Armed conflicts in Sub-Sahara Africa: Impacts on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract
Armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa have adversely affected the sub-region's political, economic, social, technological, and health development. The United Nations Development Program's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set to be achieved by 2030, have been significantly impacted by the effects of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study examines the extent of the impact of armed conflicts in the sub-region and the need for conflict resolution and peacebuilding to achieve the various SDGs set by the United Nations. The introduction provides a historical background on armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. It examines the different causes of armed conflicts and their effects on various aspects of human life in the region. This socio-political analysis elucidates the concept and significance of SDGs and fundamental SDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa. The impact of armed conflicts on specific SDGs, such as poverty and hunger, education and literacy, health and well-being, and gender equality, is discussed in detail. Strategies for addressing the impacts of armed conflicts are explored, including peacebuilding and conflict resolution, humanitarian aid and development assistance, and strengthening governance and institutions. The conclusion summarises the research findings.
Keywords
Armed Conflict, Sustainable Development Goals, Sub-Saharan Africa, Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

The pre-colonial history of Sub-Saharan Africa encompasses the period before the arrival of European powers and the establishment of colonial rule. During this time, the region comprised various societies and ethnic groups with distinct cultures and political systems (Rabinowitz, 2020). The arrival of the Europeans and the subsequent process of colonialism profoundly affected the course of history in Sub-Saharan Africa. European powers such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Belgium sought to divide the continent, exploiting its resources and people as a source of cheap labor (Tawiah et al., 2022; Deumert, 2020). This division led to significant changes in the political and social fabric of the continent, as Africa's borders were wholly redrawn to serve the economic interests of the colonial powers better.

Consequently, when the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa began to attain independence from the late 1950s onwards, they faced the daunting task of uniting these artificial colonial constructs into coherent and stable nation-states (Paine et al., 2021; Barbour, 2023; Müller-Crepon, 2020). This process was filled with conflict and challenges as different ethnic and political groups struggled to define new national identities and establish government systems. This has led many of these ethnic and political groups to take up arms, be it for the purpose of self-determination, inclusion in governance or fighting perceived

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oppression. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2022), there were active armed conflicts in no less that 18 out of the 49 states in Sub-Saharan Africa with 12 of those categorized as High-intensity armed conflicts states.

Consequently, widespread armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa have had huge impact on sustainable development goals which according to a 2023 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Sustainable Development Report, and 2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report, both reports highlight Africa's lack of progress in reaching its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030. With an index score of 53.6, showing that the region has so far achieved only 53.6% of its 2030 SDG targets, still leaving a gap of 46.4%.

Research Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative approach to gather data on the impacts of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa on achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It examined how armed conflicts disrupt fundamental aspects necessary for achieving SDGs. Specifically, it focused on the origins, dynamics, and impacts of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa on different SDGs. Additionally, it discussed existing literature, the evolving nature of conflicts in Africa, and the mechanisms linking conflicts and SDGs. Therefore, the study provides a structured approach and valuable insights into the relationship between armed conflicts and sustainable development.

Literature Review

Causes of Armed Conflicts

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2014), the first major armed conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa was the First Sudanese Civil War in 1949. It lasted 16 years and involved conflicts between the Christian and Animist minority in Southern Sudan and the Muslim Arab minority in Northern Sudan. Many scholars believe that the leading causes of armed conflicts in the region are complex and attributed to factors such as colonialism, ethnic tensions, weak governance, and poverty. The history of colonialism is considered a significant cause, as the political systems and borders established during that time created divisions between ethnic groups (Maunganidze,2023; Quirós-Fons, 2022; Gabara, 2023). When colonial powers withdrew, power struggles ensued. Most armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa are internal and occur in 'fragile states' with weakened socio-economic, political, and legal institutions (Basedau & Schaefer-Kehnert, 2020; Fang et al., 2020; Hassan, 2020). Fragile states are highly susceptible to the eruption of armed conflicts, and a definitive correlation exists between internal armed conflicts and underdevelopment. This correlation arises from the diversion of national resources, which possess the potential to improve the living standards for ordinary citizens, towards the pursuit of warfare. Moreover, political instability and widespread corruption, typically associated with internal armed conflicts, creates a vicious cycle of poverty and violence that impedes the progress of underdeveloped nations (Ficek, 2022; Saeed, 2020; Tayimlong, 2021; Al-Makura, 2021; Nkurunziza, 2022; Eneji & Agri, 2020). The UCDP identifies over a quarter of Sub-Saharan African countries as having experienced internal armed conflicts in 2011, bolstering the claim that internal armed conflicts constitute a substantive concern for the region today.

Impact on Societies and Economies

The consequences of conflicts have far-reaching effects. These long-term consequences increase the risk of state collapse and further conflict. The destruction of a stable social and economic structure, which provides order and identity for individuals and groups, creates a power vacuum, leading to further internal or regional tensions (Siregar, 2022). Furthermore, displacement has lasting consequences by disrupting

social networks, norms, and trust, which are fundamental to society. Another effect of armed conflict on societies is the destruction of institutions and infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, housing, roads, water and sanitation systems, markets, and industry (Petrova, 2022; Fang et al., 2020; Babajide et al., 2021). When these limited resources are destroyed or damaged due to conflicts, both the means and the outcome of development are jeopardized, resulting in a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Such destruction significantly impacts future economic development more than the immediate loss of life, particularly when infrastructural damage becomes a strategic tactic (Garry & Checchi, 2020; Ujunwa et al., 2021). In 2014, the World Bank estimated that the economic impact of the collapse of the Liberian health system due to armed conflict was far more significant than the immediate cost to the health sector because of the Ebola outbreak.

According to George and Adelaja (2022), armed conflicts have a long-lasting and devastating impact on affected societies' social, economic, and political fabric. Different social groups may experience different effects of the conflict. Displacement is a common effect of armed conflict, referring to the forced movement of people from their homes due to violence, human rights violations, and other insecurities (Iacoella & Tirivayi, 2020; Ojeleke et al., 2023). Those displaced by conflict face health risks, as they often live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in camps and urban areas with limited access to clean water and sanitation. They may also encounter difficulties in accessing healthcare. For example, research has shown a greater prevalence of malnutrition among displaced persons in some African countries than among local host populations (Garry & Checchi, 2020; Atsiya et al., 2021; Ekezie et al., 2020). These adverse effects of armed conflicts are significant obstacles and hindrances in achieving the SDGs outlined by the United Nations Development Program.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Definition and Importance

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global goal adopted by 193 United Nations member states in 2015. The goals are outlined in Agenda 2030, a comprehensive framework for promoting peace, prosperity, and the well-being of people and the planet. The primary aim of the SDGs is to eradicate poverty, address inequality, combat climate change, and ensure that no one is left behind. The goals encompass various challenges, including economic inequality, social exclusion, corruption, environmental sustainability, and peace and justice. Specifically, Agenda 2030 comprises 17 goals and 169 targets on social progress, economic development, and environmental protection. The goals are broad-based and interdependent, with each goal having its own set of targets, such as Goal 1, which seeks to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere," and Goal 16, which aims to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" (ESCAP, 2021; Kyeyune, 2020; Saikia & Das; Hoy & Sumner, 2021).

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), sustainable development is "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This concept is supported by three interlinked pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection (Osondu-Oti, 2020; Cernev & Fenner, 2020; Fonseca et al., 2020; Mahlatsi, 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the 17 SDGs are significant due to the region's formidable development challenges. This region faces high infant mortality, low life expectancy, high fertility rates, and relatively low per capita income. Moreover, conflicts, hunger, diseases, and high dependency on natural resources constantly threaten any progress made in the region. Additionally, the region is characterized by pervasive inequality (Juju et al., 2020; Hilson & Maconachie, 2020; Mbow, 2020; Atukunda et al., 2021).

Accordingly, by achieving the targets set by the SDGs, the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa will witness significant improvement. However, when examining the primary indicators of development, only a few countries in the region are on track to achieve Goals 1 and 2, which focus on eradicating poverty and hunger, respectively. These conflicts often stem from competition and limited access to resources. Therefore, comprehending the importance of advancing these fundamental SDGs is crucial to appreciate the impact of armed conflicts on impeding development in Sub-Saharan African countries (Giller, 2020; Juju et al., 2020; Jayne & Sanchez, 2021).

Key SDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa

Target 5.6: To ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as agreed upon under the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action, and the outcome documents of their review conferences (George, 2022). Gender-based Violence (GBV) is a significant issue. Initially, GBV services were limited, as it was not recognized as a severe problem. However, over time, the demand for GBV services increased. For example, in the Darfur refugee camps, women who go to fetch firewood face sexual abuse, but there are no counseling or medical care services available (Manuh & Biney, 2021; Singh et al., 2023).

Target 4.a: To build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive, and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all. Based on the works of several international organizations, armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa severely disrupt education. These statistics reveal that approximately 500 million children worldwide cannot attend school during conflicts (Mack et al., 2021; Unfried & Kis-Katos, 2023).

Target 2.1: To end hunger and ensure access to food for all people by 2030, particularly people experiencing poverty and those in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food all year round. Hunger is a physiological need for food, causing an uncomfortable or painful sensation due to the lack of or scarcity of food (Stubbs & Turicchi, 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa, armed conflicts cause deforestation, soil and land degradation, and soil salinity. These problems lead to desertification, as observed around Lake Chad (Azare et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020; Lenshie et al., 2021; Kalilou, 2021).

Target 1.1: By 2030, to eradicate extreme poverty for all people worldwide, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day. The impacts of armed conflicts on SDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa are similar to those in other regions (Juju et al., 2020). Food production and distribution are the two essential areas affected. According to Langley (2021) and Fayad et al. (2021), armed conflicts in the region resulted in a loss of $1.8 billion in food production between 2000 and 2017.

Results and Discussions

Impact of Armed Conflicts on SDGs in Sub-Sahara Africa

The impact of armed conflicts on SDGs can be classified as direct or indirect, depending on the specific effects. This classification creates a cumulative adverse effect, as the attainment of each goal is interconnected with the achievement of others. In Sub-Saharan Africa, addressing armed conflicts and achieving the SDGs has gained increasing attention in recent years. However, significant challenges persist, including the region's limited financial and technological capacity.

Loss of Human Resources/Capital Due to Displacement

It is worth noting that numerous studies have shown a relationship between armed conflicts and the failure to achieve the SDGs. For example, the prolonged civil war and armed conflicts in Sierra Leone resulted in the collapse of the country's infrastructure, leading to an estimated 50,000 deaths directly attributable to the conflict. This circumstance has impeded progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in areas such as public health. The World Health Organization's country cooperation strategy for Sierra Leone from 2008 to 2013 identified the government's limited capacity to provide public health services as a significant challenge. Armed conflicts have caused the deterioration of health systems and high maternal and child mortality rates. This outcome reflects the devastating impact of war and violence on the realization of SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for individuals of all ages (Okolie-Osemene, 2021; Johnson, 2021; Kobayashi & M'cleod; van der Veen & Datzberger, 2022).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, a region most heavily affected by armed conflicts, more adequate systems and mechanisms are required to implement the SDGs effectively. According to regional leaders, the peace and stability levels required for successful SDG implementation are yet to be achieved. As such, ongoing efforts are being made to strengthen governance, enhance peace and security, and address regional conflict-related issues. However, these efforts are often hindered by political interests, corruption, and lack of inclusivity in governance (Juju et al., 2020; Knight, 2021; Annan-Aggrey et al., 2021; Mbow, 2020).

Between 2000 and 2017, approximately 86% of individuals in the 13 African countries affected by the war were estimated to have lived on less than US$1 per day, with approximately 98% living on less than US$2 per day (Gul et al., 2022; Fenta et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2014). The number of individuals below the poverty line increased by approximately 20% during the civil war in Angola from 1990 to 1995 (Bank, 2020; James III, 2020). In war-affected areas, civilian hunger is exacerbated by the lack of access to necessities and any available food is often seized by armed groups. This issue is compounded by the displacement of many individuals due to conflict. Up to one in five people who suffer from food insecurity have been forced to flee due to war, civil unrest, or persecution.

Such poverty levels ultimately contribute to refugee-producing cycles of war and mass displacement, leading to brain drain and a lack of vital human resources. Additionally, children are among the primary victims of armed conflict (Osman & Abebe, 2023; Shemyakina, 2022; Kemmerling et al., 2022; Musisi & Kinyanda, 2020). More than 2 million children have been perished, with many recruited as soldiers by military forces. The familial, communal, and traditional practices that provide support and protection to children during normal development in African societies are disrupted by armed conflict (Garry & Checchi, 2020; Bendavid et al., 2021; Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021; Omar, 2020). Data from Sierra Leone indicates that school dropouts due to armed groups were as high as 45%, and in Guinea, there were 70,000 refugee girls aged 15 to 18 either heading households or caring for younger siblings (Abdullah, 2020; Bandiera et al., 2020; Alghali et al., 2005; Betancourt et al., 2020).

Poverty and Hunger

The impacts of armed conflicts on SDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa are far-reaching and complex. Poverty and hunger emerge as inevitable consequences at the nexus of conflict, where it is most prevalent. It has been observed that conflicts such as civil wars can cause extreme poverty. Poverty is measured by various indicators of individual well-being, including nutritional status, life expectancy, literacy, and numeracy levels. Consequently, as poverty escalates, so does hunger. Between 1981 and 2015, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a significant increase in poverty, with an estimated 41% of the population in this region classified as extremely poor in 2015 (Ekeocha & Iheonu, 2021; Anetor et al., 2020).

Conflict primarily causes poverty by disrupting economic activities essential for development and well-being, such as farming, healthcare, and education, as outlined in Galtung's conflict theory (1958). Reduced productivity in these economic sectors leads to diminished gross domestic product and a heightened likelihood of food shortages. Scholars have identified three distinct ways in which conflict contributes to poverty:

1. Conflicts can diminish the productivity and size of the economy.

2. The distribution of money or resources to specific citizens or regions within a nation may shift towards funding conflict management, diverting funds from welfare and development programs.

3. Conflict disrupts the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities through the destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and displacement of valuable land for refugee camps.

Research by Roux (2016) and Hoeffler and Reynal-Querol (2003) indicates that the longer a conflict persists, the more severe poverty and inequality become, often referred to as the 'time dummies of conflict.' Each year of conflict beyond a certain threshold exponentially increases the risk of chronic poverty. Furthermore, independent, well-established, and reliable measures such as 'heat maps' utilized by the UK government, the Economic Intelligence Unit, and the United Nations demonstrate a high correlation between conflict-affected areas and terrorist activities.

Education and Literacy

The armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa have devastating effects on education and literacy in the region. According to a report by the Global Partnership for Education (2018), children in conflict-affected countries are over four times more likely to be out of school than their counterparts in peaceful nations. This disparity stems from the widespread destruction of education infrastructure, recruitment of minors as child soldiers, and mass displacement of students and teachers.

For example, in South Sudan, over 400,000 children have dropped out of school due to ongoing violence. In 2014 alone, a staggering total of 913 attacks on schools were reported across 22 conflict-affected countries, instilling a pervasive climate of fear and insecurity among students and teachers and further exacerbating poor learning outcomes for children. Warring factions often employ the deliberate targeting of educational institutions to assert control, intimidate, or displace populations. For example, in the Central African Republic (CAR), 55% of schools remain non-operational due to the ongoing conflict (Lombard & Picco, 2021; Glawion, 2020), resulting in only 36% enrollment rate for primary school, one of the lowest in the world.

Such limited access to education and high illiteracy rates perpetuate themselves over time. Many children and youth lack personal and intellectual growth opportunities, undermining local, national, and international peacebuilding efforts. The enduring negative impact of education infrastructure destruction is also starkly evident. For example, in Nigeria, over 1,500 schools have been destroyed since 2009, leaving 2.2 million internally displaced people as of 2015. Without access to education, these youth struggle to envision a better future, perpetuating low literacy rates that hamper national development (Jacob et al., 2021; Ikpi, 2022; Abbas et al., 2023). These statistics highlight the urgent need for measures to mitigate the impact of conflicts on education, with sustained long-term investment to address this pressing issue.

Health and Well-being

One of the most profound impacts of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa is the severe effect on the health and well-being of the local population. As physical and mental health are intertwined, the impacts of armed conflicts on physical health, such as death, injuries, and malnutrition, impose severe consequences on mental health. An overview of the impacts is presented in this section. One of the most immediate impacts is the increased mortality rate due to various reasons, such as the use of weapons and firearms, lack of medical care due to damage to health facilities, and outbreaks of diseases. Innocent civilians are wounded or killed unintentionally because of the warfare between conflicting parties. Armed conflicts can cause malnutrition, a chronic physical health issue in the long term. It has been observed that malnutrition rates in some African conflict areas exceed double the emergency threshold designated by the World Health Organization (Adeyeye et al., 2023; Ogbu et al., 2022; Njatang et al., 2023). It affects physical growth and harms children's cognitive development and learning ability.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the mental health of those affected by conflicts. The immeasurable suffering, traumas, and stresses imposed by armed conflicts can lead to various mental, neurological, and substance use disorders. As conflicts are continuous sources of trials and stress daily for the affected people, there are increased risks of many common mental disorders and substantial reduction of well-being (Sequeira et al., 2022; Abdulkadir, 2021). These direct impacts on health can further result in a decrease in the capacities of the local health system and healthcare. For example, the deaths of experienced healthcare professionals will lead to shortages, and a lack of ongoing training and supervision can reduce the quality of services.

Gender Equality

Unfortunately, armed conflicts in many Sub-Saharan countries have had degrading impacts on gender equality. These conflicts exacerbate existing gender inequalities and even generate new ones. Due to cultural and traditional perceptions that generally undermine the potential and place of women in African society, women in post-conflict areas continue to experience gender-based violence and other human rights violations (Adejumo et al., 2022; Lugova et al., 2020; Yusuf, 2022). While gender violence is often studied as a standalone topic in gender studies, it is crucial to recognize that women are at a higher risk of gender disempowerment in post-conflict societies. In the SDGs' fight for gender equality, gender-based violence is benchmarked as a significant form of disempowerment against women. Persistent conflicts continue to undermine progress in improving the status of women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similar to the situation with wealth and political power, men in Africa's conflict areas have the privilege and opportunity to access very meager resources (Rjoub et al., 2021; Bjornlund et al., 2022; Adejumo et al., 2022; Lugova et al., 2020; Yusuf, 2022).

On the contrary, women in the same areas continue to bear the devastating consequences of conflicts as they enjoy little if any, resource-control power. This resource disparity has been empirically demonstrated by female literacy in most conflict-torn parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, which is lower than male literacy levels (Dube, 2023; DiGiuseppe & Haer, 2023; Sano, 2021). Sexual and gender-based violence experienced during conflicts has far-reaching consequences and is a critical impediment to the realization of SDG Goal 5 on gender equality (Kaka et al., 2021; Petersen, 2020; Ananias et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2023; Khurana & Verma, 2023).

On the other hand, violence during conflicts greatly hinders women's participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, as envisioned in SDG Goal 16 on governance. Women need to have productive roles in various societal developmental tasks. However, persistent gender-based violence creates what many gender scholars, including Hilary, termed the "shadow of violence." In this regard, states and their instrumentalities are unable to eradicate gender-based violence and its associated forms of

disempowerment. It should be noted that gender violence, even during peaceful regimes, is a critical micro-level cause of conflicts and lack of peaceful coexistence (BAŞER, 2024; Belrose, 2021).

SDGs' Goal 16, in the context of post-conflict peace consolidation, seeks to end sexual and gender violence and harmful practices. While it may not be possible to end all forms of gender violence in the future, the persistence of well-established measures and practices that perpetuate gender-based violence, particularly in post-conflict societies, is a manifestation of cultural and traditional patterns and extreme forms of masculinity that serve to undermine "true" reconciliation programs (Mudibu Sparf, 2023; Smith, 2021; Olsson et al., 2020; Wignall, 2022).

Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Sub-Sahara Africa

All parties must work towards prevention. If a society can prevent conflicts from erupting, it will be much healthier overall. The efficacy of constitutional treaties also reaffirms the significance of preventive action, which could assist African states in detecting potentially violent conflicts at an early stage and playing an important role in defusing them. This approach implies establishing a mechanism for early warning, including a database on conflicts and risks and funding for preventive action, as noted by EurActiv (2004). The international cooperation required for preventive action would involve the development of various appropriate measures, including confidence-building measures and the inclusion of civil society. These measures may vary from diplomatic and political initiatives to social and economic development, measures intended to protect people, and promoting human rights and good governance.

The idea of preventive strategies is not groundless in Africa. Most experts have regarded it as an effective way to reduce the likelihood of violent conflicts and relapse. Professor Francis Deng, the Director of the Preventing Deadly Conflict project at the Brookings Institute, further emphasized that preventive diplomacy is necessary to address the root causes of conflicts to prevent large-scale violence. He stressed that *"prevention should focus on comprehensive strategies that address not only the symptoms and immediate problems but tackle also the root causes of conflict."* However, a fundamental limitation of this approach is that strategies addressing the root causes of conflicts are long-term agendas. Many African states may find them impractical because they have to deal with daily conflicts and pressure from the international community to provide quick and easy solutions and desired results.

Provision of Functioning Infrastructure

When preventive measures fail and conflict arises, it can be challenging to ascertain what went wrong and how to reverse the effects of armed conflict (Kazzah et al., 2022; Juju et al., 2020). This situation is where conflict resolution methodologies play a crucial role. Although changing international politics and practices will always be daunting, initiatives such as the formation of additional treaties and global organizations and reinforcing international laws can all have a positive impact (Abbott & Faude, 2020; D'Angelo et al., 2020; Metz et al., 2021). These efforts contribute to creating a global community that respects each country's path to development. Economically, measures must address factors that could fuel further conflicts. As noted previously, offering money and trade deals through foreign investment can inadvertently lead to states supporting violent groups as a means of overthrowing opposing forces.

The most effective to prevent such occurrences is to ban any activities of this nature in war zones in Sub-Sahara Africa. Collaborating with the remaining government and reconstructing devastated infrastructure can expedite post-conflict recovery. Ensuring that services such as medical care and education are promptly provided to the general population enhances efficiency and reduces fear and instability. As the general population witnesses improvements in their lives resulting from governmental actions, society gradually becomes more stable (Blum & Rogger, 2021; Garry & Checchi, 2020; Okello & Taylor, 2023; Engwicht & Ankenbrand, 2021). This approach can foster disengagement among different societal

factions, initially striving for power and change as they begin to observe the positive impacts of state intervention on their lives.

Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

Peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the establishment of sustainable peace and prevents the recurrence of violence. Accordingly, a peacebuilding strategy involves promoting social and economic development, strengthening political institutions, enforcing human rights and the rule of law, and fostering reconciliation (Johnson et al., 2021; Ogunode & Ayeni, 2023; Simangan, 2020). Various approaches and peacebuilding levels exist, which may vary according to factors such as the nature and stage of a given conflict, the socio-economic and political situation in a country, and the international environment. Levels refer to the scope and impact of peacebuilding activities. This study delineates the three essential types of peacebuilding at different levels.

Firstly, 'track one' or 'top-down' peacebuilding involves official actions by governments and relevant international bodies to cease all forms of conflict and violence. 'Track one plus' peace-building also operates at the governmental level. It incorporates non-conventional approaches, such as employing retired soldiers for community reconstruction work and encouraging inter-departmental cooperation on peacebuilding efforts. Peacebuilding can facilitate sustainable, inclusive development by addressing the root causes of pre-conflict grievances, promoting reconstruction following crises, and empowering people and societies to develop new and innovative forms of social, economic, and political organization (Assefa, 2020; van der Veen & Datzberger, 2022; Dam-de & Sjöstedt, 2023; Azeez & Jimoh, 2023; Paudel et al., 2023).

There is abundant evidence in various literature suggesting that effective peacebuilding can also significantly contribute to poverty reduction. For example, a report by the United Nations Development Program (2015) highlights ample evidence indicating that fundamental programs essential for economic growth - in infrastructure, governance, public administration, education, primary healthcare, and the stimulation of local economies - can commence during the initial phase of a significant post-conflict recovery effort, even as efforts to generate employment and rehabilitate the private sector are underway (UNDP, 2015). However, the same report also cautions that early, rapid interventions risk being "houses built on sand" if real and substantial efforts are not made to address the more profound, structural causes of conflict.

Democratic dialogue and debate on strategies for adaptation and change are vital aspects of peacebuilding. Coordinated, global commitments to peacebuilding activities, as demanded by the Global Goals, such as the objective to 'significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere' outlined in UN Sustainable Development Goal 16, are increasingly crucial measures of sustainable progress toward creating a more equitable and peaceful world.

Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance

Development aid is support given to nations to help them grow and improve the quality of life for their citizens. In contrast, humanitarian aid involves supporting people in times of crisis.

In the world today, £8.6 billion is being spent on aid, particularly in Africa, with £5 billion allocated to humanitarian aid (Yildirim, 2022; Ahmed, 2021; Karahan, 2020; Lewin, 2020). Humanitarian aid and development assistance are crucial in mitigating the devastating effects of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. They provide much-needed resources and support to affected communities, addressing immediate needs and laying the foundation for long-term sustainable development. These aid forms are essential for achieving the SDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa and are integral to rebuilding infrastructure and restoring

livelihoods in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, humanitarian aid and development assistance focus on strengthening local institutions and promoting social cohesion, which are crucial for achieving stability and peace in the region. By investing in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, these forms of aid contribute to the well-being and resilience of communities, paving the way toward sustainable development (Moyer & Hedden, 2020; World Health Organization, 2022; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Fonseca et al., 2020).

Furthermore, humanitarian aid and development assistance are significant in promoting gender equality and empowering women in conflict-affected areas, recognizing the importance of inclusive and equitable development for long-term peace and prosperity. By providing resources and support to women, including access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, these forms of aid help break the cycle of poverty and discrimination, enabling women to actively participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the sustainable development of their communities (Patel et al., 2020; Goulart et al., 2021; Lwamba et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2022). Women's empowerment leads to the achievement of individual and community-level development goals and contributes to the socio-economic progress of Sub-Saharan Africa. In practical terms, aid has a more significant impact. More money allocated to Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDC) often has a more significant effect due to exchange rates and more aid being available to spend on resources (Ussif & Salifu, 2020; Abreha & Zereyesus, 2021).

The amount of aid spent (in absolute terms and as a percentage of gross national income) is increasing due to global action and agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals. The commitment to providing humanitarian aid and development assistance has been crucial in addressing the complex challenges Sub-Saharan African countries face. It has helped alleviate immediate suffering and fostered long-term development and stability in the region. However, several challenges and limitations hinder the effective delivery and distribution of aid to areas affected by armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, including inadequate infrastructure, corruption, and logistical barriers (Jones et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022; Lopes et al., 2020). Humanitarian aid and development assistance are crucial in mitigating the devastating effects of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, as they provide much-needed resources and support for vulnerable populations. More aid is being sent to countries to help them overcome specific crises. However, it is crucial to examine the effectiveness and long-term impact of humanitarian aid and development assistance in achieving the SDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mary & Mishra, 2020; Petrova, 2022; George & Adelaja, 2022).

When more significant amounts of aid are sent to a country emerging from a crisis or recovering from its aftermath, it is crucial to ensure that the humanitarian aid and development assistance are effectively coordinated and targeted toward addressing the specific needs of the affected population. This outcome can be achieved through close collaboration between international organizations, government agencies, and local communities, ensuring resources are allocated efficiently to meet the most pressing needs and promote long-term sustainable development (Paudel et al., 2023; Campbell & Spilker, 2020; Keijzer et al., 2020).

Humanitarian aid is frequently extended to assist countries and people in recovering from crises such as war or tyranny. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and development assistance in Sub-Sahara Africa is significantly influenced by various factors. These factors include political instability, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure. Furthermore, the absence of coordination and communication among aid organizations impedes the impact of humanitarian aid and development assistance in Sub-Sahara Africa. This obstacle leads to duplication of efforts, inefficiencies, and misallocation of resources (Mwinaayelle & Owusu, 2023; Lukman et al., 2023).

Strengthening Governance and Institutions

Two primary types of ministries or institutions are responsible for governance and security: civilian and military. Civilian institutions include the police, the Ministry of the Interior (responsible for internal security), the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Attorney General's Department, the Ministry of Justice, and the paramilitary forces. Conversely, the military operates under different security and administrative chains (de Araújo Palmeira et al., 2020; Kikuchi, 2021). Generally, the military assumes several internal security and public order responsibilities, particularly in rural areas. However, the police are primarily responsible for maintaining law and order in communities and are prominently present in most urban areas (Salihu, 2020). This division of responsibilities is further enshrined within the Constitution. For instance, since 1993 the reintroduction of multi-party democracy in Ghana in 1992, new layers of civilian oversight over the security sector have been introduced. For example, there is now a National Security Council headed by the President, which includes at least eight civilians, including the minority and majority leaders in Parliament, and relevant armed forces and police chiefs.

Additionally, a national security coordinator was appointed in 2007 to monitor the activities of all security and intelligence agencies and to facilitate communication between these agencies and the National Security Council. These changes place the armed forces and the police under greater civilian control. Moreover, legislation such as the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act 1996 permits the establishment of joint committees of Parliament with supervisory powers over the various security and intelligence agencies. Such committees would enjoy significant independence in discharging their work as they are not answerable to the Executive. This aspect of democratic oversight of the security sector is crucial, and Ghana is well-positioned in this regard to protect the rights and freedoms of its citizens now and in the future (Prah & Chanimbe, 2021; Albrecht & Sukanya, 2020; Asante, 2020; Albrecht, 2022; Salihu, 2020; Albrecht, 2022).

These measures aim to strengthen governance and institutions, ensuring that the security sector operates within the framework of democratic principles and respects the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Strengthening governance and institutions enables the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa to effectively address the challenges posed by armed conflicts and work towards achieving SDGs in the region.

Conclusion

This research highlights the significant impacts of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa on attaining SDGs. It concludes that sustainable development in the region can only be achieved if these conflicts' effects on the SDGs are effectively addressed. It identifies various areas necessitating immediate remedial measures and long-term strategies. These include peacebuilding, conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, development assistance, and strengthening governance and institutions.

The research reveals that armed conflicts significantly disrupt fundamental aspects of life, including education, literacy, health, and well-being. It emphasizes the 2030 Agenda's insistence on peace and security as essential prerequisites for sustainable development and the need to protect and promote human rights in SDG implementation.

The analysis reveals a profound, wide-ranging on Sub-Saharan Africa stemming from persistent and escalating armed conflicts, impeding progress across seven out of seventeen SDGs. These goals relate to poverty alleviation, hunger eradication, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, peace, justice, robust institutions, and collaborative partnerships.

The research strongly advocates for global, regional, and national policies addressing armed conflicts in Africa to prioritize protecting the population, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized, from the intolerable human suffering wrought by sustained aggression, violence, and warfare. This protection must be comprehensive, practical, and resolute, including establishing comprehensive social, economic, and political support systems to secure just and lasting peace in the region.

Furthermore, this research will stimulate debate and discourse among policymakers, scholars, and non-governmental organizations on the paramount challenges of achieving sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa globally.

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