

## Navigating the post-COVID landscape: Resilience, sustainability and inclusive growth

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The COVID-19 pandemic marked a defining moment in contemporary global history, exposing deep structural vulnerabilities while simultaneously creating opportunities for transformation across societies (Conduah & Ofoe, 2025; Hale et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2020). In Ghana, the pandemic disrupted economic systems, strained governance institutions, intensified social inequalities, and challenged the resilience of communities (World Bank, 2021; UNDP, 2020). Against this backdrop, the 9th School of Social Sciences International conference held in October 2024 provided a critical platform for scholars to interrogate these disruptions and propose pathways toward recovery and long-term sustainability. This special issue of the Ghana Social Science Journal (GSSJ) brings together selected papers from that conference under the theme “Resilience, Growth, and Sustainability in the Post-COVID Era: The Role of Social Sciences.”

The aim of this special issue is threefold. First, it seeks to deepen understanding of how societies in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa have responded to and are recovering from the pandemic’s multidimensional impacts. Second, it highlights the role of social science research in unpacking complex socio-economic, environmental, and institutional challenges. Third, it advances policy-relevant insights that contribute to building resilient systems capable of withstanding future shocks while promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

The contributions to this issue reflect the diversity and interdisciplinarity of the social sciences, spanning economics, geography, sociology, political science, psychology, and

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public health. Collectively, they underscore the central argument that resilience and sustainability are not merely technical or economic concerns, but fundamentally social processes shaped by institutions, inequalities, and human behavior.

Providing a macroeconomic perspective on financial resilience, Amewu et al. examine the effect of capital account liberalization on external debt in sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating that while liberalization has facilitated access to international capital, it has also contributed to rising external debt levels. This duality is particularly relevant in the post-COVID context, where many countries have increased borrowing to finance recovery efforts. Closely related is the study by Angmosi et al. on the foreign direct investment (FDI)–growth nexus and the role of financial stability, which shows that the benefits of FDI are contingent on the presence of stable financial systems. This insight is critical for post-pandemic recovery strategies, as many African economies seek to attract investment to stimulate growth.

At the institutional level, Zaato and Akoto examine organizational resilience within Ghana's Electoral Commission, offering an important perspective on governance. By analyzing how the Commission navigated challenges such as political interference, electoral violence, and the unprecedented disruptions of COVID-19, the study illustrates the importance of adaptive capacity in public institutions. Shifting focus to social protection and justice systems, Abrah and Adu-Gyamfi's article on probation sentencing and juvenile re-offending in Ghana offers insights into resilience at the community and individual levels. By highlighting factors such as poverty, peer influence, and lack of parental supervision, the paper reveals the structural drivers of juvenile delinquency. This contribution aligns with the broader theme by demonstrating how social systems can be restructured to support vulnerable populations and promote long-term societal stability.

The issue also addresses rural livelihoods and economic diversification through the article on the distributional effects of non-farm income on household welfare in rural Ghana, authored by Adjotor et al. The findings show that while non-farm income can stabilize farm income and reduce poverty, its benefits are unevenly distributed, particularly excluding the poorest households. This highlights a critical equity dimension of sustainability: growth strategies must be inclusive to be truly resilient. In the areas of education and mobility, Asamoah et al.'s study on international students' adaptation challenges at the University of Ghana sheds light on the often-overlooked experiences of transnational student populations. In a post-COVID world characterized by renewed global mobility, fostering resilience within academic institutions requires attention to the social and cultural integration of diverse student populations. Similarly, Duut's article on return migration and investment among Ghanaian migrants in the United Kingdom explores the transnational dimensions of resilience and development. The study reveals that investment in the home country is closely tied to migrants' intentions to return, suggesting that diaspora engagement can play a significant role in national development.

This highlights the importance of policies that facilitate investment and leverage the resources of migrant communities in building sustainable economies.

Urban vulnerabilities are further examined in the study on gambling among tertiary students in Accra, which frames gambling as an emerging public health concern. The findings point to the influence of financial pressures, peer dynamics, and targeted advertising, with notable gender disparities in gambling behavior. Asante and Gyan's contribution is particularly relevant in the post-COVID context, where economic uncertainty has heightened vulnerability among young people.

Environmental sustainability is addressed through the study on spatial inequalities in sanitation access in Tema. By highlighting infrastructural disparities and the strain on legacy systems from rapid urbanization, Fynn and Grant demonstrate how environmental and urban planning challenges intersect with issues of equity and resilience. The findings call for integrated approaches that align infrastructure development with evolving urban realities.

Adu-Danso and his colleagues examine how the Big Five personality traits influence energy-conservation behaviours among Ghanaian households. The paper finds that agreeableness and conscientiousness encourage habit adjustment, while openness, agreeableness, and neuroticism support investment in energy-efficient technologies. Proactive conservation is positively associated with openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, but negatively associated with extraversion. The study highlights the need for personality-sensitive policies, including targeted education, incentives, and partnerships with trusted brands.

Finally, the issue concludes with an examination of food insecurity among internal migrants in Accra during and after COVID-19. This study provides a nuanced understanding of how the pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, particularly among marginalized urban populations. By documenting coping strategies and the limitations of social protection systems, Tagoe et al. underscore the need for more inclusive and responsive policy frameworks. It also highlights the importance of addressing structural inequalities to build resilience in the face of future crises.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue offer a comprehensive exploration of resilience, growth, and sustainability from multiple perspectives. They demonstrate that building resilient societies requires coordinated efforts across economic, institutional, social, and environmental domains. Moreover, they reaffirm the critical role of social sciences in generating knowledge that informs policy and practice. As we navigate the uncertainties of the post-COVID era, the insights presented in this issue serve as a reminder that resilience demands continuous learning, adaptation, and collaboration among stakeholders at all levels. We hope that this collection will contribute meaningfully to scholarly discourse and inspire actionable strategies for a more equitable and sustainable future.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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