

Retrofitting the Grassroots at the Frontlines: Strengthening Community-Based Organisations for Peace and Security across Fragile African Contexts – Examples from Eastern, Western and Southern Africa

Original Research Article | Volume 1 | Issue 4 | 2026 | Article Number: 019

Accepted: 22 August 2026 | Published: 10 September 2026 | ISSN: 2979-8582 (Online)



Crossref : <https://doi.org/10.67693/BJCR-E8VGJB5A>



Dr Awuor PONGE¹, Dr Christine AGAYA²

¹Senior Associate Research Fellow, African Policy Centre (APC), Nairobi, Kenya; and Adjunct Faculty, Development and Policy Studies, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science & Technology (JOUST), Bondo, Kenya,

²Adjunct Faculty, Development and Policy Studies, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science & Technology (JOUST), Bondo, Kenya

 **DAP** [0000-0002-6656-1818](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6656-1818), **DCA** [0009-0008-5747-8319](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5747-8319)

Correspondence: Dr Awuor PONGE, awuorponge@gmail.com

Abstract

Community-based organisations (CBOs) constitute Africa's most credible yet chronically under-resourced frontline peace infrastructure. This paper examines how CBOs can be systematically retooled to address new and emerging conflict forms, including jihadist insurgency, pastoral resource violence, urban insecurity, and state collapse, across five fragile African contexts: Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and South Africa. Employing a qualitative comparative case study design guided by hybrid peacebuilding theory and the concept of localised peace infrastructure, the study draws on peer-reviewed scholarship, institutional policy reports, and community-level narratives to assess CBO capacity, identify retooling needs, and generate actionable recommendations. Cross-case analysis reveals five recurring enablers of effective peacebuilding – community-rooted legitimacy, adaptive capacity, gender inclusion, hybrid partnership architectures, and indigenous leadership – alongside three critical operational gaps: absent psychosocial support for practitioners, fragmented early warning systems, and chronically short-term funding cycles. The paper advances the local turn literature by providing the first systematic cross-typology comparison of CBO effectiveness within the African context, developing the "capacity paradox" as a theoretically generative framework, and centring African epistemic voices as constitutive of peacebuilding theory. Recommendations target African governments, donors and continental VOPEs, calling for structural transformation of the systems surrounding CBOs rather than incremental programmatic adjustment.

Keywords: Community-Based Organisations, Peacebuilding, Retooling, Fragile States, Hybrid Peace, Africa, Local Turn, Gender Inclusion, Conflict Transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose and Rationale

The "local turn" in peacebuilding scholarship has progressively repositioned community-based organisations as foundational rather than peripheral to peace and security (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Lederach's (1997) landmark framework established that sustainable reconciliation requires multilevel engagement, with grassroots actors uniquely positioned to translate political agreements into lived social change. Mac Ginty (2011) extended this logic through "hybrid peace," arguing that durable peace emerges from the interaction of international frameworks with local agencies – not from the former displacing the latter. Autesserre (2014) demonstrated empirically that international peacebuilding consistently underperforms precisely where it sidelines local knowledge, contextual legitimacy, and community ownership. Across Africa's most fragile contexts, CBOs possess what formal security institutions structurally cannot: proximity, trust, relational networks, and cultural intelligence (Donais, 2012). This body of scholarship collectively establishes the rationale for treating CBOs not as auxiliaries of formal peace architecture but as its indispensable foundation.

2. Problem Statement

Despite their centrality, the literature consistently documents a deepening mismatch between CBO capacity and the evolving complexity of conflict. Paris (2004) cautioned that externally imposed liberal templates destabilise fragile settings; yet even community-owned responses face severe limitations when conflict mutates beyond their design parameters. In Kenya's northern pastoral zones, CBOs encounter resource-driven violence compounded by arms proliferation and political instrumentalisation (Mkutu, 2008; Schilling, Opiyo & Scheffran, 2012). In northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram's insurgency has shattered community cohesion beyond the mediation capacity of traditional peace committees, with improvised responses through the Civilian Joint Task Force generating troubling accountability consequences (Agbibo, 2018; Onuoha, 2014). In Somalia, state collapse has produced clan-based governance arrangements that substitute for rather than complement formal institutions (Menkhous, 2007). South Sudan's civil war has corroded the inter-communal trust on which local peacebuilders depend (Jok, 2017), while South Africa's Community Police Forums remain under-resourced and institutionally mistrusted (Steinberg, 2008). Across all five contexts, CBOs were designed for a different conflict era and have not been systematically retooled for the insurgent, extremist, resource-driven, and urban security challenges that now define Africa's frontlines.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

The literature identifies promising but underdeveloped directions for retooling. De Coning (2018) advocates adaptive peacebuilding responsive to local complexity, but empirical application at the CBO level remains thin. Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) note that "local ownership" is frequently rhetorical, masking externally driven agendas that weaken community actors. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011) frame effective conflict resolution as requiring multi-track engagement, yet the architecture for linking CBOs into these tracks across Africa's fragile states is largely absent.

The critical research questions this paper pursues are: What is the current capacity landscape of CBOs engaged in peace and security work across these five contexts? What specific retooling – in skills, tools, networks, and enabling environments – would enhance their effectiveness? And how can state, donor, and civil society intermediaries restructure their support accordingly?

4. Significance

The policy and practice implications of this inquiry are substantial. Campbell (2018) demonstrates that donor accountability structures are calibrated to global targets rather than local change, systematically distorting grassroots priorities. Autesserre (2021) reinforces that without structural shifts in how international actors fund and engage communities, the gap between peacebuilding rhetoric and reality will persist. The African Union's post-conflict reconstruction frameworks remain aspirationally committed to community participation but lack operational guidance for building CBO capacity at scale. For policymakers, this paper offers evidence for redirecting investment toward community resilience infrastructure. For peace practitioners, it provides a comparative lens through which adaptive programme design can be informed by lessons across Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and South Africa. For grassroots communities themselves – women mediators, youth networks, and inter-faith facilitators – it offers analytical validation that their work is not supplementary to peace. It is its architecture.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Key Concepts

Four foundational concepts structure this paper's analytical architecture. Retooling is defined as the deliberate, structured process through which CBOs acquire, adapt, or expand the capacities – technical, relational, institutional, and adaptive – necessary to engage effectively with new and evolving forms of conflict. It is explicitly distinguished from conventional capacity-building: not merely training delivery but a systemic redesign of how organisations learn, respond, and sustain themselves within dynamic conflict environments (de Coning, 2018; Campbell, 2018).

Community-based organisations are understood as formally or informally constituted civil society bodies rooted in and deriving their primary mandate from specific geographic or identity-defined communities. In the African fragile contexts examined here, CBOs encompass women's peace committees, inter-clan dialogue forums, faith-based mediation bodies, youth networks, and community policing structures. What distinguishes them analytically from NGOs or state agencies is their organic legitimacy – authority derived from community membership rather than external mandate (Paffenholz, 2010; Donais, 2012).

Fragile contexts are characterised by weak, absent, or predatory state institutions; contested political authority; and populations exposed to chronic or acute insecurity (OECD, 2022). Fragility is understood not as a static condition but as a spectrum encompassing varying combinations of state capacity deficits and conflict drivers, which is why the five cases exhibit distinct fragility profiles demanding context-sensitive analysis.

Peace and security are understood in the broad, positive sense encompassing not merely the absence of physical violence but the presence of legitimate governance, restorative justice, social cohesion, and the conditions enabling communities to manage conflict non-violently over time (Ramsbotham et al., 2011; Lederach, 1997).

2. Existing Theories of Peacebuilding

Four theoretical traditions inform this study's analytical framework. **Local peacebuilding theory**, anchored in Lederach's (1997) pyramid model and extended through the local turn in peacebuilding scholarship (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013), establishes that durable peace must be built from the inside out – through culturally embedded relationships, indigenous leadership, and community-owned processes. **Resilience theory posits** that communities possess inherent adaptive capacities that can be strengthened to absorb and transform conflict (Chandler, 2013; Van Metre, 2016), directing attention to the endogenous resources organisations draw upon when external support is absent.

Social capital theory, drawing on Putnam (2000) and applied to conflict settings by Colletta and Cullen

(2000), explains CBO success or failure through bonding capital – trust within groups enabling internal mobilisation – and bridging capital – trust across groups essential for cross-communal peace work, exemplified by the Wajir women's multi-clan marriage ties.

Feminist peace perspectives (Enloe, 2014; Matfess, 2017; Gbowee & Mithers, 2011) challenge the gender-blindness of mainstream peacebuilding theory, demonstrating that women's exclusion from formal peace processes is structural rather than incidental, and that women-led organisations produce more durable outcomes precisely because structural marginality generates cross-community brokerage capacity unavailable to gender-exclusive bodies.

3. CBO Retooling Conceptual Framework

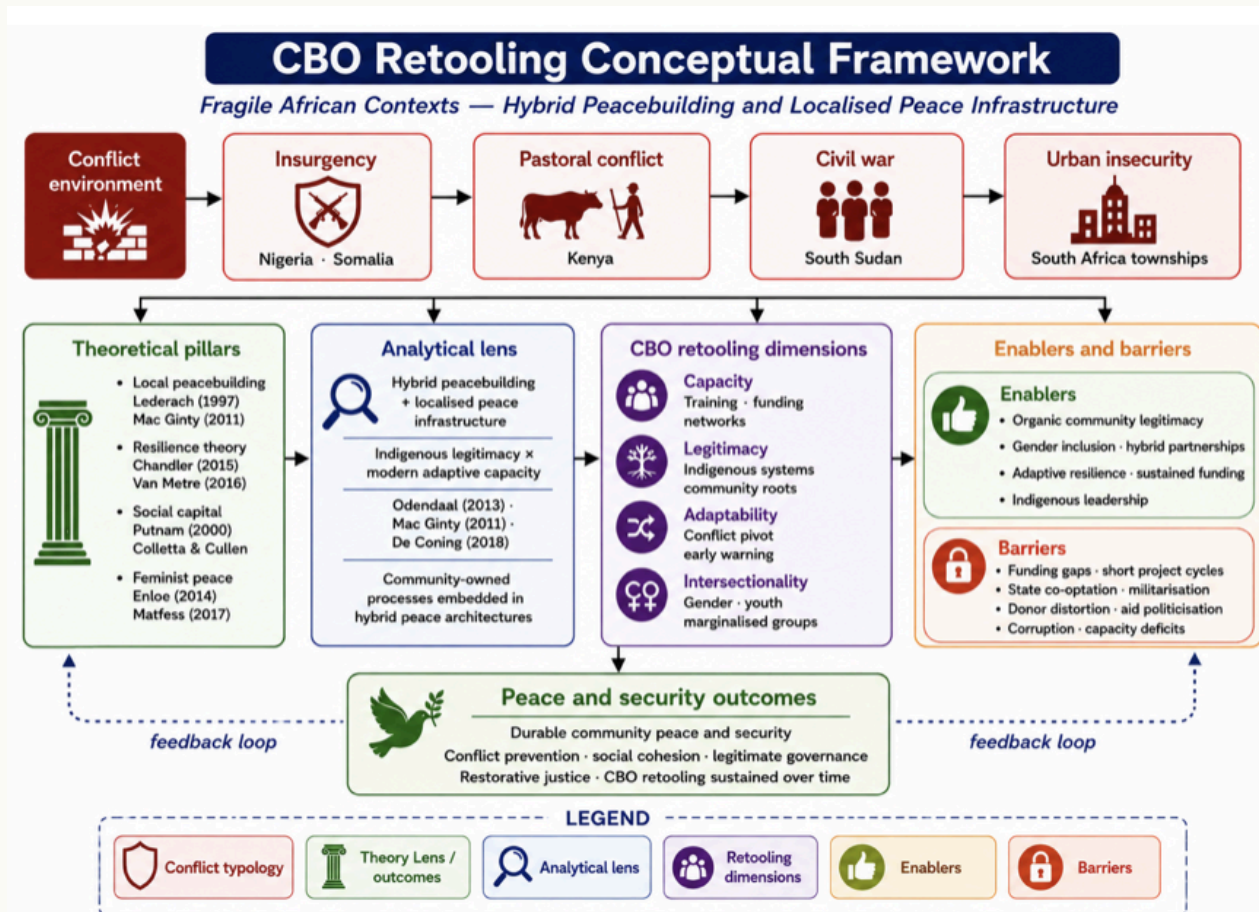


Figure 1: CBO Retooling Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 traces retooling as an iterative pathway rather than a one-off intervention. It begins with the conflict environment, disaggregated into the study's five typologies – insurgency (Nigeria, Somalia), pastoral conflict (Kenya), civil war (South Sudan), and urban insecurity (South Africa) – each of which places distinct demands on frontline CBOs. These typologies feed simultaneously into the paper's theoretical pillars (local peacebuilding theory, resilience theory, social capital theory, and feminist peace perspectives) and its analytical lens combining hybrid peacebuilding with localised peace infrastructure. Both strands converge on four retooling dimensions that constitute what CBOs must acquire or strengthen: capacity (training, funding, and networks), legitimacy (indigenous systems and community roots), adaptability (pivoting to new conflict forms and early warning), and intersectionality (gender, youth, and marginalised groups). Running alongside these dimensions, the framework maps the enablers that accelerate retooling – organic community legitimacy, gender inclusion, hybrid partnerships, adaptive resilience, and indigenous leadership – against the barriers that obstruct it – funding gaps, state co-optation, militarisation, donor distortion, aid politicisation, corruption, and capacity deficits.

co-optation, donor distortion, and corruption. The model resolves into durable peace and security outcomes, which then feed back into the conflict environment through the dashed loop at the base of the diagram: retooling is thus depicted not as linear but as a continuously renewed cycle in which sustained outcomes reinforce the theoretical pillars and analytical lens informing the next round of capacity-strengthening.

4. Analytical Lens – Localised Peace Infrastructure and Hybrid Peacebuilding

This paper adopts an integrative analytical lens combining Odendaal's (2013) concept of localised peace infrastructure with Mac Ginty's (2011) hybrid peacebuilding framework. Localised peace infrastructure refers to the networks of formal and informal institutions, relationships, norms, and practices through which communities prevent, manage, and resolve conflict at the grassroots level – independent of but potentially complementary to state and international systems. This concept foregrounds the structural, enduring character of community peace capacity rather than treating CBOs as discrete project-implementing entities.

Hybrid peacebuilding theory recognises that effective peace emerges not from purely indigenous or purely externally designed processes but from their negotiated interaction. The Wunlit Peace Conference, which fused Dinka-Nuer cattle sacrifice with Christian covenant-making, and the Wajir WPDC, which embedded customary Xeer mediation within a formal NGO structure, both exemplify this hybridity.

Together, these frameworks justify a retooling agenda that strengthens local peace infrastructure through a hybrid model in which community legitimacy and modern capacity amplify rather than displace each other (de Coning, 2018; Lederach, 2005).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic review of African peacebuilding research affirms that community-based organisations (CBOs) are central to sustainable peace, with scholars from Lederach to Autesserre demonstrating that top-down liberal approaches consistently fail when they ignore local dynamics. Frameworks such as hybrid peace and adaptive peacebuilding – now embedded in UN and OECD policy – validate grassroots actors, evidenced by landmark contributions from South Africa's TRC, Rwanda's Gacaca courts, Liberia's women's peace movement, and Kenya's Wajir Committee. Yet six critical gaps persist: absent cross-typology CBO comparisons, chronically low localisation funding, no systematic violent extremism retooling frameworks, negligible community-driven development impact, climate-fragility blind spots, and enduring Eurocentric epistemic bias.

1. Global Debates – The Role of CBOs in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Internationally

The theoretical foundation of community-based peacebuilding challenges the state-centric liberal peace paradigm that dominated post-Cold War interventionism. Paris (2004) demonstrated that rapid democratisation and marketisation frequently destabilised fragile post-conflict societies, marginalising grassroots actors. This catalysed what Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) termed the "local turn" – centring local agency and institutions as constitutive of sustainable peace. Lederach's (1997) pyramid model established a multi-level peacebuilding infrastructure requiring empowerment from within affected societies, later arguing that genuine local participation remains contemporary peacebuilding's most significant weakness (Lederach, 2005).

Mac Ginty (2011) theorised hybrid peace as negotiation between international prescriptions and local adaptive responses, while Richmond (2011) demonstrated that affected populations actively transform interventions rather than passively absorbing them. Donais (2012) exposed how international actors instrumentalise local ownership rhetoric while retaining substantive control. Autesserre's ethnographic

research revealed how international peacebuilding culture overlooked local conflict dynamics in the Congo (Autesserre, 2010) and created a "Peaceland" disconnected from community realities (Autesserre, 2014).

The UN's Sustaining Peace resolutions affirmed inclusive civil society engagement (United Nations General Assembly, 2016; United Nations Security Council, 2016), while SDG 16 implicitly legitimises CBO engagement (United Nations, 2015). Nevertheless, the OECD (2011) and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2011) have not translated normative commitments into meaningful CBO empowerment.

2. African Contextual Evidence – Previous Success Cases and Challenges

African conflict landscapes provide compelling evidence of CBO contributions to peace while simultaneously exposing structural constraints limiting their transformative potential, spanning transitional justice, faith-based mediation, customary governance, and women's mobilisation.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) remains the continent's most prominent experiment in community-engaged transitional justice. Rooted in Ubuntu, the TRC pursued restorative reconciliation through collective truth-telling (Tutu, 1999). However, Wilson's (2001) ethnographic research revealed its religious-redemptive model resonated unevenly at community level, where popular conceptions of justice diverged from institutional narratives – underscoring the need for CBO-mediated translation between institutional processes and grassroots realities.

Faith-based organisations have functioned as critical peace infrastructure across multiple conflicts. Sant'Egidio's mediation of the 1992 Mozambican General Peace Accords demonstrated how a non-state religious body could broker settlement where formal diplomacy had stalled (Bartoli, 1999), while Nigeria's Interfaith Mediation Centre illustrates the unique convening authority faith-based CBOs command in religiously plural societies (Hayward, 2012).

Customary mechanisms represent the deepest reservoir of community peacebuilding capacity. Kenya's Wajir Peace and Development Committee mobilised clan elders, religious leaders, and government officials into collaborative structures (Ibrahim Abdi & Mason, 2019). Rwanda's Gacaca courts processed nearly two million genocide cases through community tribunals, despite criticisms regarding procedural safeguards and re-traumatisation risks (Clark, 2010). In South Sudan, the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference united Dinka and Nuer communities through people-to-people dialogue grounded in traditional reconciliation practices (Ryle et al., 2021). Women's peace movements have proven equally transformative: Leymah Gbowee's Women in Peacebuilding Network mobilised Christian and Muslim women in nonviolent action that contributed directly to ending Liberia's fourteen-year civil war (Gbowee, 2011).

Despite these achievements, CBOs operate under severe structural constraints. Externally imposed frameworks consistently misread African conflict dynamics (Nhema & Zeleza, 2008), while resource governance failures entrench adverse operating conditions (Alao, 2007). Donor dependency distorts accountability, orienting CBOs upward toward funders rather than constituent communities (Richmond, 2012), while capacity gaps limit sustainability beyond project cycles (Aning, 2007).

3. Critical Gaps where Current Research Underestimates CBO Capacities and Retooling needs

Despite a growing body of literature on local peacebuilding, six significant analytical gaps collectively justify this study's three research objectives: assessing CBO capacity, identifying retooling needs, and generating actionable recommendations.

First, comparative analysis across conflict typologies remains absent. Paffenholz (2010) applied her

seven-function civil society framework primarily to post-war settings, while Leonardsson and Rudd (2015) confirm that local turn literature is dominated by single-case studies with no systematic cross-typology comparison. Second, the intersection of community-based peacebuilding and violent extremism remains severely under-researched. Van Metre (2016) documents community resilience factors against Al-Shabaab recruitment in Kenya, while Olojo and Donnelly (2021) show that prevention of violent extremism programming remains dominated by militarised state approaches.

Third, African scholarly voices remain structurally underrepresented. Sabaratnam (2013) demonstrates that even critical scholarship reproduces Eurocentric assumptions, while Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) traces this to colonial legacies marginalising African theorisation. Fourth, despite commitments to channel 25% of humanitarian funding to local actors, direct funding declined to just 2.1% by 2020 (OECD, 2022) – a structural asymmetry tethering CBO programming to external priorities (Autesserre, 2014). Fifth, no systematic CBO capacity assessment framework exists: Paffenholz and Spurk's (2006) World Bank model obscures specific operational capacities, while Wong (2012) found little evidence of impact from community-driven development programmes. Finally, Vivekananda et al. (2019) document climate-fragility feedback loops in the Lake Chad region where no peacebuilding process integrates climate considerations.

These six interrelated gaps – comparative inadequacy, violent extremism blind spots, epistemic exclusion, donor-driven instrumentalisation, assessment deficiencies, and climate-conflict neglect – constitute the analytical foundation for this study's systematic assessment of CBO capacities, identification of retooling interventions, and generation of evidence-based policy recommendations.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design, selected as the most appropriate methodology for examining the complex, context-dependent dynamics through which CBOs contribute to peace and security across fragile African settings. The central questions – how CBOs are retooled, why some succeed where others fail, and what enabling conditions distinguish effective models – require deep contextual interpretation rather than quantitative measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The comparative case study approach, as theorised by Yin (2018), enables systematic analysis across multiple cases while preserving the analytical granularity necessary to account for context-specific variables that aggregate data would obscure.

This methodology aligns with de Coning's (2018) adaptive peacebuilding framework, which explicitly privileges contextual complexity and iterative learning over blueprint prescriptions. The study follows a most-different systems logic: by selecting cases that differ substantially in conflict typology, regional geography, and state capacity, recurring patterns of CBO effectiveness identified across the comparison carry greater analytical weight precisely because they emerge despite contextual variation (Przeworski & Teune, 1970).

1. Case Selection Rationale

The five cases were selected purposively to maximise coverage across conflict typologies, geographic diversity, and institutional contexts in Eastern, Western and Southern Africa, while ensuring each offers documented, substantive evidence of CBO engagement in peace and security. Kenya was selected for its rich tradition of community-led pastoral conflict mediation, exemplified by the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, and for the increasingly complex intersection of climate-driven resource competition with political and cross-border dimensions (Mkutu, 2008; Schilling et al., 2012).

Nigeria was chosen because the Boko Haram insurgency represents one of Africa's most acute cases of

violent extremism overwhelming existing community peace infrastructure, while simultaneously generating innovative and contested grassroots responses including youth vigilance groups and women-led counter-radicalisation initiatives (Agbibo, 2021; Matfess, 2017). Somalia was included as the paradigmatic case of protracted state collapse, in which clan-based CBOs have constituted the primary governance and peacebuilding infrastructure in the absence of functional state institutions for over three decades (Menkhaus, 2007; Bradbury, 2008).

South Sudan provides a critical case of post-independence civil war in which grassroots peacebuilding – most powerfully through church-facilitated people-to-people processes and women's peace committees – has operated alongside and in tension with elite political negotiations (Jok, 2020; Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018). South Africa was selected as a contrasting urban case, where post-apartheid structural inequality has entrenched township gang violence in contexts where the state is nominally functional but deeply distrusted, demanding analysis of CBO effectiveness within a different security architecture (Steinberg, 2008; Shaw, 2021).

Together, these five cases span insurgency, pastoral conflict, state collapse, civil war, and urban insecurity – the five dominant conflict typologies confronting African CBOs – providing the comparative breadth that Leonardsson and Rudd (2015) identify as absent from existing literature.

2. Data Sources

The study draws on a purposive mixed secondary source design. Primary analytical material comprises peer-reviewed academic scholarship, policy reports and evaluations from specialist institutions including the United States Institute of Peace, International Crisis Group, Saferworld, and the African Union, and programme documentation from NGOs with direct field engagement in the five contexts. These are triangulated with community-level narratives drawn from oral histories, practitioner testimonies, CBO self-documentation, and ethnographic accounts embedded in the secondary literature (Autesserre, 2010; Bradbury & Healy, 2010). This approach operationalises Paffenholz and Spurk's (2006) recommendation that civil society assessments integrate both structural documentation and the experiential knowledge of community practitioners – sources that formal policy research systematically undervalues.

3. Analytical Strategy

The analytical strategy employs structured focused comparison, a method developed by George and Bennett (2005) that applies a consistent set of analytical questions to each case while remaining sensitive to context-specific variation. The five cases are examined through four analytical lenses derived from the literature review: CBO legitimacy and origins; adaptive capacity in the face of emerging conflict forms; partnership architecture with state and non-state actors; and gender and intersectional dimensions of effectiveness. Cross-case synthesis then identifies recurring enablers, shared barriers, and divergent outcomes across the five contexts, generating the retooling framework elaborated in the discussion and recommendations sections.

Following Yin (2018), analytic generalisation rather than statistical generalisation is pursued: findings are generalised to theoretical propositions about CBO retooling rather than to population-level frequencies. This epistemological stance is consistent with the paper's broader commitment – following Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Sabaratnam (2013) – to centring African contextual knowledge as theoretically constitutive rather than merely illustrative.

5. CASE STUDIES – RETOOLING CBOS IN FRAGILE AFRICAN CONTEXTS

1. Kenya: Pastoral CBOs and the Paradox of Organic Legitimacy

The northern Kenyan drylands – spanning Turkana, Samburu, Pokot, Marsabit, and Isiolo counties – illuminate both the transformative potential and structural fragility of grassroots peacebuilding. The Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), initiated in 1993 by women traders who organised across clan lines to halt escalating inter-clan violence, became what Menkhaus (2008a, 2008b) terms a "mediated state": a model in which the Kenyan government effectively sub-contracted local governance functions to civic leaders whose legitimacy rested on community embeddedness rather than formal authority. The WPDC's effectiveness derived from its organic emergence, multi-stakeholder inclusivity encompassing elders, youth, religious leaders, and security officials, and its culturally resonant deployment of Xeer and diya mechanisms – qualities that externally designed peace programmes consistently failed to replicate (Odendaal, 2013).

Yet pastoral conflict has been retooled by structural forces faster than the CBOs addressing it. Mkutu (2008) demonstrates that small arms proliferation commercialised cattle raiding into militarised violence transcending traditional livestock disputes, while Schilling et al. (2012) find that climate pressures compound raiding motives across Turkana and Pokot communities in ways that overwhelm elder-based mediation. Women's peace networks in the Upper Rift Valley and Isiolo – including the Rural Women Peace Link and pastoralist women's associations – adapted by integrating environmental peacebuilding and community-based policing (Saferworld, 2008; Myrntinen et al., 2015). These adaptations were constrained, however, by unilateral government disarmament campaigns that created security disequilibria, and by peace conferences that lacked binding follow-up mechanisms (Mkutu, 2008; Schilling et al., 2012). The Kenyan case reveals that CBO effectiveness depends not only on local legitimacy but on sustained institutional linkages connecting grassroots action to state policy frameworks. More recent programming illustrates incremental progress on this front: International Alert's (2024) work with the Masol climate change planning committee in West Pokot County paired rangeland-management training with cross-border dialogue, evidence that integrating climate adaptation into CBO mandates – long identified as a retooling gap – is beginning to take practical shape.

2. Nigeria: Between Vigilantism and Civilian Peacebuilding

Northeast Nigeria presents the starkest tension identified across the five cases: the collision between militarised community self-defence and civilian peacebuilding mandates. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), which emerged in Maiduguri in 2013 when youth mobilised against Boko Haram, expanded to over 26,000 members and prevented the city's fall (Ibrahim & Bala, 2018). Yet Agbiboa (2021) identifies a fundamental "precariousness of protection" at the core of this model: CJTF presence invited retaliatory insurgent attacks on host communities while generating human rights abuses, including child recruitment documented by the United Nations. The International Crisis Group (2017) concluded that the promotion of vigilantism ultimately turned the conflict from an anti-state insurgency into a far more complex and destructive civil confrontation.

Against this militarised backdrop, women-led CBOs forged alternative pathways. Onuoha (2014) documents how poverty, unemployment, and governance failures made northeastern youth vulnerable to radicalisation – conditions that community-based women's organisations address at the grassroots while state counter-terrorism programmes do not. The Borno Women Development Initiative provided psychosocial support and anti-stigma advocacy for women formerly associated with Boko Haram, filling reintegration gaps that formal programmes neglected (Imam et al., 2020). Matfess (2017) argues persuasively that women in the northeast function not merely as victims but as active agents navigating

between insurgent violence and predatory counter-insurgency. The Women Without Walls Initiative leveraged motherhood as an entry point for counter-radicalisation, training mothers to engage radicalised sons – a culturally embedded approach that externally designed countering violent extremism programmes failed to replicate. The retooling imperative here is acute: CBOs require psychosocial infrastructure, early warning systems, and operational frameworks capable of functioning within protracted displacement affecting millions (International Crisis Group, 2022). Recent field research corroborates this dynamic: Tripp, Maiga, and Yah (2025) document how women peacebuilders in Borno State and in Mali's conflict zones build cross-religious bridges and negotiate directly with communities affected by insurgent violence where formal peace processes have stalled, reinforcing the centrality of gender-inclusive grassroots agency identified across this study's five cases.

3. Somalia: Clan Governance as both Scaffold and Constraint

Somalia's prolonged state collapse has generated what Menkhaus (2007) terms "governance without government" – hybrid arrangements combining customary Xeer authority, sharia courts, business-financed security, and civil society mediation. This informal governance ecology simultaneously enables and constrains CBO peacebuilding. Over ninety local peace processes in south-central Somalia since 1991 operated through clan elder mediation (Interpeace, 2008), and Somaliland's successful bottom-up state formation through sequential clan conferences demonstrates customary authority's transformative potential when rendered sufficiently inclusive (Bradbury, 2008).

Yet clan structures impose structural ceilings on what CBOs can achieve. Organisations perceived as aligned with specific clans forfeit cross-clan legitimacy, while political elites sponsor rival elders to undermine organic peace processes (Bradbury & Healy, 2010). Women remain legal minors under customary Xeer, constraining their formal participation despite their critical role as cross-clan mediators through marriage ties. Organisations such as the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre – which established Mogadishu's first rape crisis centre and pioneered community-level disarmament programming – demonstrate that sustained service delivery builds legitimacy transcending clan identity, yet at extraordinary personal cost: the Centre's founder was assassinated, and its current leaders operate under persistent Al-Shabaab surveillance. The International Crisis Group (2023) documents how Al-Shabaab systematically eliminates community leaders who resist its demands, creating an environment where CBO retooling requires not merely technical capacity but sophisticated operational security, durable cross-clan neutrality, and the ability to function entirely without the state infrastructure that organisations in other contexts rely upon. This calculus has only sharpened since 2025, when Al-Shabaab's Shabelle offensive reclaimed swathes of Middle and Lower Shabelle and moved to appoint and rotate its own clan elders as intermediaries, illustrating how quickly military reversals can erode the cross-clan mediation space that CBOs depend upon (International Crisis Group, 2026).

4. South Sudan: Grassroots Peace Between Elite Predation and Communal Resilience

South Sudan, shaped by protracted civil wars whose structural roots Johnson (2003) traces to exploitative centre-periphery relations, illustrates the consequences of disconnecting grassroots peacebuilding from national political processes. The 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference, facilitated by the New Sudan Council of Churches, united Dinka and Nuer communities through customary ritual and Christian mediation, pacifying intercommunal relations for over a decade (Bradbury et al., 2006). The conference produced tangible results – 148 abductees returned, border courts established, contested grazing routes reopened – and owed its success to months of community-level preparation preceding the formal gathering rather than to the event itself.

Yet Jok (2020) argues that peacebuilding in Sudan and South Sudan remains fatally dependent on elite

political agreements that ignore the communal dynamics initially driving violence. When civil war erupted in December 2013, grassroots peace structures were overwhelmed by top-down ethnic mobilisation. Wild et al. (2018) document how cattle raiding was weaponised as a tool of political violence, destroying the customary codes that had governed pastoral disputes for generations. Women's peace committees, though systematically excluded from formal negotiations until securing a 35% representation quota in the 2018 Revitalized Agreement (Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018), sustained everyday peacebuilding through humanitarian provision and cross-ethnic dialogue. The South Sudan Council of Churches remains arguably the only institution commanding genuine cross-ethnic trust, yet its Action Plan for Peace operates amid state surveillance, severe infrastructure deficits, and what Murphy (2006) and Leonardi (2013) describe as a governance vacuum where elder authority has been progressively undermined by militarisation and political manipulation. The fragility of these gains was underscored again in 2025, when renewed ceasefire violations, aerial attacks displacing over 60,000 people in Upper Nile State, and the detention of opposition figures prompted the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan to warn that continued disregard for the Revitalized Agreement risked a full return to war, further constraining the space in which grassroots peace structures operate (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2025).

5. South Africa: When the State is both Partner and Obstacle

Post-apartheid South Africa's urban violence – concentrated in Cape Town's Cape Flats and Johannesburg's townships – presents a distinct CBO challenge: operating within a functional but deeply distrusted state. Pinnock (1984, 2016) traces gangsterism's structural origins to apartheid-era forced removals that destroyed coloured community cohesion on the Cape Flats, while Shaw (2021) documents how police corruption – including the sale of approximately 9,000 decommissioned firearms to gang leaders – actively fueled the violence that CBOs attempt to address.

Community Police Forums (CPFs), established under the South African Police Service Act of 1995 as civilian oversight mechanisms, have been progressively co-opted into operational policing roles, fundamentally undermining their accountability function (Kinnes, 2000). Steinberg (2008) demonstrates that effective policing operates only by community consent – precisely what co-opted CPFs erode. Alternative models proved more promising. The Zwelethemba Peace Committee model, developed by Shearing and colleagues, achieved reported dispute resolution rates exceeding 99% across 180 sites through genuinely community-led governance maintaining cooperative rather than subordinate relationships with police (Shearing & Froestad, 2010).

Ceasefire SA adapted the Cure Violence public health model to Hanover Park, deploying reformed gang members as violence interrupters and achieving significant early reductions in gang violence. Yet both models faced sustainability crises as state actors withdrew support in favour of militarised responses, reflecting the contested governance between police and community security nodes that Kinnes (2000) identifies as endemic to the Cape Flats. The South African case confirms the capacity paradox: CBOs possessing the deepest community legitimacy remain those most vulnerable to institutional marginalisation by a state that simultaneously depends on and distrusts grassroots security governance. Gang-related murders on the Cape Flats continued climbing through 2025, with monitoring by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime recording a further rise in the first half of the year alone, confirming that neither CPF reform nor renewed policing operations have reversed the structural dynamics this paper identifies (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025).

6. Cross-Regional Insights – Toward a Retooling Framework

The five cases reveal structural characteristics that distinguish effective CBO retooling from ad hoc

adaptation, operationalising the capacity paradox and addressing the critical gaps identified in the literature review.

Legitimacy grounded in community origins emerges as the primary determinant of effectiveness. The Wajir committee, the Wunlit process, and the Zwelethemba model all originated organically from within affected communities rather than from donor frameworks or government directives. This embedded legitimacy enabled collective mobilisation that externally designed programmes could not replicate. Conversely, CPFs absorbed into South African police structures forfeited the community trust that constituted their core value.

Adaptive capacity – the ability to pivot from traditional mediation to emergent conflict forms – separates resilient CBOs from static ones. Kenyan pastoral organisations that integrated small arms monitoring and climate-sensitive programming demonstrated this capacity; those relying exclusively on elder-based dialogue without addressing structural conflict drivers did not survive the transformation of pastoral violence.

Gender inclusion functions as a consistent performance differentiator rather than merely a normative aspiration. Women-led CBOs in northeast Nigeria, the catalytic founding role of women in Wajir, and cross-clan mediation by Somali women confirm that gender-inclusive models produce more durable peacebuilding outcomes than gender-blind alternatives (Matfess, 2017; Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018; Myrtilinen et al., 2015).

Hybrid partnership architectures characterise the most effective organisations. The New Sudan Council of Churches' facilitation of Wunlit drew simultaneously on church networks, customary authority, and international support, while the Elman Peace Centre leveraged diaspora connections without surrendering local ownership.

Three critical retooling gaps demand urgent attention: the near-total absence of psychosocial support for CBO practitioners operating in trauma environments; fragmented early warning and information systems lacking institutional coordination; and the absence of sustained, flexible funding aligned to protracted conflict timelines rather than short-term project cycles – the single most cited constraint across all five cases. These five structural characteristics and three critical gaps form the empirical foundation for the retooling framework elaborated in the recommendations section that follows. Table 1 summarises these dynamics comparatively across all five cases, and Table 2 synthesises the enablers and critical gaps identified above.

Table 1: Comparative Overview of CBO Retooling Across the Five Case Studies

Country	Dominant Typology	Exemplar CBO(s)	Primary Retooling Need	Key Outcome / Current Constraint
Kenya	Pastoral resource conflict; arms proliferation	Wajir Peace and Development Committee; Rural Women Peace Link	Small-arms monitoring; climate-sensitive programming; linkage to state policy	Organic legitimacy sustained, but undermined by unilateral disarmament campaigns and non-binding peace conferences
Nigeria	Jihadist insurgency (Boko Haram)	Civilian Joint Task Force; Borno Women Development Initiative; Women Without Walls Initiative	Psychosocial infrastructure; early warning; safeguards against militarisation	Vigilantism halted the city's fall but generated rights abuses; women-led reintegration filled gaps state programmes ignored

Country	Dominant Typology	Exemplar CBO(s)	Primary Retooling Need	Key Outcome / Current Constraint
Somalia	State collapse; clan governance	Wajir-style Xeer mediation networks; Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre	Cross-clan neutrality; operational security; durable service delivery	Ninety-plus local peace processes since 1991; Al-Shabaab's 2025 resurgence has re-narrowed the space for CBO mediation
South Sudan	Civil war; elite–communal disconnect	New Sudan/South Sudan Council of Churches; women's peace committees	Cross-ethnic trust preservation; protection from surveillance	Wunlit (1999) pacified relations for a decade; renewed 2025 political and security strain again marginalises grassroots gains
South Africa	Urban gang violence; distrusted state	Zwelethemba Peace Committees; Ceasefire SA; Community Police Forums	Genuinely community-led governance insulated from co-optation	Zwelethemba achieved over 99% dispute resolution; CPFs were co-opted, and gang-related murders kept rising through 2025

Source: Author's own synthesis of available information in the literature review.

Table 2: Cross-Case Synthesis – Enablers of Effective Retooling and Critical Operational Gaps

Dimension	Description	Illustrative Evidence
Enabler 1: Community-rooted legitimacy	Organic origin within the affected community, rather than donor or government design	Wajir WPDC; Wunlit process; Zwelethemba model vs. co-opted Community Police Forums
Enabler 2: Adaptive capacity	Ability to pivot from traditional mediation to emergent conflict forms	Kenyan integration of small-arms monitoring and climate-sensitive programming
Enabler 3: Gender inclusion	Performance differentiator rather than a normative add-on	Wajir founders; Somali cross-clan women brokers; Nigerian women-led reintegration CBOs
Enabler 4: Hybrid partnership architectures	Combining customary, faith-based, and international resources without surrendering local ownership	New Sudan Council of Churches at Wunlit; Elman Peace Centre's diaspora linkages
Enabler 5: Indigenous leadership	Customary authority anchoring organisational legitimacy	Xeer mediation; Gacaca-type elder justice; Dinka–Nuer covenant-making
Gap 1: Psychosocial support	Near-total absence of support for practitioners operating in trauma environments	Cited across the Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan cases
Gap 2: Fragmented early warning	Information systems lacking institutional coordination and continental linkage	Absence of a CBO-to-continental intelligence-sharing platform

Dimension	Description	Illustrative Evidence
Gap 3: Short-term funding cycles	Misaligned with protracted conflict timelines	Direct localisation funding plateaued at 3.8% in 2024, against the 25% Grand Bargain target (Overseas Development Institute [ODI], 2025)

Source: Author's own synthesis of available information in the literature review.

6. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

1. Patterns and Lessons Learned

Three recurring enablers emerge from the cross-case comparison. First, indigenous leadership and customary authority consistently anchored CBO legitimacy. The Wajir WPDC drew on Somali clan mediation traditions, Wunlit fused Dinka-Nuer cattle sacrifice with Christian covenant-making, and Gacaca adapted Rwanda's inyangamugayo elder-justice model. These cases substantiate Lederach's (1997) assertion that sustainable peace depends on culturally embedded participants and demonstrate that legitimacy was reestablished through a creative integration of traditional practices. The Wunlit White Bull sacrifice exemplifies what Mac Ginty (2011) theorises as hybrid peace – a negotiated fusion whose authority derives from its dual resonance. Somalia's Xeer-based governance, which Menkhaus (2007) documented as functional order without a central state, further demonstrates that customary institutions generate durable governance – challenging state-centric assumptions embedded in SDG 16.

Second, gender inclusivity operated as a performance differentiator, not merely a normative aspiration. In Wajir, women's multi-clan affiliations afforded them structural neutrality unavailable to male elders locked within single-clan identities (Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018). Somali women exploited the same logic as cross-clan brokers, using buraambur poetry to shame combatants while offering to pay outstanding diya blood-compensation. This pattern reveals that exclusion from formal clan politics paradoxically generates a brokerage advantage, consistent with Paffenholz's (2010) framework identifying facilitation and social cohesion as functions gender-diverse organisations fulfil more effectively.

Third, adaptive resilience distinguishes effective CBOs. De Coning's (2018) complexity-informed model predicts that organisations embracing iterative learning outperform those following blueprint logic. The Wajir committee's evolution from marketplace shuttle diplomacy to a registered NGO embedded in Kenya's national peace architecture exemplifies this trajectory. Conversely, the Wunlit covenant's collapse after political elites re-weaponised Dinka-Nuer divisions reveals the limits of adaptation when macro-political shocks overwhelm local institutional capacity (Autesserre, 2014).

2. Barriers to Retooling

Structural barriers expose a fundamental contradiction between international rhetoric and funding architecture. The Grand Bargain committed to channelling 25% of humanitarian funding directly to local actors by 2020; by 2023, only 4.5% reached local organisations, with Grand Bargain signatories themselves providing a mere 0.6% directly (OECD, 2022). This localisation failure is structural: multi-layered sub-contracting chains impose upward accountability to donors rather than downward accountability to communities – precisely inverting the logic Campbell (2018) identifies as essential for peacebuilding effectiveness.

State co-optation represents a second systemic barrier. Nigeria's CJTF – a spontaneous community self-defence initiative co-opted by Borno State – grew to over 26,000 members, was listed by the UN for

child recruitment, and now risks becoming the next security threat (Agbiboa, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2017). South Africa's CPFs demonstrate a subtler variant: legislated community participation degenerating into political patronage, with some forums captured by criminal interests (Kinnes, 2000; Steinberg, 2008). Rwanda's Gacaca courts, while processing over one million cases, were instrumentalised by the RPF to consolidate political control. These cases confirm Richmond's (2011) critique: the liberal peace framework affirms local ownership rhetorically while structurally subordinating it to state and donor imperatives. Meanwhile, global military expenditure reached \$2.7 trillion in 2024 while peacebuilding's share declined, ensuring conflict militarisation systematically outpaces CBO adaptive capacity (Vivekananda et al., 2019). This gap has not narrowed: global tracking for 2024 found that direct funding to local and national actors remained at just 3.8%, with combined direct and indirect flows still below 10% of all humanitarian funding – a decade after the 25% target was set (ODI, 2025).

3. Policy and Practice Implications

The evidence generates differentiated recommendations for three audiences. African governments must reconceptualise CBOs as strategic governance partners rather than implementing agents. Kenya's integration of the Wajir model into 99 district peace committees demonstrates that organic CBO innovations can be scaled through enabling policy frameworks without sacrificing community ownership, provided devolution is genuine rather than administrative (Donais, 2012). Donors and international organisations must restructure funding architectures to match peacebuilding's temporal logic. Project cycles of nine to twelve months cannot sustain the relationship-building that Lederach (2005) identifies as peacebuilding's core mechanism.

Multi-year, flexible, outcome-based grants channelled directly to CBOs would address the localisation gap while reducing accountability distortions (Campbell, 2018). Funding packages should also integrate psychosocial support for frontline CBO practitioners operating under sustained threat. African evaluation networks – particularly AfrEA and continental VOPEs – hold a pivotal epistemic role. Global North methodologies, including logframes and randomised controlled trials, systematically fail to capture indigenous peace practices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Sabaratnam, 2013). Building CBO-level evaluation capacity using contextually appropriate frameworks would generate African-authored evidence capable of rebalancing this epistemic asymmetry (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

4. Intersectionality – Gender, Youth, and Marginalisation

Mainstream peacebuilding's tendency to treat communities as homogeneous units obscures intersectional dynamics. Women-led CBOs consistently outperformed gender-blind models across all five contexts. The Wajir founders and Somali women brokers succeeded because structural marginality from formal power generated unique facilitative capacity – what Paffenholz and Spurr (2006) classify as intermediation. Gbowee's (2011) Liberian mobilisation confirms that women's cross-cutting social ties constitute a peacebuilding resource that gender-exclusive structures systematically waste. Yet the paradox persists: women remain the most effective grassroots peacebuilders yet most excluded from formal peace processes – a contradiction Matfess (2017) and Myrtilinen et al. (2014) attribute to the patriarchal architecture of state institutions and customary governance alike.

Youth agency presents a different analytical challenge. The CJTF case reveals that youth mobilisation is directionally indeterminate – unemployment, marginalisation, and desire for recognition that drove young men into community defence simultaneously created vulnerabilities to co-optation and human rights violation (Onuoha, 2014). Institutional design determines direction: structured accountability channels youth energy constructively; state co-optation turns it destructive. IDPs, pastoralist minorities, and marginalised populations face compounding exclusion – simultaneously most affected by conflict and least

represented in CBO governance. Until peacebuilding practice disaggregates "community" into its constituent power relations, retooling efforts will reproduce the exclusions they purport to address (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Recent scholarship reinforces this diagnosis: Chigudu (2024) argues that gender-inclusive peacebuilding policy across Africa remains constrained by structural barriers rather than by any shortage of women willing to lead, while the Institute for Security Studies (2025) reports that women-led organisations across the Mano River region continue to depend on short-term donor funding that undermines their capacity for sustained mediation and early warning work.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reinforcing the role of CBOs as frontline peace defenders when effectively retooled

This paper has argued that community-based organisations constitute Africa's most credible frontline peace infrastructure – not peripheral supplements to state and international actors, but foundational pillars upon which durable peace depends when effectively retooled. Evidence across five conflict typologies – pastoral violence in Kenya, insurgency in Nigeria, state collapse in Somalia, civil war in South Sudan, and urban township violence in South Africa – converges on a central paradoxical finding: the actors most trusted by conflict-affected communities are systematically the most under-resourced within the international peacebuilding architecture (Autesserre, 2014; Campbell, 2018).

Three structural dysfunctions sustain this paradox. First, a legitimacy-resource inversion persists: CBOs command deep social trust precisely because they are embedded in conflict-affected communities (Lederach, 1997, 2005), yet this embeddedness renders them invisible to international funding accountability logics. Second, a capacity gap has widened between the conflict realities CBOs now confront – insurgency, violent extremism, and climate-driven displacement – and the organisational architectures most were designed to manage (de Coning, 2018). Third, the funding asymmetry remains stark: direct localisation funding hovers at approximately 2.1% of humanitarian aid, far below the 25% Grand Bargain target (OECD, 2022).

Undergirding all three is an epistemic gap: African CBO innovations remain undertheorised, documented as programme anecdotes rather than recognised as constitutive contributions to conflict transformation theory (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). The question is no longer whether CBOs work – the cross-case evidence confirms they do. The question is whether surrounding international and national architectures will undergo the structural transformation required to enable rather than constrain their effectiveness.

2. Key Recommendations

Capacity-Strengthening as Systematic Investment. Retooling demands structured investment across three domains. Training must expand beyond generic conflict resolution to encompass conflict analysis, early warning systems, psychosocial support, violent extremism engagement, and climate-conflict integration (Paffenholz & Spurr, 2006). Funding must shift decisively from short-cycle sub-contracting chains toward multi-year, flexible, directly-channeled grants (Campbell, 2018; OECD, 2022). Networking must be reconceived through horizontal peer-learning platforms fostering structured South–South knowledge exchange (Donais, 2012).

Formal Recognition of Indigenous Peace Systems. Customary mediation mechanisms – the Somali Xeer, Rwanda's Gacaca-type processes, and faith-based dialogue traditions – must be formally recognised as legitimate components of national peace architectures, co-constitutive with the state rather than alternatives to it (Menkhaus, 2007, 2008; Clark, 2010; Bartoli, 1999). African Union member states should adopt legal frameworks protecting indigenous peace institutions alongside formal judicial and security systems, closing the recognition deficit that Lederach (1997) identified between elite and grassroots

peacebuilding tracks.

Local–Regional–Continental Linkages. Structured pathways must connect community-level CBOs to sub-regional bodies – IGAD, ECOWAS, and SADC – and to the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture, particularly the Continental Early Warning System (African Union, 2013; de Coning, 2018). The granular, real-time intelligence that Wajir women traders generated in 1993 exemplifies precisely the data that continental systems lack but urgently require (Odendaal, 2013). IGAD, the AU, and bilateral donors should co-invest in CBO-to-continental intelligence-sharing platforms formalising this critical bottom-up data flow (Aning, 2007a; 2007b).

Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Beyond Performativity. Gender inclusion must move beyond tokenistic representation toward gender-transformative programme design with financing, governance, and evaluation frameworks that structurally centre women's leadership – as South Sudan's women's peace committees and Leymah Gbowee's Liberian mobilisation demonstrate is both possible and effective (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011; Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018; Myrntinen et al., 2014). Youth engagement equally requires structured frameworks channelling agency into accountability-bearing peacebuilding roles, preventing the militarisation and co-optation trajectory documented in the Civilian Joint Task Force case (Matfess, 2017; Onuoha, 2014). Table 3 maps these recommendations onto the specific audiences responsible for implementing them.

Table 3: Policy Recommendations by Audience

Audience	Structural Change Needed	Key Actions
African governments	Reconceptualise CBOs as strategic governance partners, not implementing agents	Scale organic models (e.g., Wajir's integration into 99 district peace committees) through enabling policy; ensure genuine devolution
Donors and international organisations	Restructure funding architecture to match peacebuilding's temporal logic	Multi-year, flexible, outcome-based grants channelled directly to CBOs; integrate psychosocial support into funding packages
African evaluation networks and continental VOPEs (AfrEA, EvalIndigenous)	Rebalance the epistemic asymmetry in assessing CBO impact	Build CBO-level evaluation capacity using contextually appropriate frameworks rather than imported logframes and RCTs
Sub-regional and continental bodies (IGAD, ECOWAS, SADC, African Union)	Formalise bottom-up intelligence-sharing and recognition pathways	Co-invest in CBO-to-continental early warning platforms; legally recognise indigenous peace institutions

Source: Author's own synthesis of available information in the literature review.

3. Contribution to Scholarship

This paper advances the local turn literature in four ways. First, it provides the first systematic cross-case comparison of CBO effectiveness across five conflict typologies within the African context, directly addressing the comparative deficit identified by Leonardsson and Rudd (2015). Second, it develops the capacity paradox – CBOs are most trusted precisely where they are least resourced – as a theoretically generative analytical framework moving beyond descriptive observation to structural explanation (Mac Ginty, 2011; Paffenholz, 2010).

Third, it generates an empirically grounded retooling framework comprising five structural characteristics

and three operational gaps, bridging community peace practice and conflict transformation theory. Fourth, it contributes to African epistemic sovereignty debates by centering African scholarly voices and indigenous knowledge systems as constitutive of peacebuilding theory rather than merely illustrative cases (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Sabaratnam, 2013).

4. Future Research Agenda

Three priority directions demand attention. First, the comparative effectiveness of African diaspora CBOs – particularly Somali, South Sudanese, and Nigerian diaspora networks – as bridges between host-country resources and home-country conflict dynamics constitutes an almost entirely unexplored dimension requiring systematic investigation (Campbell, 2018).

Second, the digital frontier of CBO peacebuilding – social media mobilisation, WhatsApp-based early warning networks, and digital peace platforms – presents transformative opportunities alongside significant risks including surveillance, disinformation, and extremist counter-mobilisation; existing scholarship has barely begun to map this terrain (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

Third, the near-total absence of longitudinal impact evaluation data means virtually all CBO effectiveness claims rest on short-term or process-level evidence; rigorous, participatory, African-led longitudinal studies tracking CBO contributions to peace over ten-to-twenty-year periods are urgently needed to generate the evidentiary base that sustained policy investment requires (Paffenholz, 2010). Emerging locally-led aid ecosystem research – including the Network for Empowered Aid Response's (2025) synthesis of Global South civil society perspectives – suggests that practitioner-generated evidence on what genuine localisation requires is beginning to accumulate, offering a foundation on which the longitudinal, African-led studies proposed above could build.

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