



Africa's Economic Downturn and Household Well-being: A systematic review

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Abstract:

Economic disruptions by COVID-19 pandemic and trade tariffs retaliations cause adverse effects like high inflation. This paper explores Africa's economic downturn and household well-being using a systematic literature review as a research methodology. findings indicate a decline in output and food insecurity as some of the negative economic downturn effects on household well-being while positive effects are smaller family sizes experience less food insecurities, and cultural expenditure inequalities. This paper explores Africa's economic downturn and household well-being using the Systematic Literature Review , the selected database for the SLR are African Journals Online (AJOL), Google Scholar and Scopus. A total of 34 journal articles were found relevant to address the main objective of this paper. there are both negative and positive economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa. Decline in output and food insecurity are some of the negative economic downturns effect on household well-being while the positive economic downturn effects are smaller family sizes experience less food insecurities, and decline in cultural expenditure inequalities, Limits on systematic literature review and therefore, future studies can explore mixed methods approach, The government and non-government interventions to focus on improving the well-being of households, This study contributes knowledge to the existing literature on the subject, ultimately informing policy interventions and enhancing the understanding of the socio-economic dynamics during periods of economic instability.

Key words: Economic downturn, Household well-being, Africa

JEL Classification Codes: D1, E2.

Introduction :

Globally, the economy was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic with adverse effects including high inflation. In fact, Statista (2024) indicated that in 2028 the inflation rate for emerging markets and developing economies will be 5%. Although this shows a trend toward a reduction in the inflation rate, most of the pillars of the world economies were impacted too; unlike others for example, the agriculture, manufacturing, services, tourism, and mining are recovering but slowly. Equally, the World Bank (2025) mentioned that the global economy appears to be growing at a low rate while the World Economic Outlook (2025) confirmed that the global growth rate is projected at 3.3% for 2025 and 2026. On the other hand, emerging countries like Indonesia have shown that there is no asymmetric effect of inflation rate on stock market (Sia et al., 2024). Given the inflation rates and global growth projection from the World Economic Outlook (2025), there should also be consideration of the long-term impacts of the global pandemic, other micro and macroeconomic policies, not only to other countries, and the world but in the context of Africa.

Africa has experienced recurrent economic downturns, posing significant challenges to the well-being of its households. Conversely, Africa is a continent full of wealth and resources to uplift the well-being of its people at the household level with contributions from various sectors. Scholars in Africa have advocated for a number of proposals to improve the economies of Africa. For instance, Mkwizu (2020) advocated for the use of digital marketing as a means to enhance opportunities for tourism in Africa. In addition, the UNDP provided a report on the long-term effects of the pandemic for 10 African countries (Angola, Cabo Verde, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Nigeria and South Africa) and revealed that millions of people have lost work and livelihoods (UNDP, 2021). The report confirmed that the economic downturn for some countries will continue to decline, for example, Mauritius by -6.9% and Mali by -9.2% in 2050 which implies development challenges (UNDP, 2021).

When the economic growth occurred, Africa was making economic progress with average growth on the continent steady at 5% and inflation had been reducing (Clay & Keeton, 2011). Past literature like Roy and Das (2022) shows that the economic downturn in developing countries is caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic and thereafter, the Russian-Ukraine war. Following these crises, developing countries are facing a period of high prices on food and oil. This threatens to reverse the economic gains that the continent has made (Roy & Das, 2022). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has predicted a 3% fall in the global economy (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2022).

Furthermore, many Sub-Saharan African households are experiencing reduced income due to bad micro and macroeconomic policies resulting in job losses, less working hours, or pay cuts which have compounded the poverty situation. Hence, many families struggle to procure basic household needs like food, shelter, and healthcare. Also, there is a general limited financial inclusion and financial protection in the continent which increases financing resources scarcity and economic uncertainty, with heightened fear, anxiety and indulgence in drug abuse and misuse as an easy escape route (World Bank, 2023a).

The World Bank 2023 report showed that Sub-Saharan Africa's economic growth will slow to 2.5% as a result of increased fragility and conflict that is further worsened by climate change related issues with consequences on food security, alteration in nature and decreased economic recovery (World Bank, 2023b). However, the Report by UNDP (2021) studied these 10 African countries from a macro-economic perspective and focused on health, mortality and morbidity thus more studies are needed to understand the economic downturn in Africa from other perspectives and sectors. Ahmad et al. (2022) opined that though the concept of well-being has been extensively researched by many scholars, there are several categories of well-being that should be given more attention. To bridge this knowledge gap, this study explores economic downturn and its effects on household well-being particularly in Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa since the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for all these countries were affected by the pandemic despite their differences on Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.

The main objective of this paper is to explore the economic downturn and its effects on household well-being with a review of Africa. The specific objectives of this paper are: to explore the existing economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa, and to identify potential policy interventions that can help households cope with the existing economic downturn effects. Additionally, this study's outcome has significance in benefiting African citizens, policy makers and regional bodies like the African Union (AU) to improve the well-being of households within the selected countries. Policy interventions are critical for the African content not just for the manufacturing sector as indicated in Mkwizu and Monametsi (2021) but also for the household well-being which this study addresses.

Methodology :

This paper uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the research design in order to address the study's main objective which is to explore the economic downturn and its effects on household well-being with a review of Africa. This study posed two questions which are i) *What*

are the existing economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa? and ii) *what are the identified potential policy interventions that can help households cope with the existing economic downturn effects?* This paper adopts the SLR stages from Tawfik et al. (2019) which basically include developing research questions, protocol registration, literature search and evaluation by considering search strategy, inclusion criterion, exclusion criteria, quality and eligibility assessment as well as data extraction and analysis. While conducting this systematic review, this study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) as guided by Page et al. (2021). The protocol for this study was registered in the Open Science Frame (OSF) with ID link <https://doi/10.17605/OSF.10/26VCT>

Search Strategy

According to Ewald et al. (2022), in adopting a SLR, searching at least two databases should be sufficient to improve coverage and decrease the chances of making inappropriate conclusion of the review. Hence, this paper selected three databases highlighted in the search strategy of this study in order to address the main objective. This review searched the literature online to understand the impact of economic downturns on various dimensions of household well-being across Africa. Initial searches were conducted using the specified keywords and databases. The search was conducted in the following electronic databases: African Journal Online (AJOL), Google Scholar, and Scopus covering all published journal articles from 2000 to 2024. The primary search question that guided this review is “How do economic downturns in Africa affect household well-being?”. In identifying the relevant literature, the search keywords include “Economic downturn” OR “recession” OR “economic crisis” OR “Coping mechanisms” AND “Africa” OR “Household well-being” OR “household income” OR “consumption” OR “savings”.

Screening, Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria, Quality and Eligibility

Studies conducted in Africa were considered in this study for the period of 2000 to 2024 to ensure relevance to recent economic contexts. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were done and that journal articles published in the English language including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research, which examined the impact of economic downturns on household income, consumption, savings, and coping mechanisms were included in this study. Studies focusing on regions outside Africa, published before the year 2000, theoretical papers without empirical data, non-English publications, duplications and articles without full access were excluded from this review. In addition, the titles and abstracts of identified studies were screened to exclude irrelevant articles using Rayyan software. For quality, this study ensured that the selected journal articles are only peer-reviewed empirical studies. Full texts of eligible studies that

met the inclusion criteria based on titles, abstracts and indicators screening were retrieved and reviewed. The economic downturn indicators of interest were GDP, investment, Gross National Product (GNP), financial inclusion, trade, international tourism receipts, stock markets and digitalization while for household well-being the indicators were land ownership, food security, malnutrition, access to health, remittances, income shocks and unemployment. Figure 1 indicates the flow chat of the SLR with 34 selected journal articles that were found to be relevant in addressing this study's main objective.

Figure 1. Flow Chart for the Systematic Literature Review



Source: Authors' Compilation

Data Extraction, Study Selection and Analysis

Discrepancies were resolved by arbitration by all the authors. A standardized data extraction form was designed and used in collecting relevant information from each included study. Discrepancies in the extraction were resolved by all the authors until an agreement was reached. Data were extracted in terms of study information, study design, economic downturn characteristics, household well-being outcomes, coping mechanisms, and key findings. Data from the final selected 34 journal articles indicated in Table 1 were analyzed descriptively. The descriptive analysis is deployed to provide frequency and percentages that profiles distribution information (authorship, study area, topic) based on title and methods using SPSS version 25. In addition, thematic analysis assisted by a software called Nvivo 14 is used to avail core themes in terms of word cloud to support findings for the study objectives.

Table 1: Relevant Journal Articles on Economic Downturn in Africa (2000-2024)

No	Author	Study area	Title	Method
1	Greyling and Rossouw (2024, p.1)	Ten countries around the world but only one country from Africa that is (South Africa)	Reactions to macro-level shocks and reexamination of adaptation theory using Big Data	Quantitative method
2	Koomson et al. (2023, p. 418)	Ghana	Financial inclusion and food insecurity: Examining linkages and potential pathways	Quantitative method
3	Snowball and Gouws (2024, p. 120)	South Africa	Cultural consumption and equality of access during economic downturns: The expenditure Gini coefficient for South Africa	Quantitative method
4	Seguino (2009, pp. 10-11)	Regions of the world including (Sub-Saharan Africa)	The Global Economic Crisis, Its Gender Implications, and Policy Responses	Literature review
5	Genevieve et al. (2023, p.1)	Ghana, South Africa, Morocco, and Uganda	Moderating remittance and economic growth relationship with exchange rate: What new can we learn from Africa's economy?	Quantitative method
6	Schrieder and Knerr (2000, p. 223)	Cameroon	Labour migration as a social security mechanism for smallholder households in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Cameroon	Quantitative method
7	Lee et al. (2020, p. 1)	South Africa	GDP volatility implication of tourism volatility in South Africa: A time-varying approach	Quantitative method
8	Suresh (2009, p. 1803)	Africa	Global economic crisis and nutrition security in Africa	Literature review
9	Zhou (2022, p. 1245, p. 1259)	Africa	Critical shifts in the global tourism industry: perspectives from Africa	Qualitative method
10	Geda et al. (2024, p.1)	Ethiopia	Determinants of household-level food and nutrition security in wheat farmers of Arsi Zone, Ethiopia	Quantitative method
11	Grote et al. (2021, p.1)	Africa (Sub-Saharan Africa) and Asia	Food Security and the Dynamics of Wheat and Maize Value Chains in Africa and Asia	Literature review

12	Okereke et al. (2022, p. 33)	Nigeria	Assessment of strategies of quantity surveying firms during economic turbulence	Quantitative method
13	Allen and Giovannetti (2011, p.1)	Sub-Saharan Africa	The effects of the financial crisis on Sub-Saharan Africa	Quantitative method
14	Clay and Keeton (2011, p. 167)	South Africa	The South African yield curve as a predictor of economic downturns: an update	Quantitative method
15	Siraje and Bekele (2013, p. 145)	Ethiopia	Assessment of Food Insecurity and Coping Mechanisms among Pastoral Households of Afar National Regional State: The Case of Chifra District, Ethiopia	Quantitative method
16	Lynge and Coma (2022, p. 1)	Africa (40 African countries)	The effect of economic downturns on voter turnout in Africa	Quantitative method
17	Cho and Newhouse (2012, p. 31)	Egypt and South Africa	How Did the Great Recession Affect Different Types of Workers? Evidence from 17 Middle-Income Countries	Quantitative method
18	Newman (2017)	South Africa	Financialization and the financial and economic crisis: The case of South Africa	Review method
19	Batuo et al. (2018)	Africa (41 African countries)	Linkages between financial development, financial instability, financial liberalisation and economic growth in Africa	Review method
20	Hashmi et al. (2022)	Ghana	Cash crops and food security: evidence from smallholder cocoa and cashew farmers in Ghana	Quantitative Survey
21	Eton et al. (2021)	Uganda	Financial inclusion and the growth of small medium enterprises in Uganda: empirical evidence from selected districts in Lango sub-region	Quantitative method
22	Kirigia et al. (2011)	Africa (46 countries)	Effects of global financial crisis on funding for health development in nineteen countries of the WHO African Region	Quantitative method
23	Jacobs (2012)	South Africa	Household food insecurity, rapid food price inflation and the economic downturn in South Africa	Quantitative survey
24	Sane et al. (2022)	Nigeria	Application of Decoupling Approach to Evaluate Electricity Consumption, Agriculture, GDP, Crude Oil Production, and CO ₂ Emission Nexus in Support of Economic Instrument in Nigeria	Literature review method Descriptive method
25	Pillay (2015)	Africa	The Global Economic Crisis and the Africa Rising Narrative	Narrative method
26	Marumoagae (2015)	South Africa	The Effect of the Global Economic Recession on the South African Labour Market	Review method
27	Moyo and Le Roux (2020)	SADC Countries	Financial liberalisation, financial development and financial crises in SADC countries	Quantitative method
28	Paumgarten and Shackleton (2011)	South Africa	The role of non-timber forest products in household coping strategies in South Africa: The influence of household wealth and gender	Quantitative and qualitative method
29	Woldehanna and Hagos (2015)	Ethiopia	Economic shocks and children's dropout from 30 primary school: Implications for education policy in Ethiopia	Quantitative method
30	Esu and Inyang (2011)	Nigeria	Impacts of the Global Economic Crisis on the Consumption of Psychiatric Nursing Services in Nigeria	Literature review
31	Moyo (2016)	Africa	Africa and Global Recessions Options for Reducing Vulnerability in Future	Qualitative method

32	Soko et al. (2010)	SADC Countries	SADC and the Global Economic Crisis Origins, Impacts and State Policy Responses	Quantitative and qualitative methods
33	Ekpo (2016)	Africa	Global Economic Crisis and Africa's Economic Performance	Quantitative
34	Moyo (2013)	South Africa	Public Policy Responses to the Global Financial and Economic Crisis Lessons from South Africa	Literature review

Source: Compiled by Authors

Findings and Discussion :

In Table 2, the profile of the 34 articles indicate that there are mostly co-authored (70.6%) and study area being Southern Africa (41.2%). Most of the studies used the quantitative method (58.8%). These findings suggest that most of the reviewed articles are co-authored, from Southern Africa and applied quantitative methods.

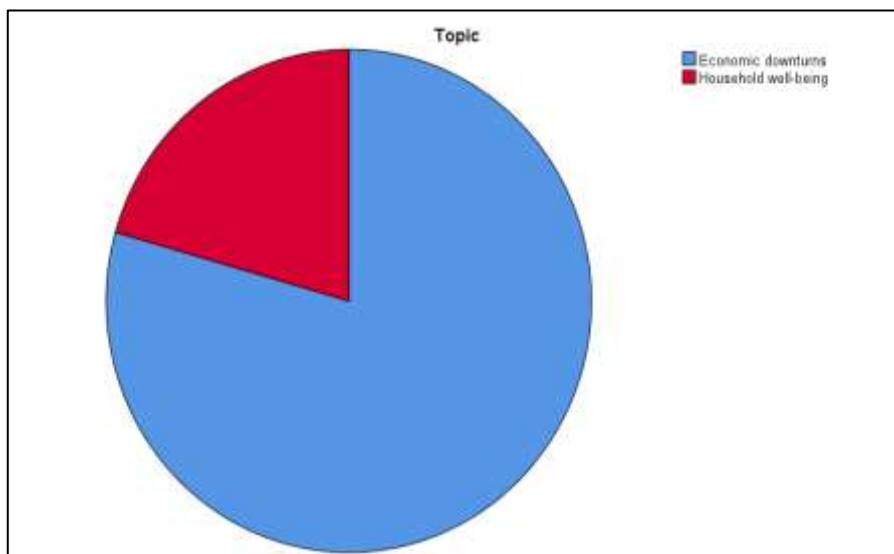
Table 2: Profile distribution of selected relevant journal articles

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Author:		
Single	10	29.4
Co-Authors	24	70.6
Study Area:		
Africa	10	29.4
Eastern Africa	4	11.8
Western Africa	6	17.6
Southern Africa	14	41.2
Methods:		
Quantitative	20	58.8
Qualitative	3	8.8
Quantitative and Qualitative	2	5.9
Literature Review	9	26.5

Source(s): Compiled by Authors

Interestingly, in Figure 2, the distribution of topics indicates 79.4% for economic downturns and 20.6% for household well-being suggesting that the majority of the articles' topics cover economic downturn compared to household well-being. This implies that more research is needed to cover issues related to household well-being in Africa. This finding is supported by Ahmad et al. (2022) who also opined that there are other categories of well-being which still need more attention by researchers.

Figure 2: Topics



Source(s): Compiled by Authors

Further findings according to the study objectives are indicated in the following subsections.

Existing economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa

The findings from the reviewed articles have shown that there are several economic downturn effects on household well-being within Africa and in particular for Eastern, Western and Southern Africa in countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda as indicated in Eton et al. (2021), Geda et al. (2024), Hashmiu et al. (2022), Okereke et al. (2022), Schrieder and Knerr (2000), and Snowball and Gouws (2024). The existing economic downturn in terms of economic indicators and economic type are displayed in Figure 3 and Figure 4 with word clouds which shows that the core themes for existing economic indicators is GDP while the economic downturn type is mostly recession. This shows that whilst there are other economic downturn indicators that exist in Africa such as income, energy and consumption but the most covered economic indicator is GDP. Equally, for the economic downturn type, it is mainly recession although other studies like Snowball and Gouws (2024) conducted in South Africa noted that there is a decline in cultural consumption.

Figure 3: Economic downturn indicators



Source(s): Compiled by Authors

Figure 4: Economic downturn type



Source(s): Compiled by Authors

The economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa based on the reviewed literature have revealed that there are both negative and positive. The negative effects from the economic downturn like food insecurity, loss of jobs and low income on household well-being indicate to have affected mostly the women and the youth as the vulnerable groups in the Sub-Saharan African countries but also in Egypt according to Batuo et al. (2018), Cho and Newhouse (2012) and Seguino (2009). In some countries like South Africa, the economic downturn has affected mostly women-headed households as confirmed by Jacobs (2012). Loss of jobs including absence of job opportunities reflect unemployment and this has a negative effect on households' well-being in Africa. For example, Marumoagae (2015) commented that in South Africa there was loss of 198,000 jobs. Equally, on the issue of low income, Moyo (2016) noted that "declined output, rising unemployment, falling incomes as well as financial and trade shocks" contribute heavily on reducing households' income. Whist negative effects of economic downturn on household's well-being exists, there are also positive effects.

Among the positive economic downturn effects on household well-being include size of the family. For example, in Ethiopia, the study by Siraje and Bekele (2013) indicated that there was increases in food insecurity as family size increases. This means that smaller family sizes stand a better a chance of enjoying food security thus experience less food insecurity compared to larger family sizes. In addition, Siraje and Bekele (2013)

confirmed that household dietary diversity increases with formal education. This further suggest that a combination of small family size and formal education is important in experiencing less food insecurity. Another positive economic downturn effects on household well-being is noted by Snowball and Gouws (2024) stating that spending on Cultural Creative Industries (CCIs) in South Africa has increased over time, from R35 billion in 2015 to R48.4 billion in 2019 but also a decline in cultural expenditure inequalities during the global pandemic of COVID-19 and this is attributed to expansion on online access. The existing economic downturn on Africa's household well-being is summarized in Table 3 showing both the negative and positive effects.

Table 3: Summary of positive and negative economic downturn effects

Negative economic downturn effects	Positive economic downturn effects
Food security.	Smaller family sizes experience less food insecurities.
Job losses.	Increase in dietary diversity with formal education.
Low income.	Decline in cultural expenditure inequalities.
Decline output	

Source(s): Compiled by Authors

Identified potential policy interventions that can help households cope with the existing economic downturn effects

Households in Africa did cope with the existing economic downturn effects but the main coping mechanism is through reducing consumption as displayed in Figure 5. Reducing consumption was done by shifting to non-essential items and online cultural consumption as indicated by Snowball and Gouws (2024). Interestingly, other households reduced consumption but also sought for informal sector employment and sale of animals as noted by Seguino (2009) and Siraje and Bekele ((2013).

Figure 5: Households coping mechanisms

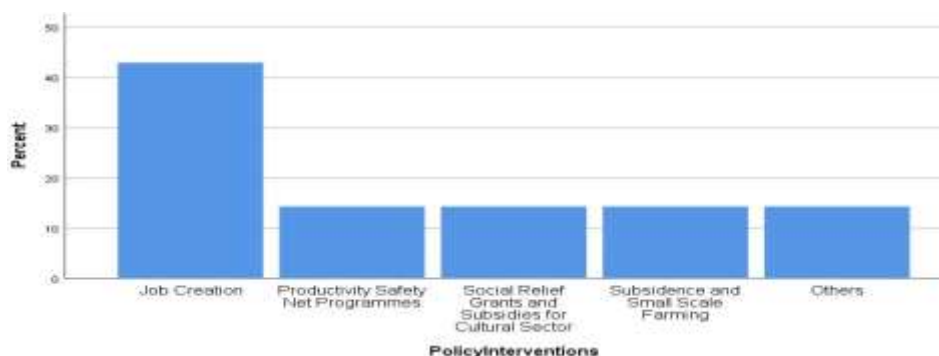


Source(s): Compiled by Authors

This study's literature review reveals that there are a number of identified potential policy interventions which can help households cope with the existing economic downturn effects. These policy interventions are depicted in Figure 6. The majority of

policy interventions are for job creation (42.9%). In particular, for job creation, the concentration is on the “launch of a national job initiative to speed up financing of job creation and retention measures” as specified by Marumoagae (2015). Other policy interventions that are of equal importance in terms of scoring 14.3% each are policies that relate to productivity safety net programs, social relief grants and subsidies for cultural sector, subsidies and small-scale farming and others. On other policies, according to Fiona et al. (2011), these involve policies that basically focus on issues such as kinship, reduced spending, changed diet, mobilization of savings, and selling of livestock.

Figure 6: Policy interventions



Source(s): Compiled by Authors

Conclusion :

This study's application of the systematic literature review approach over a period of 2000 to 2024 aimed to explore the existing economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa. In addition, this paper identified potential policy interventions that can help households cope with the existing economic downturn effects. The findings have revealed that there are both negative and positive economic downturn effects on household well-being in Africa. The negative economic downturn effects that exists are food insecurity, job losses, low income and decline output while the positive economic downturn effects are smaller family sizes experience less food insecurities, increase in dietary diversity with formal education and decline in cultural expenditure inequalities. Further findings show that the potential policy interventions that can help households cope with the existing economic downturn effects are related to job creation since job losses is one of the negative economic downturn effects on household well-being.

Implications and Recommendations of the study

Although households reduce consumption as a coping mechanism from the negative economic downturn effects, the practical implication is for the government and

non-government interventions to focus on improving the well-being of households. The improvements of households can be through the provision of subsidies to maintain upkeep of livestock for income and food security thus promoting sustainable development in the African context. Due to most policy interventions concentrating on job creation, this study recommends for other policies to be formulated which focus on elevating incomes of households through investments in income generating activities as well as programs which offer entrepreneurial skills.

Limitations of the study and Future Directions

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the economic downturns in Africa, several gaps remain to be addressed. Future research should explore the intersectionality of factors such as gender, age, and geographic location in shaping households' vulnerability to economic shocks. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impacts of economic downturns on household well-being and to identify sustainable strategies for building resilience in the face of adversity.

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