

The Ukraine Conflict and Global Economic Fallout: Impact on Poverty and Inequality in Developing Countries

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Abstract

The Ukraine Conflict's prolonged geopolitical standoff has disrupted global economic stability and exacerbated poverty and inequality in developing countries. This paper examines its impact on trade dependencies, poverty levels, and humanitarian responses in vulnerable regions. Through a qualitative review of secondary data, it identifies key findings including rising food prices, energy shocks, disrupted trade, and unequal impacts among societal groups. Long-term implications include setbacks to poverty reduction and increased debt burdens. Policy implications underscore the need for targeted interventions, debt relief, regional cooperation, and resilience strategies to mitigate adverse impacts and foster inclusive development. This study contributes to advancing social justice and sustainable development agendas amidst global uncertainty.

Keywords: Developing Countries, Global Economic Fallout, Inequality, Poverty, Ukraine Conflict

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Background and Problem Statement

The Ukraine Conflict, ignited by political tensions and ethno-nationalistic sentiments, has evolved into a protracted geopolitical standoff with profound global implications. The Ukraine conflict has its roots in the political tensions that arose following Ukraine's pro-Western Orange Revolution in 2004 and the subsequent election of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2010. In 2013, Yanukovich's decision to suspend plans for signing an association agreement with the European Union sparked mass protests, leading to his ouster in 2014. Russia responded by annexing Crimea and supporting separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, leading to an armed conflict that has continued to this day. The conflict escalated in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, capturing significant territory before Ukraine's counteroffensive regained much of it by late 2022 (Dabrowski, 2016). In February 2023, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, capturing significant territory before Ukraine's counteroffensive regained much of it by late 2023. However, the conflict has reached a stalemate, with neither side able to make major gains. As of May 2024, heavy fighting continues in eastern

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Ukraine, with neither side achieving a decisive military victory. While peace talks have yielded limited progress, the specter of a protracted conflict looms large (War in Ukraine - BBC News, 2024).

The global economic repercussions of the war continue to unfold. Food security concerns persist, with disruptions to Ukrainian grain exports pushing up global food prices and threatening food shortages in vulnerable developing nations (Ukraine Crisis, 2023). The conflict, characterized by its geopolitical complexities and humanitarian crises, has engendered a tumultuous geopolitical landscape, permeating regional and international spheres alike. The repercussions of the Ukraine Conflict extend far beyond its immediate geographic confines, precipitating ripple effects across diverse sectors and regions worldwide. Economically, the conflict has instigated disruptions in global energy markets, geopolitical uncertainties, and heightened economic sanctions, underscoring its profound ramifications for global economic stability (Havlik, 2014). Against this backdrop, developing countries, already grappling with multifaceted economic challenges, stand particularly susceptible to the spillover effects emanating from this protracted conflict. Prior to the conflict, developing countries faced a precarious balancing act. Global interconnectedness, while offering economic opportunities, also exposed them to external shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a stark reminder of this vulnerability, disrupting supply chains, plunging economies into recession, and pushing millions back into poverty (Hüfner & Neumeier, 2021). Even before the pandemic and the Ukraine conflict, developing countries grappled with pre-existing inequalities within and between their borders. Economic dependence on commodities, remittances, and trade with vulnerable partners further exposed developing countries to external shocks. The long history of conflicts and political instability in various regions of the developing world further underscores the precarious nature of progress. The ongoing war in Ukraine has triggered a cascade of economic disruptions with far-reaching consequences. Developing countries, already navigating complex challenges, stand particularly vulnerable to the conflict's ripple effects (UNDP, 2023).

Literature Review

Studies such as Havlik (2014) have extensively analyzed the macroeconomic consequences of the conflict on global markets and trade flows, shedding light on its far-reaching impact. Additionally, a policy paper by (Floreani, López-Acevedo, & Rama, 2019) on conflict and poverty dynamics in regions like Afghanistan offers insights into similar contexts, providing valuable comparative perspectives. However, there exists a notable gap in the literature concerning the specific mechanisms through which the Ukraine Conflict influences trade dependencies,

exacerbates poverty levels, and shapes humanitarian responses within developing countries. While Hendrix & Salehyan (2012) discuss the broader geopolitical risk perceptions induced by conflicts, empirical research specifically targeting the Ukraine Conflict's spillover effects in developing countries remains limited.

Research Objectives

Addressing this complex problem requires a comprehensive understanding of the Ukraine conflict's specific impacts on different developing countries and their pre-existing vulnerabilities. By analyzing regional variations, sectoral dependencies, and existing inequalities, this study's objective is "to analyze the direct and indirect economic consequences of the Ukraine Conflict on poverty levels and inequality dynamics in developing countries." Specifically, this paper aims "to identify the most vulnerable sectors and regions within developing countries that are likely to be impacted by the economic fallout from the Ukraine Conflict".

Rationale

By examining the intersection of geopolitical tensions and economic vulnerabilities, this research sheds light on how conflicts disrupt livelihoods, exacerbate poverty, and widen inequality gaps in developing countries. This analysis equips policymakers and humanitarian agencies with the knowledge to develop effective strategies. These strategies can mitigate the negative consequences of conflicts by fostering economic diversification, strengthening social safety nets, and promoting regional cooperation for resilience. Additionally, the research informs strategies for inclusive development by highlighting how conflicts worsen existing inequalities. By investing in education and health care, promoting gender equality, and empowering local communities, development efforts can become more inclusive and sustainable, ultimately fostering a more just and equitable future for developing nations in the face of complex global challenges.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

To conduct this qualitative explanatory review, a systematic search strategy was employed to identify relevant secondary data sources. A diverse array of authentic sources has been utilized for data collection. These include academic journals publishing scholarly articles on topics related to the economic ramifications of conflicts and their impacts on poverty and inequality. Reports from reputable international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United Nations (UN) provide valuable insights into global economic trends, humanitarian responses, and development initiatives in conflict-affected regions. Additionally, scholarly articles authored by subject matter experts offer nuanced analyses and contextual understandings of the socio-economic dynamics

influenced by geopolitical conflicts. The search terms were carefully selected and combined using Boolean operators (e.g., AND, OR NOT) to ensure comprehensiveness and relevance (Silverman, 2022). Furthermore, newspapers and media outlets contribute to the collection of current events, local perspectives, and real-time developments surrounding the Ukraine Conflict and its spillover effects on developing countries' poverty and inequality dynamics. Finally, the review incorporated scholarly articles from subject matter experts found through targeted searches within relevant academic databases. This approach ensured the inclusion of nuanced analyses and contextual understandings of the socio-economic dynamics influenced by geopolitical conflicts.

Through thematic analysis, recurrent themes and patterns across qualitative studies are identified and synthesized to illuminate the complex dynamics of poverty, inequality, and economic vulnerabilities exacerbated by the Ukraine Conflict in developing countries. Contextualization within broader socio-political and economic contexts enhances understanding, while critical reflection ensures methodological rigor and ethical considerations guide the review process.

3.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Ukraine Conflict exacerbates poverty and inequality, with rising food prices, inflation, and disrupted trade hitting vulnerable populations hard. Disruptions in agriculture, trade, and energy supplies pose significant challenges for food security, inflation, and economic stability in developing countries, necessitating urgent policy interventions.

3.1 Exacerbating Poverty and Inequality

Rising food prices, crippling inflation, and disrupted trade and remittances expose the deep scars of poverty and inequality, pushing vulnerable populations further into the abyss of hardship.

3.1.1 Food insecurity and rising food prices

Considered as a major global “bread basket”, Ukraine's conflict-induced disruptions in agricultural production, trade routes, and supply chains have had significant implications for food security worldwide. The developing countries, particularly those reliant on food imports and international markets, have faced heightened vulnerabilities to food insecurity and rising prices because of the conflict. Furthermore, the Ukraine conflict has led to a surge in global food prices, exacerbating affordability challenges for consumers in developing countries.

The escalation in food prices, driven by supply chain disruptions and market uncertainties, has strained household budgets and constrained purchasing power, particularly among low-income households. As a result, vulnerable populations have been forced to allocate larger portions of their incomes to meet basic nutritional needs, compromising their ability to access nutritious and diversified diets essential for health and well-being (FAO, 2022; WFP, 2021).

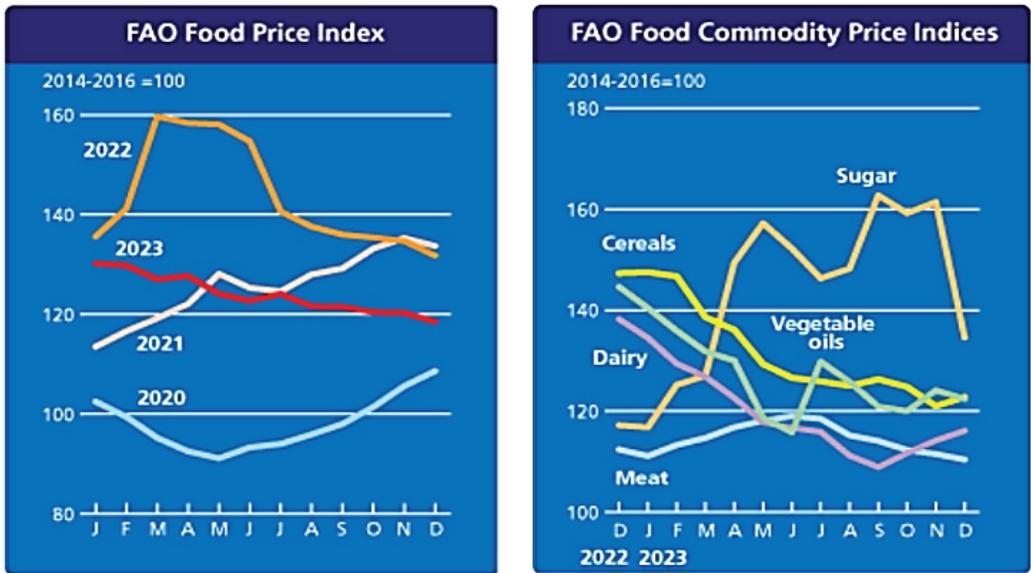


Figure 1: FAO Food Price index eased substantially in 2023

The developing countries, reliant on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia, face acute vulnerabilities. Nearly 50 nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America heavily depend on these imports, according to the World Food Programme (2023). Critical supply chain disruptions lead to shortages of key food items like wheat, sunflower oil, and fertilizers. Prices surge, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by over 30% in some regions (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023). Vulnerable populations, spending a substantial portion of income on food, face significant budget pressures. The World Food Programme (2023) estimates acute food insecurity could affect up to 323 million people, potentially plunging 47 million into famine-like conditions. Children, pregnant women, and the elderly are especially at risk of malnutrition and related health issues.

3.1.2 Energy price shocks and inflation

As geopolitical tensions escalate, disruptions in energy supplies from conflict-affected regions, such as the Ukraine conflict, have caused significant spikes

in global energy prices, exacerbating inflationary trends worldwide (Bigerna, 2023). According to the World Bank, inflation rates in developing countries are projected to rise by 4.7 percentage points in 2023, significantly above pre-conflict levels (World Bank, 2023). This surge in energy costs directly impacts production expenses and transportation costs, intensifying inflationary pressures in developing economies.

The increased cost of living resulting from energy price shocks has severely eroded the purchasing power of households in developing nations. With a substantial portion of income allocated towards basic necessities like food, housing, and transportation, the disproportionate rise in energy costs places additional financial strain on vulnerable populations (Ruiz Estrada, 2022).

Furthermore, the impact of energy price shocks and inflation extends beyond immediate financial constraints, posing challenges to access essential services like healthcare and education in developing countries. Governments, facing budgetary constraints amidst rising energy costs, may redirect allocations for social services, resulting in reduced funding for critical infrastructure and welfare initiatives (OECD, 2023).

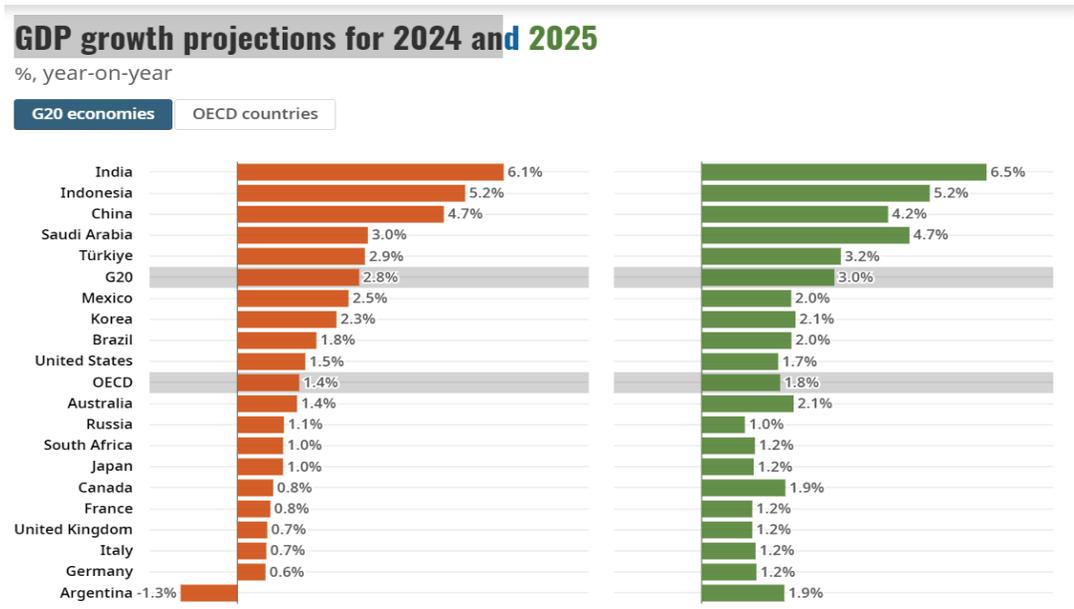


Figure 2: OECD Economic Outlook, November 2023

The differential vulnerability to inflation exacerbates socio-economic disparities, widening the gap between the rich and the poor in developing countries. While affluent segments of society may weather the impact of rising energy prices, economically marginalized populations face heightened vulnerability and financial insecurity (Ruiz Estrada, 2022).

The conflict's disruption in global energy markets has led to a surge in the price of oil and gas, impacting transportation, electricity, food production, and manufacturing.

The rise in energy prices has cascading effects on essential services, potentially forcing hospitals and schools to cut back on services or even close. Access to clean water and sanitation becomes more precarious, jeopardizing public health and hygiene. This can exacerbate poverty and illness, trapping vulnerable populations in a downward spiral.

3.1.3 Disruptions to trade and remittances

The Ukraine conflict's impact on developing countries includes significant disruptions to trade and remittances. Trade disruptions, fueled by sanctions and logistical barriers, have become potent weapons in the conflict, particularly affecting nations heavily reliant on imports from Ukraine and Russia (Fukunaga et al., 2023). In Africa and Asia, these disruptions abruptly halt essential food and fuel imports, driving prices skyward and compelling businesses to scale back or cease operations. In countries like Zambia, where wheat imports from Ukraine constituted over 80% of the total, disrupted trade signifies a potential food crisis in the making (World Food Programme, 2023).

The impact extends beyond lost imports. Export restrictions imposed by conflict-affected countries further choke supply chains, leading to plummeting agricultural prices and devastating losses for small-scale farmers in developing nations. For instance, in Ghana, cocoa exporters dependent on Ukrainian intermediaries face severe uncertainty and income shortfalls (International Trade Centre, 2023).

Another casualty in this economic war is the flow of remittances. Many developing nations heavily rely on their citizens working abroad sending money back home to support families and communities. With the conflict displacing millions in Ukraine and Russia, remittance flows from these regions are expected to decline significantly, exacerbating economic hardship in countries like Nepal and Tajikistan, where these inflows constitute a substantial portion of GDP (World Bank, 2023). While not as heavily reliant on remittances from Ukraine and Russia as some other developing countries, Bangladesh still receives a significant portion of its foreign income from migrant workers in these regions. A decline in remittance flows due to the conflict could further strain the Bangladeshi economy (Rahman, 2023).

As formal livelihoods dwindle, desperation drives many towards the informal sector. Works as street vendors have become increasingly common, and survival jobs in unregulated markets rise, often accompanied by exploitative conditions and precarious incomes. This informalization of the economy not only undermines

development gains but also traps individuals in a cycle of vulnerability and poverty (UNDP, 2023).

The decline in trade, coupled with disruptions to remittance flows and the rise of the informal sector, underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy responses to mitigate the economic fallout in developing countries (IFAD, 2021).

3.2 Vulnerable Groups and Unequal Impacts

The Ukraine conflict's ripple effects extend deep into the socio-economic fabric of developing countries, revealing stark vulnerabilities and unequal impacts among various societal groups.

3.2.1 Gender and social inequalities

Women, often the primary caregivers and household managers, face a disproportionate burden of the conflict's fallout. Rising food prices and disruptions in food supply chains push them to spend more time and resources securing sustenance, often sacrificing their own needs and sacrificing access to education or healthcare (Locke, 2003). This increased workload, coupled with potential displacement or loss of income, exacerbates existing gender disparities and reinforces harmful stereotypes about women's roles in society (UN Women, 2023).

Beyond the immediate challenges of food insecurity, women are also disproportionately drawn into the informal sector due to shrinking formal job opportunities. This often means accepting precarious work with lower wages and limited social protection, further jeopardizing their economic stability and increasing the risk of exploitation and violence (World Bank, 2023). The informalization of the economy, while providing some form of income, can become a trap, perpetuating poverty and hindering social mobility for women and their families.

The Ukraine conflict also amplifies existing social inequalities, pushing marginalized communities closer to the precipice of poverty and exploitation. Ethnic minorities, religious groups, and other vulnerable populations often face discrimination in accessing essential resources and services, leaving them particularly exposed to the economic shockwaves of the conflict (UNHCR, 2023). Furthermore, existing social hierarchies within communities can exacerbate these inequalities, with disadvantaged groups facing increased risks of land grabbing, forced labor, and other forms of exploitation during times of crisis (IFAD, 2023).

3.2.2 Regional and Sectoral Disparities

The conflict's impact is not just felt at the national level; specific sectors bear the brunt of the economic storm. Agriculture, heavily reliant on fertilizers and fuel

imports, faces a double whammy of rising costs and disrupted supply chains. Small-scale farmers in Mali, for instance, dependent on imported fertilizers for their cassava crops, face significant income losses due to price hikes (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2023). Tourism, dependent on international travel, has been brought to its knees by travel restrictions and a decline in consumer confidence. Thailand, a major tourism destination, saw a 70% decline in international arrivals in 2022, highlighting the devastating impact on communities reliant on this sector (World Bank, 2023). Manufacturing, grappling with rising input costs and disruptions in global trade, struggles to keep production lines running smoothly. Bangladesh's garment industry, a major source of foreign exchange, faces significant challenges due to rising cotton prices and disruptions in shipping routes.

3.3 Long-Term Implications and Development Challenges

The long-term implications of the Ukraine conflict present significant challenges for development in various regions, which focuses on setbacks to poverty reduction efforts, challenges to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the increased burden of debt alongside fiscal constraints.

3.3.1 Setbacks to poverty reduction and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

The economic tremors of the Ukraine conflict pose significant challenges to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing countries. In Ukraine, the conflict has led to a range of economic challenges, including ethical, social, financial, and legal aspects, which are crucial for sustainable development (Lytvyn et al., 2023). In Africa, the war has disrupted the global supply chain, leading to food and energy shortages, inflation, and commodity price hikes, which threaten to worsen poverty and hunger (Mhlanga & Ndhlovu, 2022). The conflict is also seen as a major threat to the 2030 Agenda for SDGs, particularly SDG16, which is essential for sustaining other goals (Bin-Nashwan et al., 2022). Semenenko et al. (2019) discuss the role of international organizations in promoting sustainable development in conflict-affected regions, underscoring the need for their support in achieving the SDGs.

The economic fallout exacerbates existing inequalities and pushes vulnerable populations back into poverty, jeopardizing SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. In Nepal, remittances from Ukrainians working abroad, a vital source of income for many families, have plummeted, leaving households struggling to meet basic needs (World Bank, 2023). In Malawi, rising inflation erodes the purchasing power of the poorest, widening the gap between rich and poor.

In Tanzania, rising fertilizer costs threaten long-term agricultural productivity, jeopardizing SDG 2: Zero Hunger and food security for generations to come. In

Madagascar, dependence on imported fertilizers has stalled rice production, threatening food security for millions living in poverty (IFAD, 2023). The conflict jeopardizes progress towards SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being and SDG 4: Quality Education. Rising energy costs strain government budgets, leading to reductions in healthcare services and school closures. In Bangladesh, limited access to affordable energy forces hospitals to scale back services, jeopardizing healthcare for millions (UNDP, 2023). Similarly, in Kenya, limited access to affordable internet for remote learning widens the educational gap between urban and rural communities (UNICEF, 2023).

The conflict jeopardizes access to clean water and sanitation, crucial for SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. In Yemen, conflict-induced infrastructure damage disrupts water supplies, heightening the risk of waterborne diseases and hindering sanitation efforts (WHO, 2023). In Ethiopia, diversion of resources towards the conflict threatens critical water management projects, impacting millions reliant on clean water sources.

The economic fallout casts a long shadow on the future of the SDGs. In Cambodia, tourism, a vital source of income for many communities, stalls due to travel restrictions, hindering progress towards SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. The conflict's long-term implications further complicate the pursuit of the SDGs. Investments in critical areas like renewable energy and infrastructure may be put on hold, hindering progress towards SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy and SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

3.3.2 Increased debt burdens and fiscal constraints:

The conflict in Ukraine has significant consequences for developing countries' debt burdens and fiscal constraints (Fernandes et al., 2023). The closure of ports and increased risks for navigation disrupt global grain transport chains, leading to higher costs and emissions for alternative transport chains (Talbot et al., 2022). The invasion of Ukraine has also impacted clinical trial conduct, potentially underpowering international clinical trial results and resulting in the loss of future recruitment sites (Kotina et al., 2023). The crisis in Ukraine has affected the solvency and stability of public finances, requiring special attention to fiscal adjustment measures. Prematurely curtailed incentive measures have hindered socioeconomic development in Ukraine. Additionally, the growing burden of public debt in Ukraine poses challenges for the country's economic recovery, with the internal public debt-to-GDP threshold ratio estimated to be 40%.

The conflict's economic fallout shrinks the fiscal space of developing countries, leaving them with limited resources for essential social protection programs and poverty reduction initiatives. This squeeze can have devastating consequences. In

Ghana, for instance, rising fuel prices and inflation have forced the government to cut back on healthcare and education spending, jeopardizing the well-being of millions (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the economic crisis exacerbated by the conflict has pushed the country to the brink of debt default, further constraining its ability to invest in social safety nets (IMF, 2023). The combination of rising debt limited fiscal space, and economic hardship can create a volatile cocktail of instability and social unrest.

4. LIMITATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATION

The analysis of the Ukraine conflict's effects on developing countries reveals critical insights into exacerbating poverty, inequality, and long-term development challenges. However, the research exhibits certain limitations.

One notable limitation of the secondary research lies in the reliance on aggregated data and broad macroeconomic indicators to assess the impact of the Ukraine conflict. While these indicators provide valuable insights into overarching trends and patterns, they may overlook the nuanced and context-specific dynamics at the grassroots level. A more granular analysis incorporating localized perspectives and qualitative data could offer a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of the conflict on vulnerable communities and marginalized groups within developing countries. The analysis primarily focuses on short-term economic and social repercussions, overlooking the long-term implications on development trajectories, environmental issues, and political stability.

To mitigate the long-term impact of the Ukraine conflict on developing countries, policies should prioritize local food production and social safety nets, seek debt relief and concessional financing, foster regional cooperation and green infrastructure, empower marginalized groups, and build comprehensive resilience strategies beyond immediate challenges. Debt relief measures and concessional financing are essential to alleviate the debt burden on developing countries and increase fiscal space for crucial investments. Fostering regional cooperation and trade agreements can reduce dependency on volatile global markets and enhance regional resilience. Prioritizing investments in renewable energy and green infrastructure is crucial to improve energy security, mitigate rising fuel prices, and address climate change concerns. Empowering women and marginalized groups through gender-responsive policies and economic empowerment initiatives is vital for building inclusive and resilient societies. Finally, developing comprehensive long-term resilience strategies that integrate disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and sustainable development principles are imperative to prepare for future crises beyond the immediate challenges posed by the Ukraine conflict.

5. CONCLUSION

The assessment of the global economic fallout stemming from the Ukraine Conflict underscores its profound spillover effects on poverty and inequality in developing countries. Originating from geopolitical tensions and ethno-nationalistic sentiments, the conflict has evolved into a protracted standoff with far-reaching implications across diverse sectors and regions worldwide. Despite its geographic origins, the conflict's economic reverberations transcend borders, exacerbating vulnerabilities and deepening inequalities in developing countries already grappling with multifaceted economic challenges.

The analysis highlights the complex interplay between geopolitical tensions and economic vulnerabilities, revealing how conflicts disrupt livelihoods, deepen poverty, and widen inequality gaps within developing countries. Through a comprehensive examination of the conflict's impacts on trade dependencies, poverty levels, and humanitarian responses, valuable insights emerge, shedding light on the complex dynamics at play and identifying critical areas for policy intervention and humanitarian action.

Findings emphasize the exacerbation of poverty and inequality, driven by rising food prices, energy price shocks, disruptions to trade and remittances, and unequal impacts on vulnerable groups. Women, ethnic minorities, and marginalized communities bear a disproportionate burden of the conflict's economic fallout, facing heightened risks of poverty, exploitation, and social exclusion. Regional and sectoral disparities further compound the challenges, undermining development efforts and hindering progress towards Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite the valuable contributions of this analysis, certain limitations exist, including reliance on aggregated data and broad macroeconomic indicators. To address these limitations and mitigate the conflict's long-term implications, policymakers should prioritize localized perspectives, foster regional cooperation, seek debt relief, and invest in green infrastructure and inclusive development strategies. By building resilience and promoting inclusive growth, policymakers can navigate the complex challenges posed by the Ukraine Conflict and advance sustainable development agendas in regions affected by geopolitical turmoil.

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