

## **ITEM 5: REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL SITUATIONS AND LATEST DEVELOPMENTS**

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### **SOCIO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION**

The Africa and Arab region continue to face problems of political instability and insecurity. The Sahel, parts of Central Africa and the border of some East African countries remain areas of concerns. Insurgencies or terrorist attacks have continued in Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina and, more recently, in Togo (October 2022) and Benin (September 2022). Transitional military regimes have been established in Burkina, Guinea, Mali and Chad. In the first three countries, their transition was installed following a coup d'état against democratically established civilian regimes. In Chad, the military transition is linked to the death of the president.

National elections were held in Kenya on 9 August 2022 and H.E William Ruto was declared President. His election was upheld by the Kenyan Supreme Court after being contested by the opposition leader. Nigeria held its presidential elections and national assembly on 25 February 2023, with a low 26.7% voter turnout. The election process was characterised by some problems but not enough to declare the election inconclusive, other elections for State Governors and state assemblies were also held on 18 March 2023. The newly elected President, Bola Tinubu and State Governors, are expected to take oath of office on 29 May 2023. Liberia is expected to hold its general elections on 10 October 2023.

The region has also witnessed civil unrest. In Gambia an anti-corruption rally was held by opposition leaders on the 10th March 2023, while in Senegal a 3-day protest started on the 15<sup>th</sup> March in support of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko. On the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023, protest action took place in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tunisia. Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga led a country protest against the increasing cost of living, claims of stolen election and other reforms and vowed to continue with same twice a weekly. In Nigeria, citizens took to the streets on the 20 March to protest election results and also high costs of living. In South Africa, opposition leader Julia Malema led protests calling for the resignation of President Cyril Ramaphosa and against the country's electricity crisis. In Tunisia, people protested against what they deemed a coup by Presidents Kais Saied in July 2022 after he suspended the parliament, fired the prime minister, and expanded his legislative and executive powers.

### **THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA WAR ON UKRAINE**

The political and economic crisis in the region is not isolated. The war in Ukraine and related sanctions have a direct economic impact in the region. Basic food items such as wheat or cereals and cooking oil have led to higher prices for items such as a bread. Fuel prices have increased, while international aid flows have decreased as money has been redirected to the war. In the Arab region, the war has affected oil importers in the region, they have seen a drop in tourism and a depreciation of local currencies (mainly in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria and Egypt).

## **INFLATION AND ECONOMIC COLLAPSE**

The Region has witnessed a severe economic crisis, with the Arab sub-region being the most severely impacted. Average consumer price inflation in the MENA region was 6.3% in 2022. Inflation is accelerating due to rising energy, food and commodity prices. Many countries in the region are reliant on IMF loans such as Jordan with \$400 and a new \$1 billion Eurobond debt issuance. In Egypt, total debt amounts to 364 billion USD, with a debt-to-GDP ratio of 87.2% in June 2022 (World Bank). Sudan and Yemen will continue to suffer from very high debt-to-GDP ratios of around 98 and 130 per cent respectively. The situation is not any better in sub-Saharan Africa: the debt-to-GDP ratio ranges from 102.33% in Zimbabwe, 98.72% in Ghana, 73.09% in Senegal, 72.31% in South Africa and 66.65% in Kenya (IMF).

Three years after Lebanon announced the suspension of repayment of its sovereign debt, Lebanon has fallen into an unprecedented economic crisis. As the economic crisis continues to worsen, and food prices increase, food insecurity is expected to affect 1.46 million Lebanese and 800,000 Syrian refugees (42 percent of the total population) by April 2023. Basic living conditions are in continuous decline. Lebanon's annual inflation rate increased to 123.53 percent in January 2023, up from an 18-month low of 121.99 in December 2022, due mainly to faster rises in prices of housing and transport.

In Ghana the inflation rate stands 54.1% by end of February 2022 with some global financial analyst observing the cedi to be the second weakest currency in Africa. The debt crisis in Ghana has seen IMF urging the government to undertake domestic debt restructuring through the domestic debt exchange programme, which had also targeted workers pension funds. The unions are still battling the government against restructuring pensioners money that will lead to loss in the value of pensioners funds.

Kenya is experiencing unprecedented high inflation, with Kenya shillings greatly depreciating against the dollar due to high debt standing at 62.5% to GDP ratio, increased drought with millions facing poverty. Additionally, IMF has pushed the government to undertake a number of austerity measures to be able to curb the rising public debt that includes privatization of a number of state-owned enterprises including electricity companies, health facilities, water provision among others.

In Nigeria it's estimated that close to 133 million people are either underemployed or lack jobs. Majority accounting for over 80% are employed in the informal jobs characterized with low pay and job insecurity leading to high poverty levels. Naira has also continued to depreciate against the dollar.

The Uganda government decided not to renew the concession of two private companies that were handling generation and distribution of electricity i.e. ESKOM and UMEME Ltd respectively. This was a welcomed move considering the challenges the sector experienced including high tariff costs to consumers due to privatization.

## **PRIVATISATION**

Privatisation is an ever-growing concern in the Region. As mentioned, many countries are suffering from high inflation and debt and have turned to IMF and World Bank who have used COVID pandemic and resulting economic crisis to push for privatisation and austerity measures. The high level of privatisation of public services is making services inaccessible to the populations. This includes health, water, education and transport.

In Kenya, the Cabinet has approved a new privatisation bill which seeks to allow the Kenyan Treasury to exclude Parliament from approving the sale of state-owned firms. The bill aims to shorten the approval process for the sale of government assets. It comes at a time when the government has announced plans to sell a number of state-owned firms through the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE). In addition, the Kenyan government is pushing ahead with privatisation of public services. For example, its model of universal health care coverage through the NHIF, while Kenya is not selling off its public healthcare sector, it has embraced the use of private health facilities via the NHIF as a strategy to bring private actors into the business of healthcare, amounting to de facto privatisation.

Electricity remains a concern in Southern Africa as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Malawi continue to experience power outages increasingly for over 10 hours a day. Electricity being a master resource has an impact on the economic performance of countries. Concern is growing not only in for South Africa's state utility ESKOM being privatised, but also for the details of the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P) investment which hope to see \$8.5-billion in concessional funding for decarbonisation projects in partnership France, Germany, the US, the UK and the European Union.

On the positive side, in Niger and Cameroon is witnessing the nationalisation and municipalisation of their water.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT AND BRAIN DRAIN**

Unemployment remains excessively high in the Region. Lebanon and South Africa continue to record the highest unemployment rates with around 32 per cent in 2022. In South Africa, using the expanded definition increases the unemployment rate to 42.6%. Unemployment is disproportionately higher among women and youth, for example in Iraq it sits at 28.2 percent and 35.8 percent respectively. Iraq has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world (10.6 percent) and more than a third of youth are neither in employment nor education or training.

The imminent threat of brain drain of health workers in a country like Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe among others to countries like UK and Germany is still ongoing. In November 2021, the UK government signed an agreement with the Kenyan government on health workers to be trained and recruited for UK. This follows previous agreement with the government of Ghana. In South Africa, there are active recruitment agencies offering jobs to health workers. These remain attractive as the country continues with to implement a hiring freeze despite a severe shortage of health workers in the public health system.

## **EPIDEMICS IN THE REGION**

As the Covid-19 pandemic lessens, countries have opened their borders to allow economic activity to return to normal. While vaccination is still being encouraged, the focus is shifting to other illnesses.

In October 2022, monkeypox was reported in 13 African countries, namely Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan and South Africa. The last Ebola outbreak in the DRC was declared on 23 April 2022, while Uganda declared an Ebola outbreak in September 2022. In the MENA region, public service infrastructure was severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and has become more fragile. This includes services such as health, electricity and water, which has resulted in the outbreak of old viruses such as Cholera in Lebanon and Syria.

## **COLLAPSE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

Throughout the region there has been interference and violation of collective bargaining agreements, for instance in Kenya the Salary Review Commission vetoes every CBA entered into by the various employers in public sector. This is weakening the image of trade unions in terms of their right and power to negotiate on behalf of members. In Uganda the Government has not honoured CBA signed in 2018 with public sector unions and instead opted for discriminative salary payments leaning towards scientists and ignoring arts and other civil servants. In Burundi the government unilateral revoked the agreement entered into with health workers in 2019 include suspending check-off for members. In South Africa unions are divided on whether to force government to account for renegeing on the 2018 collective bargaining agreement. In Mozambique, Mauritius and Rodrigues no collective bargaining exists. In Malawi, the government is refusing to talk to unions directly but going through the federation which has compromised on union demands. In Zimbabwe health sector workers are separated from other public services and the government is not negotiating with health workers.

Retirement and freeze or low recruitment levels in various public services across the countries of the region leading to low membership and weaker financial base for some affiliates. As does contract employment in some sectors like energy and health creating precarious work and making unionization difficult in some countries especially for the contract workers.

## **KILLINGS IN PALESTINE**

The year 2022 was a devastating year for Palestinian people. A total of 190 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces or civilians. The West Bank suffered the highest number of killings since 2004, with a total of 154 Palestinians killed. In the Gaza Strip, 32 Palestinians were killed, and in Israel, four Palestinians were killed.

Among those killed was 51-year-old journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was shot in the head unprovoked by Israeli forces, who tried to cover up her death by falsely claiming she was shot by crossfire. Her case has been taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Also killed was

80-year-old Omar Assad who died in custody after being handcuffed, blindfolded and dragged to the ground.

### **TRADE UNION RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

Trade union violations vary and take on many different forms in the region. In some countries, such as in the Francophone sub-region, violations of various workers' rights are not recorded as much as they used to be. Details will be provided in various sub regional reports.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Climate change continues to wreak havoc in our region. Tropical Cyclone Freddy broke the record for the longest-lasting tropical cyclone lasting 34 days. It hit Madagascar on 21 February and southern Mozambique on 24 February. It moved over Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and then looped back and hit Madagascar and Mozambique again. Cyclone Freddy brought destructive winds, storm surges and extreme rainfall to Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi, northeast Zimbabwe and southeast Zambia. Malawi is experiencing widespread flooding. Southern Mozambique received a years' worth of rainfall in one month.

### **SOME LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION**

**Conflict in Sudan:** A power struggle between Sudan's armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had rocked the country, with more than 500 civilians reported dead and many injured. Thousands of civilians have fled Sudan's capital and foreign nations try to evacuate their citizens, as attacks and bombings continue.

**Introduction of new Law for Medical Doctors in Nigeria:** At the time of making this report the national assembly was proposing a five-year compulsory service for graduates in medical and dental fields before obtaining a full license. According to the sponsors of the proposed bill, the aim is to provide Nigerians with quality health services and to halt brain drain.

### **REGIONAL ACTIVITIES HELD IN 2022**

**Regional Conference for quality health service -post covid 19:** The Regional Conference (minus MENA) for quality health service -post covid 19 was organized in Lagos, Nigeria on 14th and 15th November 2022. The conference sought to highlight lack of investment in health services post covid-19; shed light on the cost of privatization of public services to citizens, workers, and the attainment of the health objective of the sustainable development goals (SDGs); build a strong core of trade unions and CSOs to campaign for a post-covid economic recovery that is centred on investment in quality health services; and develop list of follow up actions for a post-covid advocacy for quality public health. It was attended by trade union leaders from 7 countries.

Participants agreed that the meeting issued a statement in the form of an article, highlighting the dangers of the presence of VAMED (a private company investing in healthcare) in Africa.

Kenya was selected to further the VAMED campaign. They also developed a list of trade union demands in health services post-covid 19.

**Young workers strategy meeting:** In December 2022, about 25 young workers from the Africa and Arab country region met in Accra, Ghana for the regional young workers strategy meeting. The participants were drawn from Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Togo, South Africa, Eswatini, Lebanon, Tunisia, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, DRC, and Malawi. By the end of the session, the young workers developed plans of action for each of their sub-region, which later has been consolidated into a regional young workers action plan for the next congress, as informed by the PSI program of action. They committed to organize and recruit more young workers in the trade union establishments; ensure that at the national level, young workers committees are established to facilitate mentoring, growth, and capacity development towards actively engaging in campaigns and actions for workers' rights and delivery of quality public services. They also asked PSI to establish and support a regional young workers committee to support national level young workers activities. They committed to campaigning on issues of digitalization, privatization, quality public services, and tax justice. The overall young workers plan would be discussed at the next AFREC in May 2023, in Morocco.

**Trade union negotiators training on digitalization:** In March 2023, about 30 trade union leaders from the region met in Accra, Ghana to be trained to appreciate the role of digitalization in shaping the new forms of work and the implication for workers' rights, data protection, and use of collective bargaining to secure the interest of workers at the place of work, in this dispensation of digitalization. The participants which came from 17 countries, at the end of the training, pledged to develop their own internal data collection systems, use the various tools PSI has developed to help Unions engage on digitalization effectively, and contribute to national discourse on data protection and the need for data to be owned by the public and not private interest. They also took cognisance of how data and the entire digitalization campaign creates new forms of inequality and colonization.

### **Pilot Training on Organising for 2 Health Sector Unions in the Region**

As part of the PSI organising campaign in the global south, Ghana and Kenya were identified as potential trade union organisations to launch or expand organising efforts to recruit healthcare workers, especially in private healthcare.

The lead consultant, Steven Ward, under the auspices of the Regional Secretary, met with leaders of the Health Services Workers Union of TUC Ghana and the Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists Dentists Union for an initial discussion and scoping exercise to ascertain the preparedness of the unions and determine whether they have the capacity to launch or expand an organising and recruitment campaign. After a successful meeting in March, the consultant will prepare a report on the outcome of the two meetings, including the next steps in the organising campaign.

## **CAMPAIGNS AND NEW EVENTS**

Southern Africa has started the process of setting up a health sector network with the objectives of developing joint campaigns and programmes, offering solidarity to one another and working towards strengthening workers' rights in the health sector in Southern Africa. So far, a draft MOU has been produced.

## **CONFIRMED DATE AND VENUE FOR WOMEN REGIONAL CONFERENCE:**

The Africa and Arab Countries Regional conference will take place in Abuja, Nigeria from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023. We are extending our invitation to PSI affiliates in other regions that are ready to sponsor their participants to the conference.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES**

On staffing issues, we have Alinah Kalauba who joined the Southern Africa Office as an Accountant and started on the 1 December 2022.