Sustainable Development Strategies in Post-Conflict Economies

Zephaniah Osuyi Edo, Frank Adogbeji Enakemu & Amanda Olowoniyi Funke

Abstract

Post-conflict economies face significant obstacles to sustainable development. Some of these challenges include political instability, social fragmentation, economic volatility, and environmental degradation. The impact of conflict not only devastates infrastructure but also erodes social capital and human resources, creating enduring obstacles to peace and development. Leveraging on sustainable development strategies designed to tackle challenges faced by economies recovering from conflict and on the postulations of the Resilience Theory and the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, this study examines case studies with a view to identifying successful solutions that have helped regions recover and thrive after conflicts. The work found out that, fortification of institutions, encouragement of social cohesiveness, diversification of the economy, and the restoration of the environment are usually top priorities geared at ensuring sustainable development in post-conflict regions and that inclusive and flexible development policies are usually a must for the success of any sustainable development initiative. Consequently, the study recommends that to restore and maintain economies emerging from conflict, integrated social, economic, and environmental initiatives should be embraced.

Keywords Post-conflict economies, Sustainable development, Resilience theory, Sustainable livelihoods approach

Introduction

Post conflict economies are faced with the prodigious task of restoring social cohesion, reconstructing their economies and promoting sustainable development. The overwhelming outcomes of war leave with it an extensive destruction of infrastructure, displacement of people, and loss of human lives. Attempts at rebuilding communities after conflict often concentrate on physical reconstruction and transitory public assistance, rather than an enduring sustainable development. Nonetheless, sustainable development is crucial to guaranteeing that post-conflict nations can discontinue the series of violence and deprivation.

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Adopting the appropriate sustainable development strategy is necessary in rebuilding infrastructure and social amenities, promoting social cohesion through dialogue and settlement efforts, stimulating economic growth and decreasing poverty in post-conflict nations.

This study examines the sustainable development strategies utilized in the post-conflict nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Although each of these nations has been confronted with major development challenges after their conflict, yet they have made remarkable advancement in encouraging sustainable development.

While Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Bosnia post-conflict reconstruction endeavours have been tailored towards supporting economic growth, decreasing poverty, and enhancing social cohesion. Rwanda has utilised the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) and Vision 2020. Sierra Leone on the other hand has adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and Agenda for Prosperity strategy, while Bosnia and Herzegovina utilised the Reform Agenda and Socio-Economic Development Strategy (European Commission, 2019; World Bank, 2011 & UNDP,2013).

Global development efforts face a distinct obstacle in post-conflict economies. This is so because as these economies rise from the ashes of violent conflict, they encounter several challenges that impede immediate prosperity for them. In addition to inflicting profound wounds on social fabric and human capital, the physical scars left on infrastructure and institutions by battle are immense. Stiglitz (2018) argues that in addition to the obvious devastation, conflicts have far-reaching consequences for economic growth, stability, and poverty alleviation. Consequently, there is the need to understand specific difficulties post-conflict economies have with the view of proposing workable solutions that are effective and efficient in producing sustainable development in post-conflict economies, particularly in the area of economy and environment.

Thus, the following questions becomes pertinent; what are the environmental, social, economic, and political encounters faced by national economies in the aftermath of conflicts? What approaches and guidelines would foster sustainable growth and development in post-conflict nations? Which of the post-conflict rebuilding initiatives are most efficient in the selected study areas?

Literature Review

According to the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). The United Nations Development Program (2018), aver that the concept of sustainable development in the context of post-conflict societies is encapsulated in the protection of the environment, social inclusiveness, economic growth and peace building among others as recovery from conflict extend beyond physical rebuilding (UNDP, 2018). It involves social reforms, reconciliation, and the construction of new institutions (Burgess & Fonseca, 2020; Barakat, 2021).

Post-Conflict Contexts and Challenges

A large number of societies emerging from the throes of armed conflict tend to have a host of complex problems in the post-conflict period that make transition into sustainable development quite challenging. Reconstructive and recovery operations are faced with different challenges on various fronts: political, social, economic, and even environmental (Sovacool et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2028). Indeed, a strategy for promoting sustainable development in post-conflict economies can be devised only after fully understanding the backdrop and nature of such challenges.

Political and Social Landscape

Social and political instability, fragility, and breakdown of governance institutions are often

the hallmark features prevalent in societies that have just gone through a conflict. Peace building and reconciliation efforts is a daunting task on account of the general distrust, long-encrusted grudges, and broken social ties that come with conflict (Touray, 2023). In a situation where armed groups and competitive factions emerge, the political tension increases and inhibits lesser chances of establishing inclusive and effective administrative systems. According to Jewett et al, (2021), problems of legitimacy and the breakdown of state institutions weaken the rule of law, which in turn exacerbates the violent cycle and diminishes the likelihood of sustainable development projects (Manyena et al. 2015).

Economic Conditions

Conflict results in widespread devastation, pauperization, and stagnation of economic growth, which has profound and lasting impact on the economy. Armed conflict results in acute humanitarian crises and long-term socio-economic dislocation since it disrupts productive activity, destroys infrastructure that is crucial, and displaces populations (Touray, 2023). Massive funding and concerted efforts geared at addressing systemic inequality, promote inclusive growth, and build sturdy economic institutions are needed for war torn countries' recovery (Roy, 2018). However, Hairam et al., (2023) avers that the presence of illicit economies, such as the drug trade or illegal resource extraction, further complicates economic recovery and fuels conflict dynamics, perpetuating instability and hindering sustainable development.

Environmental Degradation

Although essential to sustainable development programs, environmental dimensions of post-conflict transition often get overlooked. Ecological degradation, deforestation, and pollution from conflicts leave populations more prone to disasters and less capable of recovering from them (Barakat, 2021). Where fighting groups depend upon natural resource exploitation to finance the conflict, the consequences of ecological degradation and resource depletion are magnified (Asirvatham, 2024). The unified approach which considers restoration of the environment, management of natural resources, and conflict-sensitive programming will hopefully address environmental concerns, promote sustainable lifestyles, and prevent environmental hazards in post-conflict situations (United Nations Environment Programme, 2013).

The post-conflict situation and challenges in societies that have emerged from prolonged violence are complex and interlinked. Such formidable challenges to sustainable development as political unrest, economic collapse, and environmental deterioration require holistic and situation-appropriate responses. Addressing the root causes of violence, promoting inclusive governance, and enhancing resilience are some of the ways to achieve sustained peace and prosperity in post-conflict communities.

Empirically, there are studies that have shown how sustainable development strategies can advance adaptability and cohesion in post conflict environment. For instance, Roy (2018) in a study on the financial causes of civil wars contends that addressing economic injustice and inequitable distribution of resources forms part of the core activities in the rebuilding process. Conversely, Touray (2023), using an analysis of data from 1960 to 1999 revealed that countries with heavy dependence on the exportation of natural resources were more prone to civil conflicts, as natural resource availability and frequency of conflict go hand in glove. The finding affirms that sustainable development strategies for post-conflict states should be directed toward economic diversification away from natural resource exports.

Besley and Persson (2011) attempts to explain the role of institutions in post-war reconstruction. They found that the rule of law and the quality of governance structures of an institution determine the likelihood of achieving sustainable development. A country with strong institutions is more capable of implementing development programs that are sustainable, along with overcoming the many barriers that come up after a conflict. These

considerations show that rebuilding institutions is one of the key strategies for sustained development in post-conflict countries.

Similarly, Muggah and Krause (2019) in an empirical study on urban insecurity and violence in conflict-affected cities identified the interconnectedness of political instability, economic deprivation, and social exclusion in perpetuating urban violence by drawing on data from various cities such as Mogadishu, Kabul, and Baghdad. The results highlighted the multifaceted approach toward the view of sustainable development, considering the social and political dimensions, in addition to the economic and environmental ones.

World Bank (2018) examined how environmental degradation impacted recovery processes in the aftermath of a conflict. The study revealed that environmental degradation in the forms of water shortage, land degradation, and deforestation may exacerbate conflict processes. Thus, the study concluded that sustainable management of resources and environmental rehabilitation are integral components of recovery plans subsequent to a conflict.

Macid, Mursal, and Zaki (2023) in an empirical study on post conflict recovery strategies in Azerbaijani economy assert that post conflict economies can become the growth epicenter in the economic development of a nation. The study revealed that the "Smart villages" technique can add to sustainable development of post conflict region along with ensuring modernised agriculture, food security and agro-industrial factories. Macid et al., further argues that the implementation plans for restoration of economic and infrastructure is crucial in successful rebuilding of post conflict economies.

According to the (ILO) International Labour Organisation (2010) in post conflict situation employment is a key contributing factor to achieving short term stability, enduring peace, socio-economic advancement and reintegration. This is because having a source of livelihood provides people with the means of recovery and survival, a better option than social conflict. The absence of these further endemic poverty, increases vulnerabilities and is a major threat to peace efforts and the coping tactics adopted. Furthermore, the ILO aver that while international efforts play great role in post conflict economic recovery, the strategies of the Local Economic Recovery (LER) team is invaluable, particularly when it is streamlined within the gender context of the society. However, the ILO ignores the fact that the concept of gender varies globally.

Subačienė, Krutova, and Nesterenko, (2023) in a study on the' Determinants of sustainable development in the post-war recovery of Ukraine' argue that the enactment of modern practices of interaction between the nation, business and society should be adopted.

Similarly, Labaran, Muhammed, and Shehu (2023) highlights the critical need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to promote both political stability and financial development, which are fundamental to sustainable development. The findings of this study suggest that the restoration of political stability and economic growth is essential to achieving sustainable development in the aftermath of conflict. Nevertheless, the connection of these variables highlights the need for a complex and tailored approach.

Conversely, Manpaa, Liberty, & Abdullahi (2023) in a study on post-conflict societies in North-East Nigeria aver that drawing up a strategy for development of post conflict economic societies is an essential and calculated stage of recuperating from the conflict and a basic step in analysing the economic, physical and social devastations of the conflict. However, this is dependent on the cooperation of all actors involved in the development process.

Collectively, these empirical studies reveal the complexity of sustainable development in war-recovering economies. They stress that effective development interventions in nations post-conflict have to incorporate political, economic, social, and environmental concerns. On the other hand, having empirical evidence enables decision-

makers to make informed decisions and adjust their response to varied situations.

Theoretical Framework
Resilience Theory
The Resilience theory is attributed to Norman Germezy (1992), it elucidates the complexity that influence a community or a people's response to an adversity. The theory holds that facing an adversity is not as important as how one deals with the adversity. In line with this work, a nation's experience of conflict is not as pertinent as how it deals with the conflict in the interest of sustainable development. Expatiating on this theory, Béné et al. (2012) emphasises the capacities of adaptiveness, social capital, and institutional robustness in successfully navigating the complexity of post-conflict reconstruction. It goes further to state that a society that has lived through a conflict is much better off to resist shocks and rebound from disturbances for sustainable development (Manyena et al., 2015; Asirvatham, 2024). However, resilience theory ignores the cultural variations in resilience strategies and overlooks systemic and power disparities that impact resilience (World Bank, 2018).

Sustainable Livelihood Approach
The Sustainable Livelihood Approach examine the livelihood of people in a community to draw up strategies for disaster risk and poverty reduction (Carney,1998). This approach highlights the interlinked and impactful nature of economic, social, and environmental factors on post-conflict resilience and livelihood opportunities. The three principles of this approach are ecological sustainability, social cohesiveness, and economic recovery (Jewett, et al., 2021; Hariram et al. 2023). However, this approach suffers from over simplification and does not fully unravel the environmental sustainability of livelihood (Carney, 1998).

Case Studies
Case Study 1: Rwanda
Following the genocide in 1994, Rwanda presents a very good case study of post-conflict healing and sustainable development. The country was socially, politically, and economically decimated after the 800,000 lives that were lost in the genocide (Reyntjens, 2018). Strengthening social bonds and fostering reconciliation have formed vital parts of the recovery process in Rwanda. The initiation of development programmes by the administration in the state has been one of the ways the administration in the state has managed to steer the nation towards sustainable development path. For instance, the Gacaca Courts were established with the objective of truth-telling, justice, and healing at the community level (Ingelaere, 2018). Several indicators of human development show improvement due to Rwanda's investment in health and education (UNDP, 2021).

The Rwandan government has given priority to economic diversification and growth in strategic areas, including agriculture, technology, and tourism. The government's long-term development goals, as outlined in Vision 2020 and Vision 2050, include poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth (Republic of Rwanda, 2020). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global development programs have provided financial and in-kind supports to Rwanda's efforts.

Case Study 2: Sierra Leone
Sierra Leone experience from 1991 to 2002, offers yet another example of how nations strategically pursue sustainable development at having experienced national or regional conflict. From 1991 to 2002, Sierra Leone was engulfed in a terrible civil conflict that brought about immense economic damage, human rights abuses, and extensive brutality (Richards, 2016).
After the war, Sierra Leone started rebuilding by focusing on restoring institutions,

consolidating the country, and developing the economy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to address past atrocities and promote healing and reconciliation (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2004). However, progress has been hampered by challenges such as corruption, poor governance, and infrastructure limitations (Menzel, 2020).

Diamond mining in particular has been a development engine for the economy of Sierra Leone. According to (Le Billion 2015), the natural wealth has been distributed unfairly; there has also been a lack of transparency concerning the unfair distribution. Economic diversification and sustainable development initiatives have faced retrogression due to chronic poverty and inequality. (World Bank, 2020).

Case Study 3: Bosnia and Herzegovina

The rebuilding of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war it experienced is a perfect example of how hard it will be to achieve sustainable development within a fractured country. During the Bosnian War in the 1990s, there was huge population relocation, devastation of infrastructure, and ethnic cleansing (Bougarel et al., 2019). Since the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina has come a long way in repairing its institutions and reestablishing stability. However, ingrained ethnic rivalries and poor government have blocked reconciliation and long-term prosperity (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2017).

The economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina is suffering from high unemployment, corruption, and dependence on foreign aid. Ongoing impediments to investment and growth have thus far thwarted this country's transition to a market economy (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Efforts to promote sustainable development have been hindered by political gridlock and a lack of consensus on key reforms (European Union, 2021).

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Institutional Rebuilding

Reconstructing institutions is paramount for the attainment of stability and provision of a foundation for sustainable growth in countries that have experienced violence (World Bank, 2018). One of the most important lessons learned is the importance of designing and implementing institutional reforms through inclusive and participatory processes (Brinkerhoff, 2011). The situation in Rwanda remain a valid example on how a nation can strategically steer itself back on the path of sustainable development after ethnic-fueled crises. The country's concentration on decentralization and community participation in decision-making in order to ensure local ownership of development projects and rebuild confidence in Rwanda has been very effective not just in birthing development, but in sustaining it (Asirvatham, 2024).

Economic Policies and Programs

Building post conflict economies often require the initiation of conducive economic policies and programs that help revitalize post-conflict economies and contribute toward sustainable development (Makdisi & Soto, 2023). It is prudent to ensure diversity and innovation to minimize exposure to volatile industries such as agriculture and natural resources (Johnson, 2023). Sierra Leone has been a good example of the government in developing countries taking serious steps to increase economic growth and enhance employment opportunities by attracting international investment into industries such as tourism and telecommunications (UNDP, 2019).

Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Reconciliations of trust and peace in post-conflict cultures involve the encouragement of social cohesion and participation. According to Nititunga (2023), one of the important

lessons learned was addressing inequality and discrimination—a root cause of social unrest (Fiedler & Rohles, 2021). Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been done around the interethnic dialogue and reconciliation; however, there are still a lot of obstacles to be overcome if the country hopes to resolve long-standing ethnic differences that continue to bedevil the sustainable development efforts of the country (UNDP, 2020).

Environmental Restoration and Management

Development in post-conflict settings can never be accomplished without first restoring and subsequently managing the environment. According to UNEP (2021), it is recommended that environmental concerns be integrated into broader development planning processes (Makdisi & Soto, 2023). In post-conflict Liberia, for example, the government has been working with international partners to develop policies and programs for reforestation and sustainable land management that have contributed simultaneously toward environmental and socio-economic goals (UNEP, 2018).

Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted for this study, given that the focus is on qualitative data. Qualitative research is best suited for studies involving complex social phenomena and nuances of various stakeholders' perceptions. The data sources were pre-selected based on the reliability and applicability to the research. Academic papers, government publications, international organization reports, and other related documents were used.

Analysis of Findings

The findings from various case studies and empirical research that were analyzed show useful insights into strategies and challenges of sustainable development in post-conflict economies. This section presents some key findings and discusses implications for policy and practice. One key observation is the crucial support for the rebuilding of institutions in post-conflict contexts, as addressed and used in the case of Rwanda to achieve good governance and to build institutional capacity for an enabling environment towards sustainable development (Smith, 2018). In addition, setting up transparent and accountable institutions promotes trust among citizens, which attracts investment and allows for economic growth. According to Jones (2016), rebuilding institutions requires time and even prolonged international support to ensure that stability will prevail (Lund, 2019).

Another important area is economic policy and programs. The experience of Sierra Leone shows that the diversification of the economy and investments in infrastructure create conditions for economic growth and job creation (Kaplan, 2017). Most sustainable development strategies in these contexts focus on agriculture, tourism, and renewable energy as ways to tap into the local resources for a more inclusive growth (Sachs 2015). Additionally, focused interventions related to microfinance initiatives and vocational training programs have also been successful in empowering marginalized communities to become entrepreneurial (UNDP, 2020).

Social cohesion and inclusion are important parts of sustainable development for post-conflict societies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, efforts toward reconciliation and coming to terms with the war have been at the heart of the recovery process of this country (Bieber, 2018). According to Roig (2019), a resilient community is one that consciously strives for openness, truthfulness, and fairness even in the face of challenges. In fact, uniting people from various ethnic groups is hard for any community to do, much more when hate and hostility dominate the scenes (Paffenholz, 2017).

The reinstatement of environmental regulations after a conflict is paramount. In fact, sustainable development in the aftermath of conflict is very difficult due to the aftereffects of pollution, deforestation, and land degradation that characterized the conflict (Bromley, 2016). Conca and Wallace (2019) raise these and other issues that call for an integrated approach of peacebuilding with natural resource management. It is possible to reduce environmental damage and contribute to economic recovery and resilience through locally adapted land-use planning, reforestation efforts, and renewable energy (UNEP, 2018).

Finally, the research findings reveal that political, economic, social, and environmental factors often interact in a complex way during post-conflict economic recovery. According to Pinker (2020), policies for sustainable development should be sensitive to the context so that long-term resilience and stability are promoted and the causes of conflicts tackled at their very source. By taking stock of what has worked and what hasn't, policymakers and practitioners can help communities hard hit by conflicts build resilience for the future.

Conclusion

A study on sustainable development techniques in post-conflict economies shows that the setting creates complex problems to be resolved in several ways. The economies of such countries have been adversely affected due to political turmoil, social breakdown, and economic disturbance among others which result in the breakdown of social cohesion and degradation of the environment. These notwithstanding, rebuilding of institutions is a necessity for achieving sustainable development in post-conflict contexts. Well-established institutions and good governance allow for stability, promotion of the rule of law, and facilitation of economic growth. As highlighted by Hariram et al. (2023), Institutions are crucial to the setting of norms, protection of property rights, and the promotion of responsibility, making sustainable development possible. According to UNDP (2019), for development initiatives to become culturally sensitive and sustainable, they must be nationally owned and their decision-making processes must be inclusive.

But, of course, without economic policies and programs, no sustainable development is possible, and repair of damaged economies is unimaginable. High unemployment, disruption of supply chains, and collapse of infrastructure are common economic legacies from post conflict economies. Hence, to get the economy going again and make people's lives more secure, we need targeted interventions in infrastructure investments, job creation initiatives, and assistance to small and medium businesses. Proactive government initiatives, when assisted by international aid, can have impressive poverty reduction along with the revival of the economy, as witnessed in Rwanda (World Bank, 2018).

Social cohesion and inclusiveness are needed when building resilient communities in post-conflict situations. Healing current societal wounds, encouraging mutual understanding, and strengthening social bonds are indispensable for reaching long-term stability and prosperity. The experience of Sierra Leone teaches that the way to mend or restore the divisions and the lost trust in society could be facilitated by inclusive government systems, truth and reconciliation processes, and community discussion (Roy, 2018; UNEP, 2018).

Sustainable development in post-conflict economies is complex and demanding; thus, it requires coordinated, well-rounded strategies. Building resilient societies – a battle against war and a conquest for perpetual peace, prosperity, and progress – implies not only looking for the root causes of conflict and advocating for inclusive development but also safeguarding the environment. The recovery of conflict-ridden economy requires strong

international cooperation and alliances that allow sustainable development.

Recommendations
1. In their efforts at restoring, post-conflict economies, governments should embrace integrated social, economic and environmental initiatives.
2. Conflict and political stakeholders, should employ multiplicity of approaches in their efforts at fostering sustainable growth and development in post-conflict nations.
3. Effective post-conflict rebuilding initiatives that cater for the wellbeing of all parties involved as opposed to ineffective initiatives that promotes sectorial empowerments should be used in rebuilding post-conflict economies.
4. The international community should develop more effective and impactful development initiatives in post-conflict situations by utilizing the knowledge and resources of governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions.

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