

Investigating the Challenges Confronting Civil Society Organisations in Peacebuilding Activities in Juba City, South Sudan

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges facing civil society organisations in implementing peacebuilding activities in Juba City, South Sudan. Although CSOs play a vital role in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, conflict resolution, and community mediation in fragile and post-conflict settings, their effectiveness is constrained by structural, operational, and contextual challenges. The study sought to examine how resource limitations, external pressures, and weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems influence the effectiveness of CSO-led peacebuilding initiatives. A descriptive qualitative research design was adopted. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review involving CSO leaders, community leaders, local government officials, and beneficiaries of peacebuilding programs. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret emerging patterns from the data. The findings revealed that CSOs experience inconsistent donor funding, limited logistical support, shortages of skilled personnel, and heavy dependence on external financial assistance. Political interference, insecurity, ethnic tensions, economic instability, environmental challenges, and weak institutional coordination further undermine peacebuilding efforts. In addition, weak M&E systems characterised by limited technical capacity, absence of standardised frameworks, poor data quality, and inadequate evidence-based decision-making reduce organisational accountability, learning, and program effectiveness. The study recommends strengthening sustainable funding mechanisms, improving coordination between CSOs and government institutions, expanding civic space to encourage inclusive participation, and establishing participatory M&E systems to enhance accountability and organisational learning. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen community-based peacebuilding, promote sustainable peace and social cohesion, and provide valuable evidence for policy formulation, program improvement, and future research on CSO-led peacebuilding in fragile contexts.

Key terms: Civil society organisations, conflict transformation, monitoring and evaluation, peacebuilding, resource constraints.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are key actors in the process of building peace, reconciliation, social cohesion and resolving conflicts in post-conflict societies (Liaga, 2024). In South Sudan, especially in Juba City, CSOs have been actively engaged in supporting peace initiatives to address the impacts of extended political instability, communal violence and social divisions (Bekoe & Burchard, 2017). Yet, there are many obstacles to the effectiveness of CSOs in peacebuilding, such as insufficient and unsustainable funding, weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, insecurity, political interference, lack of institutional capacity, and poor coordination among peacebuilding actors (Autesserre, 2010). These challenges hinder CSOs from implementing, monitoring, and sustaining peacebuilding interventions, which affects their contribution to long-term peace and stability (Ndizamangwi, 2022). Previous research has focused on civil society's role in peacebuilding in a national, rural or post-conflict setting, but little empirical research has focused on the challenges faced by CSOs in fragile urban settings like Juba City (Aall & Crocker, 2019). Thus, there is little evidence specific to the context of the impact of these challenges on the performance and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. This study aims to explore the problems faced by civil society organisations (CSOs) in Juba City, South Sudan, in the context of peacebuilding activities, and to provide evidence that can help inform policies and strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of CSOs in promoting sustainable peace.

The field of peacebuilding has garnered scholarly and policy attention from conflict management to conflict transformation of social and political systems (Mac Ginty, 2021). In this theoretical framework, civil society organisations (CSOs) are considered important non-state actors that link communities to formal peace institutions and, therefore, play a crucial role in the process of sustainable peace (Richmond, 2020). Their grassroots presence allows them to help promote dialogue, build reconciliation and enhance civic engagement in fragile contexts (Autesserre, 2010; Bell, 2018). However, CSOs are limited in their contexts, and this can limit their effectiveness and sustainability. In post-conflict societies with weak institutions and political instability, these restrictions are particularly tight.

The contribution of civil society to conflict transformation processes is gaining importance in the post-conflict literature of the countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Nepal, in particular in societies transitioning from conflict to stability. In these settings, empirical studies show that CSOs are central to peacebuilding by mediating, providing early warning, advocating for human rights, and promoting social reconciliation to build social trust and cohesion (Aall & Crocker, 2019). However, studies in the Northern Ireland and Afghan peace processes indicate that CSO involvement in formal peace processes is largely symbolic and not substantive, with decision-making power still held by political elites (Bell, 2018). This structural exclusion has been proven to limit the transformative power of civil society involvement. In addition, studies conducted in Lebanon and Iraq show that CSO activities that are not aligned with local needs are often prioritised in donor-led peacebuilding processes (Bekoe, 2020; Cheeseman et al., 2020). This implies that civil society involvement in peacebuilding can have varying effects in different areas of conflict.

In the African context, empirical research on Kenya (post-2007 electoral violence), Rwanda (post-genocide reconstruction), and Sierra Leone (post-civil war recovery) shows that CSOs are now playing a more important role in peacebuilding, governance reform and post-conflict reconstruction (Aall & Crocker, 2019). In Uganda and Nigeria, research shows that CSO effectiveness is constrained by weak institutional

capacities, weak organisational networks and political interference (Bekoe, 2020; Cheeseman et al., 2021). Further, studies from Ethiopia and Zimbabwe show that civic spaces can be restrictive of freedom of expression and decrease CSO autonomy in advocacy and mediation processes (Pring, 2022; Bell, 2018). The above structural constraints all lead to constraints on civil society's role in sustainable peacebuilding processes in Africa.

South Sudan is one of the most complex and fragile peacebuilding environments in modern-day Africa, and has been plagued by cycles of armed conflict, ethnic division, and poor institutional governance. The country has, since its independence in 2011, undergone several cycles of civil war which have seriously affected the country's national unity and development prospects (Johnson, 2021). The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was conceived as a means to achieve peace and political stability, but its implementation has been slow and uneven, in part due to the fragmentation of the elites and institutional weaknesses (Rolandsen, 2022; de Waal, 2015). The constant challenges have led to a dynamic situation in which actors of peacebuilding, including CSOs, are forced to work in an environment of uncertainty and insecurity. Thus, the sustainability of peace interventions is still very precarious.

Civil society actors have become significant actors in peacebuilding and humanitarian and reconciliation activities in this sensitive national context (Marchetti & Tocci, 2011). CSOs in South Sudan organise community dialogues, civic education and conflict mediation activities which contribute to de-escalating tensions and fostering communal peace and coexistence (Magara & Rivers, 2024; Liaga, 2024). But empirical evidence suggests that such organisations are likely to be very fragmented, poorly coordinated and lacking institutional coherence and as such have less collective impact (Owiso, 2021). Lack of technical capacity in the fields of conflict analysis, negotiation and peacebuilding program design is also a challenge for many CSOs. These limitations hinder them from building comprehensive and continuous peacebuilding processes. As a result, civil society interventions tend to be small-scale and fragmented, and not transformative.

Apart from the capacity constraints, civil society organisations (CSOs) in South Sudan are also constrained by the political environment of governance in South Sudan, which is sensitive and restrictive (Pring, 2022). The limitations of civic space include bureaucratic regulations, surveillance, and political mistrust of non-state actors (Magara & Rivers, 2024; Liaga, 2024). This restricts CSO autonomy and their advocacy and mediation activities. In some cases, civil society actors are seen as partisan, impacting their neutrality and legitimacy in peacebuilding processes (Bell, 2018). Such politicisation of civil society leads to a decline in the trust of CSOs, government and local communities. In reality, then, the potential of civil society peacebuilding is weakened.

The operational environment for CSOs is further complicated by security dynamics, especially in urban areas like Juba City (Rolandsen, 2022). The overall level of conflict has decreased in recent years, although localised conflict, intercommunal tensions and political instability are still a possibility (Johnson, 2021). These factors restrict CSO access to vulnerable populations and the sustainability of peacebuilding programs. Furthermore, communities affected by the conflict may not be willing to engage in reconciliation and dialogue processes because of fear, mistrust, and trauma (de Waal, 2015). Insecurity and social divisions combine to create a very volatile context, which is not conducive to continued peacebuilding activity. Consequently, CSOs need to continually adjust their strategies to work in uncertain

and risky environments. While there has been increasing research on civil society and peacebuilding in South Sudan, the literature lacks an empirical focus on Juba City as a space for peacebuilding.

Within the South Sudan context, especially in Juba City, civil society organisations remain at the heart of peacebuilding activities, including dialogue facilitation, reconciliation and civic education. But current empirical evidence indicates that they are seriously undermined by the interaction of financial instability, politically constrained operating environments and weak accountability systems (Magara & Rivers, 2024; Liaga, 2024). While these challenges have been recognised in the literature, there is a need for more localised empirical analysis of the interaction between resource limitations, external political-security dynamics, and weak M&E frameworks and their impact on CSO performance in peacebuilding in Juba City. This leaves a significant knowledge deficit regarding both the presence of these constraints and how these constraints interact in an urban fragile-state context to shape peacebuilding outcomes (Johnson, 2021).

Three issues that consistently emerge in empirical studies of the effectiveness of CSOs in peacebuilding in fragile and post-conflict situations are identified. First, resource constraints are significant limiting factors on organisational capacity, and reliance on short-term funding from donors has been found to have a negative impact on program continuity and sustainability in post-conflict settings in Africa and Asia (Cheeseman et al., 2021; Bekoe & Burchard, 2017). Second, external environmental factors, such as political interference, civic space restrictions and insecurity, have been documented in contexts where CSO autonomy is often undermined and access to conflict-affected populations is limited, e.g. South Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Pring, 2022; Bell, 2018). Third, the lack of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems has been found to be a significant gap in CSOs in fragile states, with weak technical capacity and the absence of standardised frameworks limiting the ability to measure outcomes of peacebuilding and organisational learning (Lutwama et al., 2021).

While these documented issues exist, the existing literature tends to be at a national level and to make general regional comparisons, with little attention paid to the local urban context, such as Juba City, where CSO operations are more concentrated but also very limited. This is especially notable because the majority of international and local NGOs involved in peacebuilding are based in Juba, but continue to face challenges of coordination failures, limited resources and impact of programs. Therefore, there is a clear need for an in-depth investigation into the challenges confronting civil society organisations in peacebuilding activities in Juba City, South Sudan, with specific attention to resource limitations, external environmental pressures, and monitoring and evaluation weaknesses that collectively hinder sustainable peace outcomes.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organisations in Their Peacebuilding Efforts

Research on civil society involvement in peace processes indicates that engagement can be limited in scope even when formally included, and can involve low levels of influence. Bell (2018) suggests that CSOs are often used in peace negotiations in a consultative capacity, rather than a decision-making one, limiting their impact on substantive outcomes. The study has contributed to the understanding of the challenges faced by civil society actors in conflict situations, but has not been able to offer much insight into the nature of participation in urban peacebuilding contexts. This constraint is significant because the post-conflict cities are likely to have unique governance dynamics, population diversity, and political interests that affect the nature of peacebuilding processes compared to national-level peacebuilding.

A second theme that has been raised in the literature is the ability of civil society actors to track and assess the effectiveness of peacebuilding. The post-conflict context suggests that many CSOs are dependent on donor-funded reporting frameworks that focus on the project activities and outputs rather than on longer-term measures of peace and social cohesion. Weak evaluation systems have a negative impact on the production of trustworthy evidence of reconciliation outcomes, and thus on organisational learning and donor confidence, as shown by Autesserre (2010). Likewise, Aall and Crocker (2019) note that weak monitoring systems limit accountability and hinder the evaluation of the effects of sustainable peacebuilding. While these studies make valuable contributions to the understanding of institutional shortcomings in peacebuilding practice, they offer less analysis on how monitoring challenges are exacerbated in fragile urban settings with weak information systems, weak institutions, and weak inter-organisational coordination. These gaps are especially significant in Juba City, where the complexity of urban governance could further limit the ability to monitor and evaluate.

Another common thread in the literature is resource dependency. Pre-existing research indicates that too much dependence on external donor funding can be a threat to the sustainability of civil society peacebuilding efforts. Cheeseman et al. (2021) argue that donor dependency can make it harder to establish local ownership and long-term sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives. Similarly, Magara and Rivers (2024) show how short-term funding cycles can lead to program discontinuity, job turnover, and a decrease in community trust in peacebuilding interventions. These studies successfully point to the financial fragilities of CSOs, but do not give sufficient consideration to the interaction between resource limitations and political pressures and administrative problems in urban centres. The literature therefore offers only partial insight into the operational context faced by civil society organisations in capital cities, like Juba, where the struggle for resources and political power is often fierce.

The literature also shows insecurity and political instability as significant barriers to effective civil society engagement. Field studies in areas affected by conflict reveal that CSOs can be severely constrained by the reach and autonomy of CSOs due to violence, weak state authority, and limitations by political actors. Ndizamangwi (2022) shows how insecurity limits access to communities by organisations and how it affects the implementation of peacebuilding programmes. Likewise, Bell (2018) points out that political mistrust and insecure situations impede grassroots reconciliation. While these findings are relevant to the understanding of peacebuilding challenges in conflict areas, they are mainly based on experiences from rural or peripheral conflict areas. There has been less focus on the ways in which insecurity is expressed in semi-urban or capital city environments where political control, bureaucratic constraints and institutional pressures can have different impacts on civil society.

The reviewed literature provides valuable inputs on the factors that shape the effectiveness of civil society in peacebuilding, such as participation, monitoring and evaluation capacity, financial sustainability and security conditions. But there is a lack of knowledge about the interaction of these factors in fragile urban contexts. The majority of the current research is on national peace processes, rural reconciliation initiatives, or conflict-affected border areas, while empirical data on CSOs' experiences in post-conflict capital cities is scarce. In addition, the interlinkages between resource limitations, limited monitoring capacity, political pressures and insecurity have not been sufficiently explored in one analytical package. This gap calls for the current study, which aims to explore the problems encountered by civil society organisations in peacebuilding activities in Juba City, South Sudan, and provide context-specific evidence to the wider peacebuilding literature.

Theoretical Review

In order to carry out the research, the study adopted Conflict Transformation Theory in determining challenges confronting civil society organisations in peacebuilding activities in Juba City, South Sudan.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory is most closely linked to John Paul Lederach (1997), who defines peacebuilding as a long-term process concerned with changing relationships, structures and social systems that create and sustain violence. Lederach believes that a lasting peace is not possible through a quick-fix approach to conflict resolution, but through a transformation of attitudes, institutions, and intergroup relations. The view is reinforced by Johan Galtung (1996), who coined the term structural violence, a form of violence in which inequality, exclusion and injustice are at the core of the social structure and are responsible for the recurring violence. Likewise, Hugh Miall (2004) reiterates the idea that conflict transformation is a slow and participatory process of multiple actors who seek to transform relationships and institutions to a peaceful co-existence. Other researchers, like Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011), extend the theory by emphasising its relevance to post-conflict reconstruction where deep social divisions need to be dealt with in an inclusive and participatory manner. Together, these scholars develop a holistic perspective of conflict transformation as a framework for sustainable peacebuilding in fragile societies.

Although widely embraced, there are some scholarly critiques of Conflict Transformation Theory. Transformative approaches are frequently idealistic and hard to apply in fragile states where security is a pressing issue and the longer-term relational change is not considered (Paris 2004). Likewise, Richmond (2011) points out that although the theory is based on local participation, in reality, peacebuilding processes are often dominated by external actors, resulting in limited local ownership. The theory is also criticised by Autesserre (2010), who demonstrates that international peacebuilding efforts tend to ignore the local dynamics of everyday life, and concentrate on negotiations at the elite level. Furthermore, Mac Ginty (2011) suggests that transformation processes are complex and resource-heavy and therefore challenging to maintain in contexts of poverty, weak institutions and continuing insecurity. However, the theory is still applicable to the current study in Juba City, South Sudan, as it offers a lens through which to analyse the efforts of civil society organisations to encourage dialogue, reconciliation and structural change in the face of significant constraints, including resource limitations, political interference, insecurity and limited monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). In this research. Economic empowerment is the study's independent variable, whereas peace-building is the dependent variable.

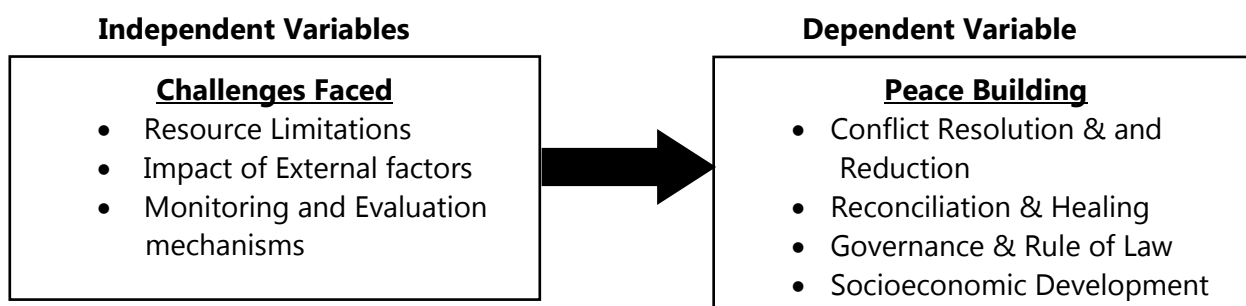


Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Researcher, 2026).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design anchored in a purely qualitative approach to investigate the challenges confronting civil society organisations (CSOs) in peacebuilding activities in Juba City, South Sudan. A descriptive design was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena and provides a contextual understanding of participants' experiences (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted in Juba City, Central Equatoria State, with fieldwork undertaken between January and March 2026 across Juba, Kator, and Munuki Payams. The target population comprised CSO leaders, community leaders, local government officials, and beneficiaries of peacebuilding programmes.

Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich participants with direct experience in peacebuilding processes (Patton, 2015; Suri, 2021). The study involved 20 key informants comprising CSO leaders (7), community leaders (7), and local government officials (6), together with 42 beneficiaries participating in six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and documentary review of policy documents, CSO reports, and scholarly literature. The interview and FGD guides contained open-ended questions addressing resource constraints, external challenges, institutional coordination, and monitoring and evaluation practices. With participants' consent, all interviews and discussions were audio-recorded, while trained translators assisted participants who preferred local languages.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis involving transcription, translation where necessary, coding, categorisation, and interpretation of emerging themes aligned with the study objectives (Kvale, 2007). Documentary evidence was used to triangulate primary findings and enhance the credibility of the results. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities, and participants received information sheets before providing written informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymised codes, secure password-protected storage of data, and restricted researcher access. Research records will be retained securely for five years before permanent destruction, while interviews were conducted in safe locations and participants were free to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Although the qualitative design generated rich contextual insights, the findings are not statistically generalizable beyond Juba City. Purposive sampling may also have introduced selection bias by focusing on participants with direct peacebuilding experience. These limitations were mitigated through triangulation of interviews, FGDs, and documentary sources, inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups,

systematic thematic analysis, and member checking of selected interview summaries to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study findings.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative Results

Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organisations in their Peacebuilding Efforts

The thematic areas that the challenges encountered in the peacebuilding efforts in Juba City, South Sudan are organised around three key thematic areas that emphasise the operational and contextual constraints that persist in the operations of civil society organisations and other stakeholders. Among them are Resource Limitations, which look at the financial, human and logistical constraints that limit effective implementation of peacebuilding programs. The second theme, Impact of External Factors, examines the impact of political instability, economic shocks, insecurity, and environmental conditions on the effectiveness and continuity of peace initiatives. The third theme, Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms, evaluates the limitations of evidence-based decision-making and program improvement due to weaknesses in data collection, analysis, accountability, and learning systems.

Resource Limitations

The investigation showed that the lack of funding is a major limiting factor to the capacity of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to enforce effective peacebuilding initiatives in Juba City. Key informant interviews revealed that financial constraints influence the magnitude, persistence and sustainability of peace interventions.

In this respect, K4 (CSO Program Officer) noted that *"there are funding gaps that limit the capacity to cover all the affected communities"* and K12 (CSO Leader) observed that *"most of the programs are donor-based and thus unstable."* Likewise, K18 (Local Government Official) pointed out that *"insufficient financial resources lower the efficiency and coverage of operations"*.

Another aspect that was pointed out by FGD participants is that the *"lack of funding influences the uniformity of peacebuilding efforts"*. One respondent explained that *"sometimes programs are cut short due to lack of funding"* (FDG-2, Participant 3) and another respondent explained that *"CSO activities do not reach all the villages due to lack of resources"* (FDG-5, Participant 1).

These results are in line with those of UNDP (2023), which states that the financial limitations continue to be one of the significant obstacles to successful peacebuilding in fragile settings, restricting the scalability and sustainability of CSO interventions. The research found that the challenges associated with resources were a major limitation to the civil society organisations (CSOs) in their endeavours to carry out peacebuilding initiatives in Juba City, South Sudan. Among the respondents, the most intractable barriers were found to be funding shortages, limited logistics, and weak institutional capacity.

A CSO leader remarked, *"most of our activities come to a halt when the donor funding is withdrawn, even though the community still needs to be supported"* (K1, CSO Leader).

A local government official added, without consistent resources, even good peace programs cannot continue (K2, Local Government Official). The elders of the community also highlighted that most of the scheduled activities fail because of non-availability of transport and materials. FGD 1 beneficiaries said that at times there is no funding to facilitate the meetings (FGD1, Beneficiary). These issues diminish continuity and effectiveness of peace interventions. They also limit CSO outreach to remote areas. This is in line with the recent literature by the United Nations Development Programme (2023), which emphasises funding instability as a significant limitation in fragile-state peacebuilding.

The research also established that the short-term and unpredictable donor funding had a significant impact on the sustainability of CSO peacebuilding programs. According to the respondents, the majority of funding cycles are short and project-based, which restricts long-term planning.

A CSO leader noted, *"When the funding runs out, even successful programs are lost without continuity"* (K4, Community Leader).

The local government officials also observed that this kind of unpredictability negates coordination efforts. FGD 2 beneficiaries affirmed that community trust is undermined when programs are abruptly terminated. This frustrates and decreases involvement in further programs. It also compels CSOs to focus on survival rather than impact. The findings are in line with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2022), which highlights the significance of foreseeable financing in the context of peacebuilding.

The other important finding was that the lack of sufficient logistical and operational resources was a significant constraint to CSO field participation in peacebuilding processes. Lack of transport, office equipment and communication tools were some of the challenges highlighted by the respondents.

A local government official said, *"Even it becomes hard to organize community dialogues without basic supplies"* (K6, CSO Leader).

Another significant result was that the risks of financial mismanagement and the pressure of accountability also influenced the CSO resource utilisation. Other respondents have observed that the rigorous donor reporting policies are time- and resource-consuming.

A CSO leader noted, *"we spend more time reporting than implementing activities"* (K2, CSO Leader).

The research also determined that resources were a problem for CSOs in Juba City due to insecurity and access restrictions. The respondents observed that insecurity adds to the operational costs and restricts movement in the field.

A local government official said, *"We sometimes cancel field activities due to safety risks and lack of transport support"* (K4, Local Government Official), and a CSO leader added, *"We sometimes cancel field activities because of safety risks and lack of transport support"* (K6, CSO Leader).

Community leaders affirmed that there are still areas that are underserved because of these constraints. In FGD 1, beneficiaries pointed out that insecurity minimises regular participation. This impacts the continuity of peace programs. It also adds to operational uncertainty. These results are also consistent with United Nations (2023), which emphasises insecurity as a significant limitation in fragile environments.

One CSO leader observed, *"There is not always cooperation between CSOs, but competition"* (K5, CSO Leader) and a local government official added, *"This lacks coordination in peacebuilding efforts"* (K8, Local Government Official).

Beneficiaries in FGD 2 observed duplication of activities in some communities. This contributes to poor utilisation of the limited resources. It also undermines collective impact. Such fragmentation reduces overall effectiveness of peace initiatives. These results are consistent with Bentu et al. (2025), which emphasises the coordination of peace actors. Another key finding showed that inflation and economic instability in South Sudan further strained CSO resource capacities. Respondents highlighted that rising costs increase program expenses beyond planned budgets.

A CSO leader stated, *"The cost of implementing even small activities keeps increasing"* (K7, CSO Leader), while a community elder added, *"Prices change quickly, making planning difficult"* (K10, Community Leader).

Impact of External Factors

The study established that external factors significantly influence peacebuilding efforts in Juba City, with political dynamics emerging as one of the most critical determinants. Respondents indicated that shifts in political leadership and national-level tensions often affect the consistency of peacebuilding programs implemented by civil society organisations (CSOs).

A CSO leader observed, *"Whenever political temperatures rise, our community activities become more sensitive and restricted"* (K1, CSO Leader)

While a local government official added, *"Peace initiatives are sometimes slowed down by national political uncertainties"* (K2, Local Government Official). Community leaders also noted that political mistrust at higher levels filters down to local communities, affecting cooperation. Beneficiaries in FGD 1 stated that *"politics sometimes divides people even at community peace meetings"* (FGD1, Beneficiary).

These dynamics reduce predictability and stability of interventions. They also influence community willingness to participate. This aligns with the United Nations Development Programme (2023), which highlights political instability as a major constraint in peacebuilding contexts.

Further investigation showed that political interference diminishes the autonomy of CSOs in conducting peacebuilding activities. It was revealed that in the interviews, outside political influence influences decision-making and program neutrality. I

In this respect, K7 (CSO Coordinator) reported that *"political pressure occasionally restricts our autonomy in our work"*; K15 (Community Leader) reported that interference influences

trust in CSO neutrality. Moreover, K20 (Local Government Official) admitted that *"political processes sometimes affect the peacebuilding agendas"*.

The same participants of the FGD were also concerned with the fact that political influence is a problem that affects neutrality in peace processes. One participant said that.

"politics sometimes interferes with peace programs" (FDG-1, Participant 4).
Another said that *"we are not always sure whether CSOs are completely independent"* (FDG-4, Participant 2).

Such results can be corroborated with the peacebuilding framework proposed by Lederach, who states the significance of neutrality and independence in maintaining credible peace interventions, especially in politically sensitive settings. The investigation also found that the movement and activities of CSOs in Juba City are limited by insecurity and continued conflict situations. It turned out that unstable security situations restrict the ability to access some communities and postpone program implementation.

In this respect, K3 (CSO Field Officer) pointed out *"that it is hard to travel to some places without insecurity"*, whereas K11 (CSO Leader) stressed that *"the limitation of movements slows down the project implementation"*. Likewise, K17 (Community Leader) noted that the *"fear of violence inhibits community involvement"*.

The participants of FGD affirmed that insecurity influences involvement in peacebuilding efforts. One of the participants said that CSOs are unable to reach us sometimes due to fighting (FDG-3, Participant 5), and another participant said that security issues postpone peace meetings (FDG-2, Participant 1). These results are consistent with the conflict environment theory, which states that insecurity is a direct threat to the performance of peacebuilding actors due to restricted access, participation, and implementation capacity (World Bank, 2022).

The investigation showed that ethnic divisions that are deeply rooted in communities hamper the success of CSO peace efforts. It turned out that the historical resentment and the tensions based on identity diminish the trust and collaboration between groups.

In this respect, K9 (Community Leader) noted that *"ethnic divisions complicate the effort of uniting communities"* and K14 (CSO Officer) observed that deep-rooted mistrust hinders the process of reconciliation. Also, K19 (Local Government Official) highlighted that *"social fragmentation is one of the major hindrances towards sustainable peace"*.

The same was echoed by FGD participants who indicated that ethnic divisions are a barrier to participation in peace activities.

One of the participants said that *"people continue to separate themselves by tribe when discussing"* (FDG5, Participant 3),

and another participant said that it is difficult to trust other groups fully (FDG1, Participant 2). Such results are in line with the structural violence theory of Galtung, which emphasises the role of structural social divisions in sustaining conflict and derailing peacebuilding processes.

The investigation further revealed that economic instability and inflation in South Sudan have a direct negative impact on peacebuilding initiatives in Juba City. Respondents emphasised that rising costs limit the scope and reach of CSO programs.

With the rising cost of living, "it's hard to carry out planned activities effectively" (K3, CSO Leader) and "People are more concerned with survival than attending peace meetings" (K4, Community Elder).

Local officials also said that less purchasing power leads to fewer participations. Economic hardship is a barrier to participation in community dialogues, as confirmed by beneficiaries in FGD 2. This undermines social involvement and participation in peace processes. It also makes people more susceptible to conflict over limited resources. These results align with those of the World Bank (2023), which suggests that economic instability is one of the main factors that contribute to fragility in post-conflict situations.

Another major finding was that environmental shocks like floods and climate-related shocks also impact peacebuilding efforts in Juba City. The respondents noted that such events would cause displacement of communities and interference with planned activities.

"Disasters often force us to postpone community meetings, while peacebuilding is a priority" (K9, CSO Leader) and "Floods and weather changes shift priorities away from peacebuilding to survival needs" (K10, Local Government Official).

Community leaders reiterated that displacement leads to stress and conflict. In FGD 5, beneficiaries agreed that environmental shocks hinder the continuity of the program. This takes resources away from peacebuilding and towards emergency response. It is also a factor that makes communities vulnerable. The results confirm the findings of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2023), which identifies climate shocks as indirect causes of instability.

The study concluded that while these external factors pose challenges, coordination between CSOs, government, and international actors can help reduce their impact on peacebuilding efforts. Partnerships are seen to enhance resilience and adaptability, with respondents reporting this.

A CSO leader summarised, "Collaboration enables us to address external challenges better" (K5, CSO Leader), and a local government official added, "Collaboration is a way to build peacebuilding even in difficult times" (K6, Local Government Official).

Community leaders highlighted the importance of collaboration in building trust and effectiveness. The beneficiaries in FGD 2 agreed that coordinated interventions work better. This cooperation enhances the sustainability of peace initiatives. It also minimises duplication of efforts. The results are in line with the multi-stakeholder coordination in fragile environments that is highlighted by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (2023).

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

The research has determined that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanisms pose a significant challenge to civil society organisations (CSOs) in their peacebuilding initiatives in Juba City due to poor systems, lack of technical capacity and resources to effectively collect and utilise data. The respondents reported that despite the fact that M&E is necessary to ensure accountability and learning, it is not well implemented.

A CSO leader said, *"We gather data, but sometimes we do not have proper systems to analyse and utilise it effectively"* (K1, CSO Leader), and a local government official added, *"Many organisations report activities, but they do not measure the actual impact on peace"* (K2, Local Government Official).

Community leaders underlined the fact that poor feedback mechanisms decrease transparency. According to the FGD 1 benefits, the beneficiaries said that they are frequently asked questions, but they never hear the results of the findings (FGD1, Beneficiary). These loopholes lower confidence in programs. They also undermine evidence-based decision-making. This is in line with the recent literature by UNDP (2023), which identifies weak M&E systems as one of the major obstacles to effective peacebuilding in fragile contexts.

The research also found that the lack of technical capacity among the staff of CSOs is a crucial factor that compromises the effectiveness of M&E in peacebuilding efforts. The respondents indicated that in most organisations, there are no trained personnel on data analysis, reporting, and impact evaluation.

One CSO leader noted, *"They rely on a small number of staff who are not fully trained in advanced M&E techniques"* (K3, CSO Leader), and a community elder added, *"Sometimes they gather information but fail to interpret it in a good way"* (K4, Community Leader).

The local government officials also indicated that the gaps in capacity lead to low-quality reports. FGD 2 beneficiaries affirmed that evidence is seldom used to improve programs. This restricts learning and adaptation. It also undermines program effectiveness. World Bank (2023) supports these findings by highlighting human capacity gaps as one of the key challenges in M&E systems in fragile states.

The other important result was that insufficient financial resources that are specifically devoted to the activities of Monitoring and Evaluation are an obstacle to effective peacebuilding assessment. Respondents stressed that the majority of budgets focus on implementation, not evaluation.

A CSO leader said, *"Without adequate funding, monitoring will be haphazard and incomplete"* (K5, CSO Leader), and a local government official added, *"Without proper funding, monitoring will be inconsistent and incomplete"* (K6, Local Government Official).

According to community leaders, this results in poor follow-up of activities. According to the beneficiaries in FGD 3, evaluation meetings are normally not attended because of insufficient funds. This reduces accountability. It also restricts ongoing program improvement. These results are consistent with OECD (2022), which presents a lack of M&E funding as a systemic issue in development and peacebuilding initiatives.

The research also determined that poor participatory Monitoring and Evaluation strategies decrease the sense of community ownership of the peacebuilding efforts. According to the respondents, communities are usually engaged as sources of data and not as active participants in evaluation.

A community elder remarked, *"We are not involved in checking whether things are working, and we are asked to answer questions, but we do not participate in that"* (K7, Community Leader), and a CSO leader added that "true participatory M&E is still hard to come by due to time and resource constraints" (K8, CSO Leader).

Local authorities stressed that insufficient involvement restricts the applicability of results. FGD 4 beneficiaries affirmed that they seldom participate in the process of reviewing results. This decreases inclusivity and trust. It also undermines accountability mechanisms. These results are aligned with the principles of OECD-DAC (2007) and recent literature that highlights the importance of participatory M&E in peacebuilding.

The study also found that the problems of data quality and reliability are serious challenges to effective Monitoring and Evaluation in CSO peacebuilding programs. Respondents observed discrepancies in data collection instruments and reporting structures.

A CSO leader said, *"Sometimes different field teams gather different types of information, and it is difficult to compare them"* (K9, CSO Leader), and a local government official added, "It is difficult to compare them because sometimes different field teams gather different types of information (K10, Local Government Official).

Another issue raised by community leaders was incorrect reporting. Beneficiaries in FGD 5 have reported that some of the reported outcomes do not correspond to their lived experiences. This compromises the validity of results. It also undermines planning and implementation. These results are consistent with International Alert (2022), which focuses on the reliability of data as a key to conflict-sensitive programming.

Another important finding showed that the lack of standardised Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks across CSOs leads to fragmented and inconsistent assessment of peacebuilding outcomes. According to the respondents, every organisation has various indicators and tools.

A CSO leader noted, *"Each organisation has its own system of measuring the results of peacebuilding, which makes the coordination process challenging"* (K1, CSO Leader), and a local official added, *"There is no unified system of measuring the results of peacebuilding"* (K2, Local Government Official).

According to the community leaders, this results in duplication of efforts. FGD 6 beneficiaries affirmed that there was confusion in reporting outcomes in various programs. This weakens coordination. It also minimises comparability of results. These findings align with UN Peacebuilding Fund (2023), which stresses the need for harmonised M&E frameworks.

The paper has also determined that failure to utilise M&E findings in decision-making to a considerable degree is a significant setback to the role of Monitoring and Evaluation systems in peacebuilding. According to the respondents, although data is gathered, not all the data is utilised to modify programs.

One CSO leader said, *"We do not necessarily see any change based on what was reported to us"* (K4, Community Leader); one CSO leader added, *"We sometimes do not see any change based on what was reported to us"* (K4, Community Leader).

Local government officials stressed the fact that feedback loops are weak. The respondents of FGD 1 who are beneficiaries affirmed that the recommendations are hardly ever implemented. This reduces the effectiveness of interventions. It also does not encourage community participation. These results are consistent with OECD (2023), which highlights the use of data as one of the main pillars of effective M&E.

The study also indicated that the lack of effective Monitoring and Evaluation efforts is due to insecurity and mobility restrictions in Juba City. The respondents observed that access to the field is occasionally limited, and it impacts the collection of data.

A CSO leader noted, *"Not all communities can be reached regularly due to insecurity and transport issues"* (K5, CSO Leader),

A local government official added, some areas are hard to reach regularly due to insecurity and transport problems (K6, Local Government Official). Community leaders pointed out that this results in coverage gaps. FGD 2 beneficiaries affirmed that there are certain areas that are not regularly evaluated. This leaves gaps in data. It also lessens the representativeness of results.

and K12 (CSO Leader) noted that lack of capacity diminishes the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, another aspect that FGD participants noted was that the quality of peacebuilding initiatives is also influenced by lack of expertise. One participant explained that certain programs are not effectively implemented because of the absence of skilled individuals (FDG-1, Participant 6), and the other participant said that *"peace activities should be enhanced through training"* (FDG-4, Participant 3). These results are in line with the capacity-building theory, which underlines that successful peacebuilding must be based on sufficient human capital, technical skills, and ongoing training (UNESCO, 2022).

State of Peacebuilding in Juba City, S. Sudan

The section is structured in terms of four major themes that capture both the advances and the ongoing challenges in the peacebuilding environment. These are Conflict Resolution and Reduction, which looks at the mechanisms employed in managing and preventing violence at the community level. It also includes Reconciliation and Healing, which is concerned with the attempts to restore relationships and to overcome the past trauma of the conflicting groups. Governance and Rule of Law is another key theme, assessing institutional effectiveness, accountability, and justice delivery systems. Lastly, Socioeconomic Development examines the impact of livelihoods, employment, and economic stability on the outcomes of peace.

Conflict Resolution and Reduction

The research found that, moderately, dialogue forums, mediation structures, and community peace committees, with the support of civil society organisations, have improved conflict resolution and

reduction in Juba City. Respondents have pointed out that most conflicts are currently resolved at the community level before they can turn into violence.

A CSO leader remarked, *"most of the conflicts today are resolved through dialogue before reaching security forces"* (K1, CSO Leader), and a community elder added, *"nowadays, most conflicts are solved through dialogue before reaching security forces"* (K2, Community Leader).

FGD 1 beneficiaries attested that minor land and resource conflicts are increasingly being handled at the local level. Nevertheless, they also stated that resource-based and politically motivated conflicts are hard to resolve. This is in part agreement with recent literature by the United Nations Development Programme (2023), which states that community-based conflict resolution is more effective in improving local peace, but it is less effective in addressing structural conflicts.

The results also indicated that the mechanisms of early warning and rapid response have enhanced the conflict prevention efforts, but their effectiveness is limited by the resource and coordination gaps.

One of the local government officials said, *"We are alerted by communities, but sometimes we are delayed in responding due to lack of capacity"* (K3, Local Government Official). One CSO leader replied that *"it is not uniformly covered over all areas, and they attempt to intervene at the earliest stage possible"* (K4, CSO Leader).

FGD 2 participants observed that there are still cases where conflicts escalate because of the delay in intervention. This is contrary to the recent literature by United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (2023) that argues that effective early warning systems can greatly reduce escalation. However, in Juba City, there is a lack of coordination and resources to make the system effective. In this way, although there are conflict reduction mechanisms, their effect is not evenly distributed.

Reconciliation and Healing

The research determined that dialogue platforms, psychosocial support, and trauma healing programs have enhanced reconciliation and healing processes in Juba City through the efforts of CSOs and faith-based actors.

A CSO leader said, *"People are slowly restoring trust after years of conflict"* (K6, Community Leader).

The participants of FGD 3, who are the beneficiaries, affirmed that the structured conversations have diminished the hostility between groups. These findings are in agreement with recent literature by Bentu et al, (2025), which highlights dialogue and healing as critical in rebuilding fractured relationships in post-conflict societies.

Nevertheless, the research also established that reconciliation is not complete because of unresolved grievances, trauma, and inaccessibility to justice.

One local government official noted, *"Reconciliation is still going on, yet there are still deep wounds in many communities"* (K7, Local Government Official).

The FGD 4 beneficiaries also added that it is hard to forgive where accountability is poor. Other respondents believed that peace programs are more about dialogue rather than justice. This is contrary to what the United Nations Human Rights Council (2023) says, which emphasises that reconciliation should be connected with transitional justice to ensure long-term peace. The lack of balance between healing and justice in Juba City restricts the achievement of full reconciliation.

Governance and Rule of Law

The research has determined that governance and rule of law in Juba City have made modest improvements through collaboration between CSOs and government institutions towards promoting accountability and access to justice.

A local government official said, *"We are working with CSOs to strengthen justice delivery at the community level"* (K8, Local Government Official), and a CSO leader added, *"We help communities report cases and follow up on justice processes"* (K9, CSO Leader).

The beneficiaries of FGD 5 reported greater awareness of legal rights and reporting systems. These results agree with Transparency International (2022), which also points to the role of civil society in enhancing the transparency and accountability of governance.

Although these have been improved, the study found that there are still weaknesses in the enforcement of the laws, corruption issues, and inadequate institutional capacity. One of the community elders remarked that some cases have been reported, but nothing has been done after that (K10, Community Leader). Mistrust in formal justice systems because of delays and inefficiencies was also expressed by the beneficiaries. This is contrary to optimistic governance reforms being reported in United Nations Mission in South Sudan reports (2023-2024), which focus on progressive strengthening of institutions of the rule of law. In Juba City, however, there is still weak enforcement that is eroding confidence in the structures of governance.

Socioeconomic Development

The research determined that socioeconomic development is a critical factor in determining the outcome of peacebuilding in Juba City, with livelihood programs being one of the factors that have led to a reduction in vulnerability to conflict.

One CSO leader observed, *"when people have income, they are less likely to engage in violence"* (K1, CSO Leader),

and one community elder added, the economic support programs have helped families to stabilise their lives (K2, Community Leader). Beneficiaries in FGD 6 confirmed that skills training and small business support improved household resilience. These results agree with the World Bank (2023), which states that economic stability is critical to maintain peace in weak situations.

Nevertheless, the research also found that unemployment, inflation, and poverty still erode peacebuilding achievements in Juba City. According to a local government official, the economic hardship is still one of the largest forces of insecurity (K3, Local Government Official). FGD participants reported that youth unemployment makes them susceptible to violence and crime. This is contrary to the optimistic development assumptions in the United Nations Development Programme (2024), which attributes development programs to rapid peace dividends. However, in Juba City, structural economic issues retard peace consolidation. Therefore, socioeconomic development is a source and a limitation to sustainable peace.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study found that civil society organisations (CSOs) have a significant but limited role in peacebuilding in Juba City, South Sudan. While CSOs can have a strong impact in dialogue facilitation, reconciliation processes, community mediation and peace education, they are limited in their effectiveness due to structural, operational and contextual challenges. The findings indicate that certain donor funding constraints, logistics and human resource issues are specific challenges that have a significant impact on the continuity, reach and sustainability of peacebuilding interventions. These limitations make it difficult for CSOs to have a long-term effect and build trust with the community. The study also reveals that external factors, such as political interference, insecurity, ethnic divisions, economic instability and environmental shocks, play a significant role in the success of peacebuilding efforts. These factors affect CSO autonomy, access to communities and implementation of programs, thereby affecting peace consolidation efforts in Juba City. The study also found that weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are a major challenge to evidence-based programming. Limited learning, accountability, and program improvement are due to the lack of standardised frameworks, lack of technical capacity, and lack of data use.

The Study adds to the body of knowledge on civil society and peacebuilding by offering empirical data on the difficulties of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on peacebuilding efforts in Juba City, South Sudan. This study is unique in that it addresses the realities of peacebuilding in a fragile urban and capital city context, rather than rural reconciliation programmes or national peace processes as has been the focus of much previous research. The study illustrates the ways in which resource limitations, poor monitoring and evaluation, insecurity, and political interference can interact to affect the effectiveness and sustainability of CSO peacebuilding efforts. The study also adds to the practice by identifying institutional and operational challenges that hinder CSOs from contributing to social cohesion, reconciliation and conflict prevention in Juba City. The results offer evidence to support policy development, donor strategies, and organisational capacity building efforts to support peacebuilding in South Sudan and other post-conflict urban contexts, by identifying context-specific challenges and their implications for peacebuilding outcomes.

Recommendations: Based on the study findings, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives in Juba City. Development partners should consider long-term institutional funding mechanisms, and CSOs should pursue diversified funding sources by mobilising local resources, engaging the private sector, reaching out to the diaspora, and generating income. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems restrict accountability, learning and evidence-based decision-making, so CSOs should develop a standardised and participatory M&E framework that tracks long-term peacebuilding outcomes, with the support of development partners and government

institutions, to build the capacity of CSO staff to collect, analyse, report and assess impact. Greater coordination and cooperation among CSOs, government agencies, community leaders and international partners should be encouraged through formal coordination platforms and information sharing mechanisms, to overcome fragmented interventions and lack of coordination among stakeholders. In addition, political interference and restrictions on civic space limit the autonomy of CSOs, and the Government of South Sudan should enhance legal and policy frameworks to promote civic freedoms and support positive interaction between CSOs and state actors.

Security coordination mechanisms, early warning systems and community-based security initiatives should be enhanced to create safe operational environments for CSOs, as the findings indicated that insecurity hinders access to conflict-affected communities and affects peacebuilding activities. The study also suggests greater community engagement in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding programs to improve local ownership, accountability and sustainability of interventions. Lastly, in recognition of the identified institutional capacity gaps among CSOs, capacity-building initiatives should be sustained to enhance CSOs' leadership, project management, financial management, conflict analysis, mediation and monitoring and evaluation skills, to enhance CSOs' effectiveness, credibility and sustainability in peacebuilding.

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