and rising political tensions between Ethiopia’s federal government and Tigrayan authorities have re-emerged, alongside renewed internal clashes between the TPLF and the federally appointed interim administration. The situation is further complicated by Eritrea’s reported involvement and shifting regional alignments, which increase the risk of wider instability and worsen humanitarian conditions across Tigray and the Horn of Africa. The chapter on the Tigray region discusses the destruction of infrastructure, political fragmentation, casualties, displacement, livelihood crises, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation driven by the conflict and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. It further explores sectoral impacts and cross-cutting challenges shaped by intersecting pressures of conflict, pandemic disruption, and climate stress.

Iraq has endured more than four decades of near-continuous war, sanctions, and political upheaval, from the Iran–Iraq War and the 1991 Gulf War to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that dismantled the Ba’athist state and fundamentally reshaped its political order. In the aftermath, the rise and defeat of ISIS left a fragmented security landscape marked by insurgency, weak governance, and competing militias, including Iran-aligned groups embedded within state structures, while the country has increasingly become a theatre of regional proxy rivalries involving the United States, Iran, Turkey, and Kurdish actors. In this broader context of instability and shifting regional tensions, Iraq continues to face recurring insecurity, contested sovereignty, and the risk of renewed conflict. This chapter examines the resulting

socioeconomic crisis shaped by decades of warfare, authoritarian rule, sanctions, and foreign intervention, which have eroded state institutions and replaced them with a fragile sectarian political system, driving long-term economic and social breakdown marked by widespread suffering, unemployment, food insecurity, and environmental stress; despite its oil wealth, Iraq remains trapped in persistent poverty and vulnerability, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate extremes.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has endured over three decades of protracted, resource-driven conflict, particularly in its eastern regions, causing millions of deaths and a massive humanitarian crisis. As of April 2026, intense fighting persists in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, with groups such as March 23 Movement clashing with state forces despite recent counter-offensives. The crisis has escalated with widespread food insecurity affecting about 26.6 million people and nearly 8 million internally displaced, alongside increasingly sophisticated warfare involving drones and heavy artillery. Compounding this instability, the country faces overlapping public health emergencies, including COVID-19, Ebola virus disease, Mpox, and the bubonic plague, further intensifying its humanitarian burden. The chapter on the DR Congo examines how the crisis has deepened due to both internal dynamics and overlapping global conflicts, including the Ukraine war. It explores how COVID-19 and other infectious disease care have been jeopardized amid compounding challenges, while also addressing environmental and health pressures intensified by climate extremes, alongside intersecting crosscurrent issues.

Collectively, these chapters point to a persistent and troubling pattern: the convergence of protracted conflict, pandemic shocks, and climate stress generates complex crises that outstrip conventional policy responses. Across Israel–Palestine, Tigray, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cycles of violence weaken institutions, fragment governance, and destabilize essential sectors. Climate pressures intensify resource scarcity and displacement, while pandemics expose and deepen structural vulnerabilities in already fragile systems. These intersecting forces drive cascading socioeconomic disruptions, entrench inequality, and prolong humanitarian distress, narrowing pathways to recovery. Addressing these layered crises will require stronger institutional resilience, inclusive governance, sustained international cooperation, and adaptive, context-sensitive innovation.

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Preface

In many of today's conflicts, war is not a choice made by ordinary people but a condition forced upon them by forces far beyond their control. Political ambition, strategic rivalries, and the narrow interests of a few often ignite and sustain violence, while civilians—who neither shape these decisions nor benefit from them—are left to endure the consequences. In places like the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Tigray, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, daily life has become a fragile struggle for survival, where safety and dignity can no longer be taken for granted. Prolonged conflict delivers a relentless “triple shock,” as violence, economic collapse, and failing institutions slowly dismantle the rhythms of normal life. Livelihoods disappear, prices spiral beyond reach, and families are pushed into poverty not by choice but by circumstance. Hunger deepens into famine as food systems break down or are deliberately obstructed, while shattered health and sanitation systems leave communities exposed to disease and silent suffering. Many are forced to flee their homes, crossing borders with little more than hope, while others return after brief truces only to find themselves trapped in yet another cycle of destruction. Education fades into the background, replaced by survival, and entire generations grow up without the stability needed to imagine a different future. For millions, peace remains a distant, almost abstract dream, glimpsed but rarely sustained. Amid rubble and uncertainty, children still dare to hope for safety, for classrooms, for a life not defined by fear. What lingers beyond the visible ruins is a quieter, more enduring loss—the erosion of hope itself, as lives are shaped more by absence than by possibility. In the end, the heaviest burden of war is carried by those who never chose it, yet must live with its deepest and most lasting scars.

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Section 1 (War-Torn Countries)

CHAPTER 1

Conflicts in Israel-Palestine and Beyond**Atef Masad^{1,*}**¹ *Department of Biomedical Science, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Israa University, Gaza, Palestine*

Abstract: Palestine has been under Israeli control for 77 years, which has caused financial difficulties, shortages of resources, and problems with healthcare. In the Gaza Strip, there's been a complete military blockade since 2007. This means there are very limited resources, and people face many challenges, leading to a tough life. In the areas under Palestinian control, like the West Bank and East Jerusalem, there are problems with violence from settlers, and the land is divided. The Palestinian government relies heavily on funding from other countries, especially for public services. But some areas, like farming and industry, are struggling. Israel is much wealthier than Palestine, with people in Israel earning about 14 to 20 times more per person. The COVID-19 pandemic made things even harder for Palestine's economy. There are still issues with access to water and electricity, and people have come up with creative ways to address them. Climate change causes things like droughts and makes it harder to grow food. This affects society and the economy. In Palestine, droughts can lead to not having enough water for farming, which is a big problem for people's lives and the economy. Israel is working on using eco-friendly technology, but there are still issues with settlers and fairness in how the land is used. Even though the climate crisis is a big problem, the political issues in the region often take the spotlight, leaving the climate concerns in the background.

Keywords: Abrahamic accords, Food insecurity, Geopolitical dynamics, Damage, International interventions, Normalization, Oslo accords, Regional diplomacy, Terrorism, UN's limitation, Violence escalation, West bank occupation.

INTRODUCTION

For the past 77 years, Palestine has been experiencing a crisis due to Israeli military control, leading to severe shortages in financial resources, materials, healthcare services, and supplies. Since 2007, Gaza has been subjected to a comprehensive military blockade, resulting in limited resources, increased social hardships, and challenges in maintaining a satisfactory quality of life. The

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Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) includes the West Bank, which encompasses East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip (Fig. 1). As of April 2023, Israel's population is approximately 10 million, consisting of 7.2 million Jews (73.5%), 2.1 million Arab Palestinians (21%), and 534,000 individuals categorized as “others” (5.5%). Within the population of the OPT, there are Jewish settlers residing unlawfully in exclusively Jewish settlements. Between 1993 and 2007, per capita GNP in the occupied territories decreased by 30%, while unemployment and poverty rates soared to over 70%. Israeli settlers doubled to 400,000 by 2000 and reached 700,000 by 2023, exacerbating the marginalized status of Palestinians. Pre-2023, Gaza already faced acute malnutrition, with over half of Palestinian families surviving on just one meal daily, reflecting deep socio-economic disparities. As of 2024, there are over 300 Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, with Palestinian land use in Area C still restricted, witnessing 1,240 new settlement constructions between July 2022 and March 2023 (Robinson, 2024; UN Report, 2023; OHCHR, 2024). The West Bank and East Jerusalem are grappling with a crisis stemming from settler colonial violence, territorial fragmentation, and ongoing military occupation. These factors pose significant obstacles to achieving sustainable development (Veronese *et al.*, 2023a). The Gaza Strip, situated on the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, is home to approximately 2 million people, with 70% being Palestinians who were displaced from their homes in 1948. They subsequently resided in refugee camps after the establishment of the State of Israel. From 1967 to 2005, the region was under Israeli military control, a situation that came to an end with Israel's withdrawal in 2005 (Alshurafa *et al.*, 2023).



Fig. (1). Occupied and lost territories of Palestine (author's own work using MS Paint).

The Economic Toll of COVID-19 on Palestine Amidst Ongoing Occupation Challenges

The economy of Palestine suffered significantly from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as reported by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, which recorded a 12% decrease in GDP compared to the previous year, primarily attributed to disruptions in both demand and supply (Press Release, 2020). The service sector, particularly tourism-related industries like restaurants and hotels, experienced a notable 10% reduction, leading to significant job losses. Similarly, construction activity plummeted by 35%, accompanied by a sharp 45% decline in building permits during the closure period. Industrial activity also saw a significant decline of 12% in 2020, with a further 6% drop observed in the first half of the year. In response to the crisis, the Palestinian Monetary Authority implemented various measures, including remote work, branch closures, reduced hours, service suspensions, and postponed payments for borrowers, with additional instructions issued in July 2020 to prohibit payment postponement for unaffected creditors without prior approval (Awwad & Razia, 2023). Darabee's (2022) study delved into the financial performance of 15 Palestinian firms across industrial, investment, and service sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing liquidity, solvency, and profitability indicators. The findings revealed significant disparities in liquidity and solvency indicators post-pandemic, notably with decreased liquidity in industrial and investment sectors. Service firms experienced a substantial increase in the debt-to-equity ratio alongside declining net profit margins across all sectors. While the investment and service sectors faced challenges meeting long-term debts, the services sector showed improved liquidity.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, the pandemic exacerbated dire living conditions due to Israel's blockade, hampering the health sector's ability to respond effectively. Restrictions on medical imports worsened shortages of diagnostic and therapeutic resources, while workforce development was hindered by permit denials. Electricity and water shortages further strained healthcare facilities and living conditions, intensifying the health crisis (ActionAid & Al Mezan, 2022). Abuzerr *et al.* (2021) highlighted the struggles of the Palestinian population, particularly in Gaza, with inadequate water and electricity supplies aggravated by fuel import restrictions during the pandemic. This directly affected essential infrastructure like water pumps and electrical engines, prompting reliance on mobile Internet bands or stable 12V power supplies for wifi routers, which were more accessible than potable water or consistent electricity. In her book "COVID-19 in Palestine: the settler colonial context," Nadia Naser-Najjab explores the pandemic's impact on Palestinians, revealing heightened difficulties within the context of occupation and conflict. Through interviews with stakeholders, she unveils how Palestinians

CHAPTER 2

Hunger, Repression, and Tears: Evidence from Tigray, Northern Ethiopia**Kassa Teka^{1,*}, Mulu Haftu² and Efrem Gidey²**¹ *Department of Land Resources Management and Environmental Protection, Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia*² *Department of Rural Development, Wukro St. Mary's Institute, Tigray, Ethiopia*

Abstract: Ethiopia, situated in the Horn of Africa, faces a myriad of challenges, from recurrent droughts and environmental degradation to conflict and economic instability. Despite its rich indigenous heritage and status as Africa's only uncolonized nation, Ethiopia's resilience is being severely tested on multiple fronts. The ongoing conflict in the Tigray region has unleashed a humanitarian crisis marked by mass displacement, violence, and reports of ethnic cleansing and human rights abuses. This conflict stems from political tensions between the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, escalating into open warfare in November 2020. Adding to Ethiopia's woes, the COVID-19 pandemic has strained its fragile healthcare system and exacerbated socioeconomic disparities. Lockdown measures have disrupted livelihoods, particularly in regions like Tigray, where access to essential services is restricted. Moreover, the looming specter of climate change exacerbates environmental challenges, such as droughts and floods, pushing millions to the brink of famine and deepening food insecurity and economic instability. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, and refugees, face dire circumstances, with mass displacement, lack of access to basic services, and widespread poverty shaping an uncertain future. Urgent action is imperative to address the root causes of conflict, strengthen humanitarian assistance, and build resilience against future shocks. Only through concerted efforts, both domestically and internationally, can Ethiopia navigate these turbulent times and emerge stronger from the storm. Despite achieving peace, Ethiopia continues to struggle with the aftermath of conflict, facing daunting challenges such as hunger, drought, and socioeconomic instability.

Keywords: Attack on health facilities, Catastrophic drought, Food aid dependency, Food crisis, Gender-based violence, Human rights violation, Malnutrition.

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INTRODUCTION

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, has experienced recurrent periods of drought, environmental degradation, and conflict, which have contributed to food insecurity and economic hardship for many of its population (Fig. 1). Ethiopia has long preserved its unspoiled indigenous heritage as the only uncolonized country. It is divided into eleven National Regional States: Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, Sidama, Somalia, South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, and Tigray, as well as two administrative cities: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, and has the world's thirteenth largest population at 120,283,026 people and the second largest in Africa. Acute food insecurity in Ethiopia increased from 8 million in 2019 to 20.1 million (nearly one-sixth of the total population) in 2023, including more than 3% of internally displaced people (IDP) and 13 million people in northern Ethiopia (UN OCHA, 2023a). Ethiopia has made significant economic strides since the end of its civil war in 1991, achieving an average growth rate of 10.6% from 2005 to 2017, reducing poverty to around 24.1%, and enhancing social service provision. Despite challenges such as drought, COVID-19, displacement, and conflict, the number of food-insecure households decreased from 40% in 2014 to 16% in 2020 (Araya & Lee, 2024).



Fig. (1). Ethiopian Regions Tigray, Afar, and Amhara are involved in war. Mekelle is the capital city of the Tigray region. Eritrea declared independence from Ethiopia in 1993, but Eritrean troops are said to be assisting the Ethiopian Army in the Tigray Conflict (authors own work using MapChart).

Tigray is one of the eleven regional states and two chartered administrative cities that constitute northern Ethiopia. It encompasses approximately 5% of the country's population (5.5 to 6 million), making it the fifth-largest regional state. Tigray borders Sudan and Eritrea, as well as the Ethiopian regions of Afar and Amhara (Fig. 2).



Fig. (2). Tigray, a historic region in northern Ethiopia, with four zones and 35 districts, faced conflict starting in November 2020, triggered by clashes between the Ethiopian army and Tigrayan troops (author's own work using MapChart).

The impact of COVID-19 on Ethiopia's socioeconomic crisis has been profound, particularly after the delta variant was identified in September 2021. Despite initial containment efforts, enforcement weakened over time, hindering vaccination targets. Concurrently, the ongoing conflict in Tigray diverted vital resources away from pandemic response, compounding the crisis. Access to vaccines remained limited, compounded by challenges in the healthcare system and issues with rural outreach (Tesfay & Gesesew, 2021). The situation was dire in Tigray, where only five out of 40 hospitals were accessible in January 2021, with most looted or destroyed, further complicating the pandemic response (Anna, 2021). Alongside COVID-19, ongoing conflict, and desert locust infestations, the humanitarian crisis in Tigray worsened, affecting 4.5 million people, including 2.3 million children, who required emergency food assistance (UNICEF, 2021a).

CHAPTER 3

Reclaiming Potential: Overcoming Decades of War, Sanctions, Conflict, and Terrorism in Iraq

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Abstract: Iraq is an upper-middle-income country with tremendous human and financial resources available for potential growth. The war and ongoing conflicts have resulted in the displacement of millions of Iraqis, loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure, and a significant humanitarian crisis. The country continues to grapple with the process of rebuilding, addressing political divisions, and ensuring stability and security for its people. However, decades of wars, sanctions, conflicts, corruption, and terrorism have challenged these resources and Iraq's potential. Iraq in the 1970s was one of the strongest economies in the Middle East region, with impressive health care, credible education, and solid infrastructure. The Iran-Iraq war reduced oil revenue, shifted priorities, and increased debt. Then the Gulf War, followed by international sanctions and the regime's mismanagement, exacerbated Iraq's economic deterioration. By 2000, Iraq was among the poorest countries in the region. With the economic reconstruction by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in 2003, the country appreciated a relatively stable economy that nevertheless could not withstand pervasive corruption, political instability, civil war, terrorism, and climate change. The increase in oil demand and prices in 2019 benefited Iraq's economy, and the country was finally poised to execute its recovery and reconstruction plans. However, the COVID-19 pandemic hindered these efforts and worsened the preexisting challenges. Today, with burgeoning oil revenue in 2023, Iraq is at a crossroads: it can passively continue in its decline or act proactively to relive its thriving times.

Keywords: Currency devaluation, Dollar crisis, Food inflation, Forced displacement, Economic sanction, Gulf war, Iraq-Iran war, Multiple wars, Political instability, Refugee crisis, Traumatic events.

INTRODUCTION

Iraq has unique demographic characteristics, as the country has an ethnically and religiously diverse population of more than 40 million. Iraq's population is

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expanding at one of the world's fastest rates, primarily due to high birth rates (OCHA, 2023) (Fig. 1). Iraq's population is expected to double again by 2050 (Sky, 2023). The last official census in 2014 reported that the population growth rate was 2.5%, with women accounting for 49% of the total population. Almost 70% of Iraq's population lives in urban areas as of 2021 due to the lack of urban planning and successive internal conflicts (Al-Aloosy *et al.*, 2022). The life expectancy at birth has increased significantly from 58.2 years in 2006 to 71 years in 2023 (Shlash *et al.*, 2008; MacroTrends, 2023).



Fig. (1). Republic of Iraq map (generated by MapChart).

As of April 2023, Iraq had more than 6 million vulnerable individuals, including 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 5 million IDP returnees, and 261,929 Syrian refugees who reside predominantly in Kurdistan (USAID, 2023). The country is divided into eighteen governorates. Three provinces (Erbil, Duhok, and Al-Sulaimaniya) are found in the north and are ruled by a semi-autonomous regional government known as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG); the remaining fifteen provinces are in central and southern Iraq and maintain a centralized relationship with Baghdad (Hadad, 2023). Forty years of ongoing conflict in Iraq have resulted in massively traumatic events like multiple wars, economic sanctions, sectarian strife, terrorism, and organized crime. Iraq has not been an exception to the rule when it comes to the severe consequences that conflict has on the economy, population health, health systems, and other services and infrastructure that support a population's health. Over the last decade,

oil revenues have accounted for more than 99% of exports, 85% of the government's budget, and 42% of GDP (Makki, 2022, Fig. 2).

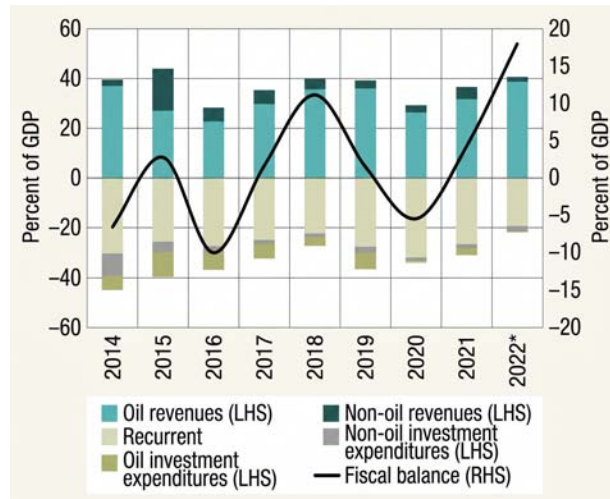


Fig. (2). Iraq's expenditures and revenues (LHS) as a percentage of GDP for oil and non-oil sectors 2014 - 2022 (World Bank Group, 2022).

The country reported that its economy was recovering after contracting in 2019 due to the war against ISIS. The improvement in security conditions, increased oil demand and production, and the reconstruction of the oil industry's facilities have all led to an increase in Iraq's economic growth to 4.5% in 2019 (Al-Jumaili, 2021; Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Despite this increase, political instability, widespread corruption, social unrest, and a lack of supported policies have led to the mismanagement of this valuable economic growth and forced the government's dependence on oil and society's reliance on the government (IMF, 2023).

BRIEF HISTORY OF WARS IN IRAQ

Iran-Iraq War, September 1980–August 1988

Iraq and Iran have a long history of conflict. A series of border disputes fueled by hegemonic aspirations and religious divides sparked the war in 1980. Western countries have long had strategic interests in the region and have alternately supported Iran or Iraq, escalating tensions. Chemical agents were among the high-intensity weapons used in the Iran-Iraq war. Because it involved two major oil producers and the region that hosts more than half of the world's reserves, the war was one of the most strategically important conflicts in modern history. To finance the war efforts, both Iran and Iraq resorted to borrowing money from

CHAPTER 4

Deteriorating Humanitarian Situation of DR Congo

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Abstract: The Democratic Republic of Congo faces multiple challenges, including civil wars and heavy reliance on the mining sector. The country also has significant potential for eco-tourism, boasting seven major national parks with diverse wildlife, including endangered gorillas and volcanic landscapes. However, the DRC has been hit by several epidemics, including Ebola, measles, meningitis, cholera, Typhoid, bubonic plague, and monkeypox, which have strained the healthcare system. Vulnerable populations suffer from pre-existing conditions and diseases, complicating the COVID-19 response. Additionally, the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in 2021 exacerbated the existing pandemic crisis, adding to the challenges faced by the DRC. The eruption introduced health risks due to pollutant release, impacting respiratory health, and had broader environmental and economic impacts. The DRC also experiences a shortage of medical equipment, diagnostic devices, and healthcare workers, contributing to challenges in pandemic response. Ongoing conflicts in the eastern regions have led to internal displacements, hampering social distancing measures and putting additional strain on the healthcare system. The impact of the Ukraine war on the DR Congo is evident in the sharp rise in prices, particularly in the northeastern region, due to economic repercussions and existing challenges. Escalating fuel costs have sparked frustration among residents, calling for more active price regulation. Climate change poses a severe threat to agriculture in vulnerable regions like the DRC, affecting smallholder farmers and exacerbating gender disparities in adaptive capacity. Addressing these complex challenges requires strategic planning, increased funding, and healthcare resources.

Keywords: Civil wars, Conflicts over natural resources, Gender disparities, Healthcare resources, Internal displacements, Medical equipment shortage, Vulnerable populations.

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INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the largest state in Southern and Central Africa, located at the heart of the continent, covering 2,345,095 km². It features a diverse geography, including a central basin, plateaus, and mountains, with over half of the country covered in tropical rainforest (Fig. 1). Despite being rich in mineral resources, the DRC has faced challenges, including civil wars and economic reliance on the mining sector. Agriculture, particularly cash crops like coffee and palm oil, also plays a significant role. The country holds potential for eco-tourism, boasting seven major national parks with diverse wildlife, including endangered gorillas and volcanic landscapes.

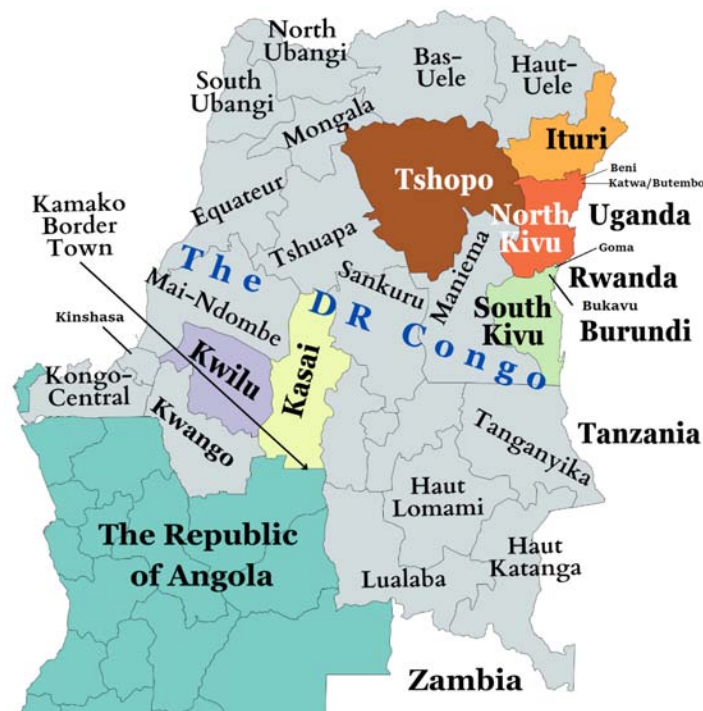


Fig. (1). Democratic Republic of the Congo (generated with MapChart).

The DRC, with a population exceeding 115 million in 2026, is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the second-largest in Africa, and the eleventh-largest globally, with a land area comparable to Western Europe. As of 2025–26, it is Africa's fourth most populous country after Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Egypt, and ranks fifteenth worldwide, while recording the world's third-highest fertility rate after Niger and Angola. The country also has the second-highest number of displaced persons in Africa, at 8.2 million, following Sudan. Despite its size and population, over 70% of its people—around 76 million—lives in extreme poverty,

accounting for roughly one in ten of the world's extremely poor. Its population growth rate of 3.3% in 2025 exceeded both continental and global averages. Factors contributing to this growth include a decrease in deaths and a high number of births, with Congolese women averaging 5 to 6 babies in their lifetimes, driven by cultural values, early childbearing, low contraception usage, and the absence of a national population policy. The implications of this rapid demography include a high dependency ratio, planning challenges, low human development indicators, and significant social and economic burdens. In 2023, nearly three-fourths of Congolese people lived on less than \$2.15 a day, with about one in six people living in extreme poverty in SSA residing in the DRC (Emina, 2023; UNRIC, 2024).

The DRC grapples with longstanding food insecurity worsened by conflicts, economic challenges, and climate change, further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating health crises and diminishing livelihoods amid disrupted food markets, especially impacting vulnerable populations' well-being (Izabayo & Gabrielová, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic in the DRC has severely impacted vulnerable populations, particularly the elderly, due to inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited access to essential resources, and the absence of ventilators, resulting in dire consequences, including increased mortality rates and emotional distress among aid workers (Modeawi *et al.*, 2021). In March 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and its tenth Ebola outbreak, the DRC implemented lessons learned from Ebola response (EVD10) to enhance infectious disease management, focusing on capacity building and healthcare facility strengthening, despite logistical hurdles posed by its vast size and poor road connectivity (The World Bank Group, 2023a). With a GDP per capita of \$753 and half the population living below the poverty line, the DRC faces dire economic consequences from the Covid-19 pandemic, including a projected recession (-2.2% growth) in 2020, exacerbated by reduced exports and falling commodity prices, leading to a \$5 billion revenue loss, as warned by the World Bank, while IFPRI analysis indicates a 13% decline in national GDP and a 4% drop in agri-food system GDP during a 2-month lockdown, resulting in over \$1 billion in lost GDP (Dizolele, 2020; IFPRI, 2021). The Social Sciences Analytics Cell (CASS) reported that the COVID-19 outbreak disproportionately affected women in the DRC, exacerbating disparities in health, social protection, and economic status. The pandemic caused job losses in the informal labor sector, restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services, and increased childcare burdens due to school closures (UNICEF, 2020). The World Bank allocated \$47 million to the DRC for COVID-19 response, targeting critical provinces like Kinshasa, Bas-Congo, Kwango, and Kwilu, aiming to bolster testing, containment strategies, and medical personnel training (The World Bank Group, 2020).

SUBJECT INDEX

A

Academic performance 56, 172, 308, 310, 313
 Acute malnutrition 2, 186, 257, 344, 346, 371
 Acute respiratory infection (ARI) 84, 163, 357
 Adaptation strategies 44, 151, 154, 261, 306
 Adaptive capacity 280, 379
 Adherence 95, 240, 329, 331
 Adolescent fertility rate 324
 Anaemia 102, 369
 Anaerobic digestion 69
 Antenatal care (ANC) 102, 159, 179, 187, 376, 377, 378, 379
 Anthropogenic activities 150, 340
 Aquifer recharge 43
 Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) 100, 101

B

Bacterial contamination 249
 Bacterial-viral co-infections 372
 Big data analytics (BDA) 46
 Biodiversity loss 141, 149, 300, 339, 340
 Biomass energy 67, 68, 72, 151
 Biomonitoring 342
 Birth outcomes 187

C

Carbon emissions 9, 36, 298, 306
 Cardiovascular disease 75, 155, 237, 253
 Case fatality ratio (CFR) 335, 358
 Chikungunya virus (CHIKV) 339
 Chronic kidney disease (CKD) 80, 155, 159
 Climate-smart agricultural technologies (CSATs) 307
 Competency-based medical education (CBME) 324
 Congenital birth defects 252
 Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever (CCHF) 255

Crop diversification 304
 Cutaneous leishmaniasis (CL) 163

D

Data management 308
 Deforestation rates 149, 305, 343, 345
 Depleted uranium 252
 Desertification 33, 141, 149, 219, 220, 225, 226, 233, 253, 260
 Diagnostic capacity 161, 323, 331
 Diarrheal diseases 35, 189, 323, 339
 Dietary diversity score 91, 257
 Digital infrastructure 54, 256
 Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) 75
 Displacement tracking matrix (DTM) 177, 181

E

Early childhood education (ECE) 166, 308
 Ebola virus disease (EVD) 282, 288, 321, 339, 374
 Ecological degradation 380
 Economic instability 53, 137, 230, 246, 290, 301, 303, 352, 356, 363, 366
 Educational attainment 98, 250, 317, 354
 English medium instruction (EMI) 308, 319
 Environmental hazards 8, 341, 361
 Epidemiological surveillance 77, 251, 331
 Evapotranspiration 226

F

Facility-based deliveries (FBD) 377
 Family planning (FP) 101, 155, 244, 370, 375
 Food consumption score (FCS) 185, 257
 Food insecurity 89, 90, 91, 140, 151, 182, 183, 184, 255, 257, 344, 345, 347, 348, 349, 360

G

Gender-based violence (GBV) 104, 105, 106,
107, 137, 140, 145, 311, 313, 314, 349,
363, 364, 367
Generalized extreme value 222
Geopolitical dynamics 1, 236
Gestational age 187
Global developmental delay (GDD) 96
Global partnership for education (GPE) 309,
311, 314
Global war on terror (GWOT) 247
Greenhouse gas emissions 10, 298, 306, 351
Groundwater contamination 8, 35, 43

H

Haemophilus influenzae 372
Health Extension Program 156
Healthcare waste management (HCWM) 341
Hepatitis B (HBV) 155, 362, 373, 374
Hepatitis C (HCV) 373
Human Capital Index 308, 317
Hydrological droughts 42
Hyperglycemia 248
Hypertension 75, 80, 103, 240, 248

I

Immunization coverage 102, 165, 241, 244,
372, 374
Infection prevention 157, 240, 330
Infectious diseases 10, 80, 83, 84, 99, 320,
338, 340, 356, 357, 364
Inflation rate 259, 284, 351
Information and communications technology
(ICT) 46, 47, 59, 256, 312, 313
Integrated watershed management (IWM) 151
Internally displaced people (IDPs) 138, 161,
170, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 209, 283,
316, 322, 327, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357,
358, 359, 361
Intimate partner violence (IPV) 107, 190, 362,
363, 379
Intrauterine devices 101

K

Knowledge sharing (KS) 56

L

Labor market participation 215
Land tenure systems 293
Leptospirosis 163
Levelized cost of energy (LCOE) 68, 69
Life expectancy 74, 209, 238
Livelihood strategies 176, 360
Long-acting reversible contraceptive methods
(LARCMs) 101
Low birth weight (LBW) 99, 100, 187, 211

M

Macroeconomic policies 285
Malaria morbidity 358
Maternal and child health (MCH) 370
Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) 370, 375
Meningococcal meningitis 164, 280, 319, 320,
331, 337, 338, 372
Microalgal communities 342
Micronutrient deficiencies 100, 102
Monkeypox (MPX) 280, 319, 322, 331, 339,
342
Morbidity indicators 160, 248
Multiple indicators cluster survey (MICS)
367, 376, 379

N

National Determined Contributions (NDC)
220, 298
Necropolitical systems 13
Neonatal mortality 159, 160, 370, 375, 376
Neurodevelopment 374
Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) 74, 75,
85, 155, 158, 319
Normalized difference vegetation index
(NDVI) 153

O

Oil revenue dependence 256
O'nyong'nyong virus (ONNV) 339

P

Particulate matter 85
Payments for ecosystem services (PES) 298

Perinatal distress 187
Persistent organic pollutants 340
Physiological outcomes 164
Polio (Poliomyelitis) 211, 331, 338, 373
Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) 341
Post-disaster housing reconstruction (PDHR) 108
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 103, 107, 161, 170, 247, 333, 374
Precipitation concentration index (PCI) 184
Primary health care (PHC) 75, 213, 237, 239, 244, 247, 250
Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) 183, 185
Psychosocial support 62, 175, 312, 313, 316

Q

Quality of life (QoL) 5, 15, 17, 21, 220, 239

R

Refugee populations 170, 292
Regression analysis 153, 154, 343
Renewable energy 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 220, 232, 233
Reproductive health 247, 282, 295, 325, 328, 359, 370
Resource governance 297, 299
Respiratory diseases 8, 155, 218, 253, 255, 280, 341, 366
Rift Valley fever (RVF) 339

S

Salinity levels 220, 252, 253, 258, 261
Sandstorms 219, 253, 255
Scabies infestation 164
Schistosomiasis 248
Secondary School Leaving Examination (SSLE) 172
Seroprevalence 328
Settler colonialism 2, 3, 36, 49
Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) 328, 377
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) 191, 311, 359
Simulation-based medical education (SBME) 324

Socioeconomic status 17, 91, 100, 102, 176, 282, 288, 362, 363, 371, 372, 379
Soil degradation 33, 85, 141, 149, 151, 185, 233, 283, 294, 299, 305, 348, 351
Solar Water Heater (SWH) 67
Structural equation modeling 87
Student Learning in Emergencies Checklist (SLEC) 62

T

Technical expertise 67, 241, 301, 328, 377
Technological advancements 22, 301, 342
Traumatic brain injuries (TBI) 247
Tuberculosis (TB) 155, 159, 161, 162, 250
Typhoid fever 211, 280, 319, 331, 340

U

Under-five mortality 155, 358, 370, 371, 375, 378
Urbanization 183, 227, 231, 232, 233, 298, 340, 360

V

Vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) 241, 244
Visceral leishmaniasis (VL) 165

W

Waste-to-energy facilities 68
Water Safety Plans (WSPs) 221
Waterborne diseases 91, 92, 163, 189, 213, 252, 253, 339, 340, 360

Y

Yellow fever virus (YFV) 152, 331, 339, 373

Z

Zoonotic disease events 163, 323, 339



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