

## The Nature of the United Nations Peace Mission in South Sudan

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### ABSTRACT

*This study delves into the nature of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and specifically explores UNMISS's key roles like violence reduction, political instability, the security situation, social cohesion, reduction of violence, protection of civilians and socio-economic development. The study was guided by two objectives; to assess the objectives and mandates of UNMISS, and to examine the effectiveness of the roles and mandates of UNMISS in addressing the underlying causes of conflict and fostering sustainable peace in South Sudan. The study was underpinned by two theories, conflict transformation and Liberalism institutionalism theory. The study adopted a mixed method design with a target of 3280 and a sample size of 354 which was determined by the Yamane (1967) formula. The study employed purposive, cluster, stratified, and systematic sampling. Primary data was collected through interview schedules and questionnaires which were supplemented by FGDs. While secondary data was collected through a review of various publications. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using SSP version 28 and thematic excerpts respectively. The study concludes that UNMISS has been in the front run to de-escalate hostilities by putting in place several strategies to create a conducive environment that supports dialogue and negotiation. This includes concerted DDR efforts that aim to reduce armed conflicts and prioritize the protection of civilians by fostering trust within the warring communities. Equally, UNMISS has played critical roles in ensuring social cohesion and political stability that are conducive to reconciliation and dialogue at the grassroots level. Peace-building initiatives have been achieved through missions' commitment to the protection of human rights, social-economic development and availability of resources. The study recommends a substantial increase of resources to UNMISS and strengthening the SSR and DDR programs.*

**Keywords:** Armed Conflicts, Peace-Building Initiatives, Protection of Civilians, Reconciliation, Socio-Economic Development

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations has participated in several Peace operations globally with the primary goal of promoting sustainable peace and stability. While some of the missions have succeeded in intervention in many conflict situations, PSO has also faced a myriad of challenges in different conflict areas thus limiting their gains in conflict situations (Bellamy & Williams, 2013). United Nations peacekeeping operations have evolved over time, from the traditional peacekeeping operations to the current multidimensional and transitional missions which cut across both inter-state and intra-state operations.

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) came into operation way back in 2011 by UNSCR 1996 (2011) with the primary goal of promoting sustainable peace after the secession from the larger Sudan. Armed with a broader framework, UNMISS has faced increasing challenges due to the various conflict dynamics and mandates (United Nations, 1999). The challenges have had a profound effect on the application and execution of the key principles of consent, impartiality and non-use of force except for self-defence and the defence of the mandate (Bellamy & Williams, 2013). This was exacerbated by the changing political landscapes and the realities of asymmetric conflict coupled with the push to ensure comprehensive protection of civilians including women and children in a fragile environment.

Regionally, United Nations peace operations have faced a myriad of complex inter-state and intra-state conflicts which have been interlinked within a fluid political landscape, competition for resources and changing regional power dynamics (Biswas, 2017). The success of peace operations in Africa has been pegged and influenced by various regional actors including the African Union and the politics of the neighbouring nations which have vested in the conflict states. This has affected the efforts to achieve sustainable peace within these conflict countries due to interference and the spoilers' effects.

Equally regional organizations including IGAD have played a critical role in promoting peace and stability, research and development and as such they have supported peace operations through various diplomatic initiatives like supporting mediation and reconciliation and coordination of the regional peace efforts (Biswas, 2017). The tension

between the United Nations' strategic priorities and regional actors has equally hindered the effectiveness of such missions thus leaving many conflict states on the verge of conflict and humanitarian crisis.

Many international actors have observed that despite South Sudan being on the verge of conflict, the country has made progressive efforts towards peace and stability (Murphy, 2017). Accordingly, there has been a noticeable decrease in political and ethnic violence across the country since the signing of the peace agreement in 2018 and the creation of a power-sharing government about two years later.

Peace scholars and local leaders equally assert that the presence of UNMISS has had a considerable decrease in conflict and political tensions across the country (Stamnes, 2015). However, other quarters argue that the potential for conflicts persists especially among the commanders and political leaders based in the capital Juba who continue warring against each other across the country.

Conversely, other analysts, conflict monitoring organizations, and locals assert that the peace accord has resulted in a considerable increase in violence. This is because commanders and politicians in a transitional government centred in the capital, Juba, engage in divisive and contentious power struggles in most parts of the country. International actors commonly attribute these conflicts to communist insurgencies, including a billion-dollar UN operation within the nation (Tyner, 2018). Equally, the international and the United Nations Security Council have imposed sanctions on South Sudan

The horrific civil war in South Sudan, which has resulted into the loss of thousands of lives and led to a severe refugee and humanitarian catastrophe, was intended to be ended by a revived peace agreement in September 2018 (Stamnes, 2015). However, the agreement is still in jeopardy two years after it was signed, surging domestic and international fear that implementation delays may encourage new bloodshed.

A humanitarian catastrophe that has already left over eight million South Sudanese in need of aid and over 4.5 million people either internally displaced or living as refugees could get worse if violence continues (Murphy, 2017). Since the peace deal was signed in 2018, the total number of people forced to flee their homes due to violence in South Sudan has increased annually; 144,238 in 2019, 172,447 in 2020, and 183,447 in 2021.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Peacebuilding is a vital component of peace support operations, encompassing activities such as supporting elections, reconciling factions, conflict resolution and mediation, rebuilding state institutions, governance and rule of law and disarming combatants to solidify peace and avert relapse into violent conflict. Although peacekeeping forces have been significant in restoring peace in some volatile regions, certain cases have exceeded their capacity, leading to reports of abuse and global criticism (Stamnes, 2015). Contrary to these expectations, the current situation in South Sudan is marked by significant human suffering and displacement, with millions requiring humanitarian assistance.

According to the United Nations (Curran, 2020), it is estimated that the country has a total of 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and over two million Refugees in the neighbouring countries. While there are several studies on the nature of peace support operations by various scholars, they provide general valuable insights into the goals, mission mandate and challenges of United Nations Peace Operations, nothing substantial has been written on the nature of UNMISS (Stamnes, 2015). A lot of available literature focuses on the general role of UN peacekeeping, the political and socio-economic aspects of the host nation the impact of local actors and generally on the success of the mission but nothing substantial on the nature of UNMISS as a united nation mission in South Sudan.

According to Jaafar, (2017), studies on the perspective and roles of the local actors are critical yet have not been addressed effectively thus posing a significant weakness in the United Nations peacekeeping operations. This has subsequently failed to address the root causes of conflict hindering sustainable peace in conflict zones. There is therefore the need to study the nature of UNMISS from the perspectives of the local community to understand the challenges and opportunities in enhancing sustainable peace and stability in South Sudan.

### **1.2 Research Objective**

To assess the objectives and mandates of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and their effectiveness in addressing the underlying causes of conflict and fostering sustainable peace in South Sudan.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

The study employs two theories to elucidate and explain the complex dynamics of conflict in South Sudan and UNMISS peacebuilding efforts.

### 2.1.1 Liberalism institutionalism theory

The study is guided and influenced by liberalism institutionalism theory. This theory focuses on the role of international organizations like the United Nations in promoting cooperation and dealing with collective problems among states according to proponent Keohane and Nye, (1977). He opines that international institutions have a key role in helping deal with issues that individual states cannot tackle alone. The theory asserts that international institutions have a critical role in advancing cooperation and reducing conflict among different states thus can help resolve disputes that states cannot handle independently

This theory is relevant in understanding the role of the United Nations in conflict prevention and management and emphasizes the role of UNMISS in the institution and enhancing various democratic institutions which promote the rule of law and human rights best practices (Keohane and Nye, 1977). The UNMISS Mandate and objectives clearly conform to the principles of liberalism institutionalism as it emphasizes the promotion of sustainable peace, stability and post-conflict reconstructions within nations.

### 2.1.2 Transformation Conflict Theory

John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory acknowledges the intricacies of conflict and the need for multifaceted ways to create constructive, long-term peace (Lederach, 2019). It emphasizes that peace processes should take into account the relationships between concerned parties, investigate multi-level approaches, and prioritize long-term transformation. Traditional conflict resolution procedures, according to the notion, are just temporary remedies since they do not address the underlying reasons.

The UN mission in South Sudan focuses on promoting political, economic, and social peacebuilding measures. The mission has worked together to establish problem-solving techniques. It has also underlined the need to include marginalized people, women, and adolescents in formulating long-term and effective peacebuilding solutions. Thus, conflict transformation theory serves as an extension of liberal institutionalism (Lederach, 2019). While the latter supports the role of international organizations like UNMIS and their promoting collaborative engagement of foreign players in South Sudan's rebuilding efforts, conflict transformation theory underscores the importance of procedures and holistic approaches that goes beyond mere conflict resolution and can address fundamental causes as well as inclusivity at all levels to guarantee peacebuilding and sustainable peace.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

UNMISS was established way back in July 2011 with the main role of supporting peace and stability in the newly independent nation South Sudan. The country has had prolonged decades of conflict due to many reasons. According to Gruenbaum (2018) UNMISS Mandate included a variety of objectives which embedded protection of civilians, facilitating humanitarian assistance in violent areas, monitoring and reporting of all human rights violations and supporting the peace processes and agreement between all the warring factions.

Smith in his seminal study, *The Dynamics of United Nations Peace Missions in South Sudan*, talks about the complex nature of these missions and sheds more light on the intricate delicate balance between the various actors in the local, regional and global spheres (Smith, 2019). This emphasizes the coordination challenges among diverse actors and stakeholders both at the national and international levels. He opines that there is a need to appreciate the different perspectives which shape the efficacy of missions. According to Agutu (2022), the robust mandate, justified by the complexity of the political landscape and the volatility of the conflict environment was difficult to implement fully due to the deep-rooted ethnic tensions and political and economic rivalries that exacerbated the conflict environment.

The effectiveness of the multidimensional mandate meant to address the root causes of conflict in South Sudan has been a subject of debate by many scholars some of whom opine that the mission has not been able to achieve its mandate as a result of the diverse challenges that the mission has faced including limited resources, lack of political will, poor coordination and cooperation among both local regional and international actors and partners (Johnson, 2020). Other scholars argue that the inadequacy of the mission is due to the role of global actors and stakeholders in shaping the mission's efficiency.

Equally Jones and Patel (2018) in their comparative analysis work on the roles of global actors and how they affect the efficacy of UNMISS, established that there is a significant effect of external actors on the operations of any mission. Accordingly, they point out factors such as geopolitical interests and various diplomatic interventions which impact the peace operations efforts in South Sudan. They emphasize the need to have a deeper insight into the geopolitical landscape to be able to deal with the challenges that hinder sustainable peace in the region

According to Smith (2019), several international actors like the USA, China and regional actors such as the African Union, play a critical role in shaping the mandate, outcomes operations and end state of the mission through various diplomatic, financial and peacebuilding initiatives. Weighing on the mandate of UNMISS, it is clear that it extends way beyond the diplomatic engagement to logistical and military support. Troops contributing countries



(TCC) are at the forefront in providing resources including troops and personnel who support various operations in UNMSIS, as opined by Dixon (2017)

Equally, various international humanitarian organizations and NGOs tend to collaborate with the mission in order to deliver all the required humanitarian aid and assistance, this includes the provision of protection services and peacebuilding strategies in South Sudan (Jones, 2021). Nevertheless, the efficacy of their collaboration efforts always depends on the goodwill, cooperation and proper coordination and alignment among all the regional and international actors as well as their capability to navigate the regional and global operational, political and security challenges in South Sudan.

Other scholars like Garcia and Nguyen (2019) delve into the myriad operational limitations facing these missions and their far-reaching impact on the peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan. They emphasize the important roles of these missions. It draws attention to the discrepancy that exists between the current mission mandates and the actual practical realities encountered on the ground and thus recommend adaptive approaches that can be used to solve the evolving gaps of fragile environments

It is important to understand the nature of UNMISS and how its efforts have contributed to the peacebuilding strategies in South Sudan. This further requires a nuanced assessment of the missions’ objectives mandate effectiveness and the overarching roles of various regional and international actors. The mission plays a critical role in ensuring the protection of civilians, and promoting peacebuilding initiatives and efficacy is also dependent on several factors including resource availability, political factors, and the cordial agreement between all the actors and stakeholders. In the future, there is a need to address the root causes of the conflict which will need a sustained political commitment from multinational corporations and strong diplomatic engagements to support the peace process.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed method design across five regions of Juba, Aweil, Malakal, Rumbek, and Wau in South Sudan and Nairobi in Kenya. The choice of the study design has relevance in combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches thus aiding in addressing the research questions more holistically. The study had a target population of 3280 which comprised both military police and civilian components, Payam administrators, religious leaders, United Nations International staff, diplomats, humanitarian affairs heads and personnel from International Non-governmental organizations (INGOs).

The study utilized a sample size of 354 combined with both probability and non-probability sampling approaches. Sampling techniques consisting of purposive, clusters, stratified proportionate and simple random sampling were employed. Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interview schedules were used to collect primary data from the respondents. Equally Yamane’s (1967) formula was used to achieve recommended sample confidence.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were utilized with quantitative data being analyzed using numerical techniques and statistical methods while excerpts were used to explain plausible interpretations of qualitative data. Secondary data collection involved literature review and analysis of academic papers, policy documents, reports, and relevant publications from reputable sources such as the United Nations, governmental agencies, and NGOs (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999). Equally Face and content validity processes were considered alongside data triangulation from numerous methods and sources to evaluate the nature of UN missions and peacebuilding strategies in South Sudan.

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Response Rate

To facilitate an in-depth investigation, the study collected data from a sample size of 354 individuals with a response rate of 82% and used a self-administered survey method. The response rate of 82% was achieved by the successful completion of 290 surveys, FGDs, and the use of an interview schedule which highlights the integrity of the data collection process. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), any response rate above 72% is recommended and holds statistical significance for a reliable conclusion and findings as presented below.

**Table 1**

*Response Rate*

S/No	Category	Sampled	Responded	Response rate (%)
1.	Surveys, FGD and Interview schedules	354	290	82%

#### 4.2 Reduced Violence and Conflict

The United Nations mission has a primary role of reducing violence in a conflict nation through many ways. This includes conflict prevention measures which are implemented to prevent escalation of conflicts and aiding conflict parties to make peace by facilitating peace operations. This assistance involves the rapid deployment of peacekeepers who act as buffer zones between conflicting parties and create favourable conditions for peace to flourish. UNMISS has also put in place several conflict prevention and mitigation methods which aim to address the root causes of conflict and manage the escalation of conflict. Early warning systems are important in ensuring early conflict detection and prevention to promote peace and stability (Coning, 2018).

The study sought to explore the contributions the United Nations Mission has made in its efforts to mitigate violence and conflict as a wider peacebuilding strategy in South Sudan. This was done by surveying 290 respondents to obtain their views and perspectives. The study analyzed various dynamics and patterns relating to violence and conflict and the findings are presented in the subsequent table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Missions' Role in Reduced Violence and Conflict*

Reduced violence and conflict Activities	Population	Percentage
Conflict Prevention and Mitigation	45	16%
Protection of Civilians	66	23%
Conflict Resolution and Mediation	42	14%
Security Sector Reform	40	14%
Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration	55	19%
Early Warning and Early Response	38	13%
Not sure	4	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>100</b>

The study findings above illustrate the mission's proactive efforts in mitigating the root causes of violence and conflict in South Sudan. The mission has immensely contributed to the promotion of peace and a stable environment which aligns with the mission's border comprehensive approach to peacebuilding and sustainable peace in South Sudan (Coning, 2018). The findings provide a clear understanding of the respondents' perspectives and viewpoints thus highlighting the enduring efforts to reduce violence and conflict in the country.

One of the key objectives of UNMISS is the protection of civilians in South Sudan. This is done by ensuring the safety and well-being of the variable communities and populations which are mostly affected by the conflict. In many instances, the mission has facilitated dialogue and negotiation between warring populations and parties as part of a bigger peace-building effort. This requires qualified mediators who can bridge the interests of two opposing parties by defining their issues and eliminating obstacles in communication (Lederach, 2019).

Prevention of violent conflict has long been one of the primary goals of security sector reform and DDR programs. Sustainable changes strengthen security and justice systems while addressing many of the core causes of conflict, which come from inadequate, ineffective, or unaccountable security and justice systems which hinder sustainable peace and development in conflict areas.

One of the earliest initiatives to start recovery services and support security and stability in situations following conflicts so that development can begin is the DDR program (Fishel, 2019). These initiatives seek to address the issue of post-conflict security that emerges when former combatants are left with no means of support or livelihood outside of what they were used to while serving as soldiers.

The mission has supported DDR programs with a view of reducing conflicts and violence in South Sudan by facilitating the transition from combat role to civilian role. Because of this, DDR aims to assist former combatants in their transition from war to peace and development by assisting them with their social and economic reintegration into society and by establishing the framework for the protection and upkeep of the communities into which they settle while enhancing the nation's capacity for long-term peace, security, and development (Fishel, 2019).

It is crucial to understand that conflict resolution or the avoidance of violence cannot be achieved or guaranteed by DDR alone (Fishel, 2019). DDR can aid in creating a safe atmosphere so that other aspects of recovery and peace-building can move forward, but it should not be viewed as a replacement for comprehensive development programs. This makes the shift from instability to peace easier. Upon being interviewed, one respondent observed that; .....DDR programs serve a critical role in disarming combatants, demobilizing them from various armed groups and re-integrating them fully into civil life. These programs comprise of provision of education, vocational training, job opportunities and psychosocial assistance to help them adapt well to civilian life .....

Early warning and early response systems have been instrumental in conflict detection and prevention in South Sudan. Its primary goals are to recognize and assess conflict patterns, warn of conflict risk, guide decision-making, and launch prompt actions to avert violent conflict (Agutu, 2022). By the end of 2027, every place on Earth should be covered by an early warning system. This is according to the UN Secretary-General's Early Warnings for All Initiative, which was introduced during COP27 in November 2022.

Although the initiative has received significant attention and funding, more emphasis and scrutiny is required to understand how fragile, violent, and conflict-affected nations may effectively implement early warning systems, including any components that might need to be modified or created. According to Richmond (2011), Early warning systems help to avoid and lessen violence by enabling prompt and focused actions. UNMISS has been able to use these key strategies in ensuring sustainable peace in South Sudan by reducing violent conflicts as part of broader peace-building initiatives.

### 4.3 Improved Security

Understanding the nature of UNMISS requires an in-depth analysis of the status of the security situation in South Sudan. This calls for a closer look at the security analysis before the deployment of peacekeepers, during their mandate and after they transit from the conflict environment. The UNMISS Peacekeepers perform several roles in a bid to ensure improved security. This includes key activities such as engaging with the local community's leadership, supporting rule of law, assisting humanitarian agencies, monitoring and reporting activities, assisting in electoral procedures and processes, maintaining the constant presence of peacekeepers which ensures deterrence and prioritizing gender mainstreaming issues which further assist in addressing the wider WPS issues.

By fulfilling these key responsibilities, UNMISS can be able to gather valuable information and intelligence thus facilitating trust and confidence building thus fostering cooperation. This will in turn bolster general security and peacebuilding efforts in the country (Keohane and Martin, 1995). The mission also does monitoring and evaluation to improve security in South Sudan.

Being one of the key activities of UNMISS and utilizing its extensive knowledge of how peacekeeping missions are carried out on the ground, Stimson created a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that peacekeepers can use to assess the success of their protection initiatives (Richmond, 2011). Missions can better focus resources on what works and assist the maximum number of civilians if they have a better grasp of which peacekeeping operations are effective and under what conditions thus helping to reduce conflict and improve security in the conflict areas. One respondent observed that:

...Monitoring and reporting have benefitted the mission greatly as they facilitate the collection of accurate and timely information and intelligence on the fluid security situation and more especially incidents relating to human rights violations. This promotes transparency and accountability among all stakeholders and thus serves as a deterrent against potential security threats .....

The mission has been able to utilize monitoring and evaluation strategies to hold key stakeholder partners and actors accountable for their actions. This further promotes transparency and serves as a deterrent to potential conflict triggers in the area ultimately ensuring comprehensive protection of civilians and facilitating peace-building activities in South Sudan (Keohane, 1995).

For example, in 2016, the PoC camp in Juba was targeted by armed groups as fighting between government and rebel forces worsened. Thousands of people escaped to UNMISS PoC sites throughout the city, where UNMISS forces battled tirelessly to repel assaults and secure their safety and security. Despite confronting numerous hurdles, the peacekeepers' fast action and intervention served to avert a devastating calamity on mankind, particularly after the 2015 breach of the protection of civilians PoC in Juba.

Some key elements influencing increased security include gender mainstreaming, presence, and deterrent, patrolling and monitoring, and UNMISS assistance with election procedures. According to Agutu (2020), patrolling activities help the mission to deter and reassure the local communities of their presence and improve security thus enabling them to continue with their day-to-day life. Through this UNMISS has been able to promote a democratic process to ensure gender mainstreaming and address specific gender and security concerns of girls and women in the mission areas (Thomas et al, 2018)

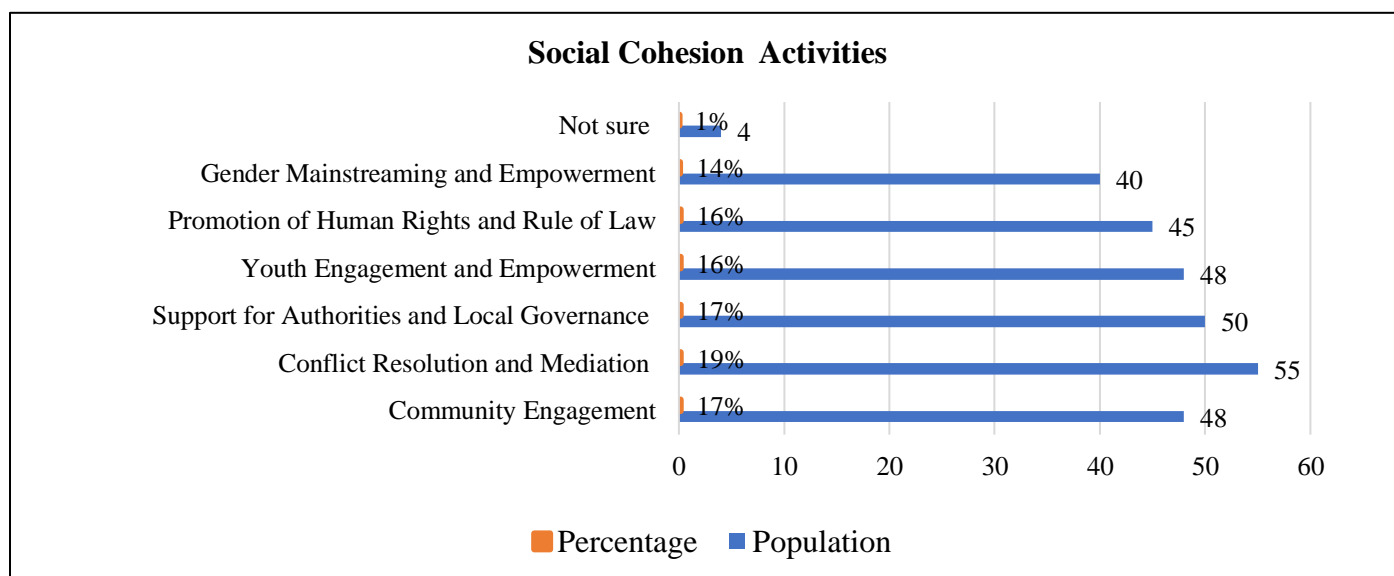
According to Autesserre (2011), UNMISS has been able to employ various security strategies to enhance safety and security in conflict environments. These strategies include monitoring child abuse and gender issues, conducting patrols addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) through having in place presence and deterrence measures and through supporting electoral processes. Gender mainstreaming has been used by the mission

to ensure the effectiveness of security interventions as it recognizes various needs, experiences, and contributions of diverse populations in South Sudan.

#### 4.4 Enhanced Social Cohesion

The mission has endeavoured to enhance social cohesion in South Sudan by utilizing the local peace-building networks that may regulate and disrupt processes that develop conflicts and provide space for novel forms of political agreement, social cohesiveness helps avoid political and social extremism (Agutu, 2020). The process of increased harmonious cohabitation between individuals, organizations, and institutions within a community is known as social cohesiveness. It is desired to foster trust, collaboration, and a feeling of common purpose amongst historically separated individuals and groups within society as well as between society and the state (Keohane and Martin, 1995).

The study sought to explore the mission’s contribution to enhanced social cohesion as a broader peacebuilding strategy in South Sudan. The study surveyed a total of 290 respondents to obtain their views and perspectives. The study analyzed various dynamics and patterns relating to enhancement of social cohesion and the findings are presented in figure 1. below.



**Figure 1**  
*Role of UNMISS in Social Cohesion*

The findings indicate that respondents view social cohesion as one of the key peacebuilding strategies and thus crucial in ensuring sustainable peace and stability in the region. The results indicate that most of the population placed a high priority on the importance of conflict resolution, community engagements, and support by the local and national governance, and promotion of human rights, gender mainstreaming and empowerment as indicated in their responses (Autesserre 2011).

According to them, the mission can reap big in promoting peace and stability by addressing the key issues and fostering social cohesion and inclusivity. The mission recognizes that socially coherent cultures are built upon basic elements including feelings of acceptance, validity, acknowledgement, and inclusion. According to Keohane and Martin (1995), community engagement is an important activity that promotes social cohesion and peace-building efforts.

This was exemplified in October 2019, when the mission organized an intertribal peace forum in Yambio town. Through this forum, the mission was able to bring different warring communities mostly from Balandia, Dinka and Azande ethnic groups into one sitting and through the help of other civilian leaders to discuss conflict resolution, and reconciliation between the ethnic groups (Autesserre 2011). Through this the communities were able to resolve emotive issues and foster understanding and create plans for harmonious relationships through facilitated conversations and trust building activities.

It is easier for the mission to address the root causes of conflict and promote social cohesion by building trust and facilitating reconciliation through dialogue and mediation as opined by Autesserre (2011). These strategies are fundamental in promoting conflict resolution and enhancing social cohesion. Addressing the grievances of the local communities requires UNMISS to embed inclusivity in its decision-making organs as it aligns with the mission mandate of achieving sustainable peace.

UNMISS supports the local authorities and promotes youth inclusivity and empowerment thus advancing the rights of the young people in South Sudan. Most of the population in South Sudan is made up of the youth including women who require empowerment and involvement in decision-making processes. This will enhance social cohesion both at the local and national levels, a task undertaken strategically by UNMISS to ensure their participation in peace-building efforts across all levels as poised by Lähnemann (2022).

The mission places a strong emphasis on preserving human rights and guaranteeing justice and strict respect for the rule of law at both the local and national levels. These are the foundational pillars of social cohesiveness, particularly in terms of peacekeeping and sustainable development. Mutua (2017) believes that for sustainable development to be effective, human rights and the rule of law must be strengthened via equitable conflict resolution, accountability and openness, and the establishment and building of community trust. The mission has also placed a greater emphasis on post-conflict peace-building measures, as well as monitoring gender mainstreaming and empowerment activities to address gender gaps in local communities by respecting their viewpoints and including them in decision-making processes.

#### 4.5 Increased Political Stability

Political stability is the state of peace and order as well as the sustainable stability of any country's political process and systems. It is often characterized by the ruling government's commitment and ability to uphold the rule of law and respect human rights and dignities through clear processes, procedures and protocols. The success of the mission is hinged on the state of political stability and adherence to international norms and best practices.

The study sought to investigate how the mission has been able to promote Political stability and its effectiveness in promoting sustainable peace and stability in South Sudan. The study surveyed a total of 290 respondents to obtain their views and perspectives on increased political stability as a peacebuilding strategy in South Sudan. The study analyzed various dynamics and patterns that influence political stability, and the findings are presented in the subsequent table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*UNMISS's role in Political stability*

Political stability Activities	Population	Percentage
Facilitating Political Processes:	60	20%
Supporting Governance and Rule of Law	45	16%
Supporting Electoral Processes	55	19%
Human Rights Monitoring and Promotion:	40	14%
Engaging with Political Actors	45	16%
Promoting Reconciliation and Dialogue	40	14%
Not sure	5	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>100</b>

From the study findings, it is evident that UNMISS has played a critical role in promoting political stability as emphasized by the respondents. According to the perspectives and opinions of the respondents, there is a need to promote political processes and support the government and the rule of law. However, it was noted that this requires goodwill from both the local, national and international actors and stakeholders within the mission.

The respondents listed the key activities which they consider important in promoting and favouring a stable political environment. Findings point out that electoral process transparency and promotion of human rights are ingredients for a stable political environment (Paris, 2004). It is important to foster human rights monitoring, engagement of various political leaders and promotion of reconciliation and dialogue were also identified as critical activities that support political stability and sustainable peace in South Sudan.

Through this, the mission can be able to promote and sustain growth and development in post-conflict situations. According to Paris (2004), UNMISS has a critical role in fostering good socio-economic and workable interpersonal relationships across the racial, national, religious and ethnic lines while remaining committed to the primary role of ensuring prosperity and sustainable peace.

Many scholars have argued that the mission has been able to ensure political stability and prosperity in Many regions within South Sudan by upholding key principles of consent, impartiality, and non-use of force unless they are acting in self-defence and defence of the mandate (Paris,2004). By adhering to these key principles, UNMISS has been able to play a critical role in promoting peace-building activities and post-conflict reconstruction in South Sudan. Between the period from 2009 and 2022, UNMISS collaborated with the local communities and other international organizations to rehabilitate roads and construct schools that had been previously damaged during conflicts.



The main aim of the project was to rehabilitate the damaged school buildings and through that, the mission was able to contribute to the stabilization and reconstruction in South Sudan. This didn't just allow the students to learn but also gave them hope for the future.

The mission has also been in the front run lobbying for ceasefire through various avenues including mediation efforts, peacekeeping operations and participating in Humanitarian diplomacy to raise awareness of conflict as part of its mandate (Buchanan, 2023). In line with mediation efforts, UNMISS has been able to advocate for dialogue and negotiation to achieve a ceasefire in various regions within South Sudan. This it has done by bringing together various faction representatives to the negotiation tables and further facilitating discussions as witnessed in 2015 in Juba when the mission played a critical role in mediating between the government and the position groups to effect the ceasefire agreement.

Establishing clear mandates in line with the set security councils' resolutions is key to ensuring the efficacy and accountability of peacebuilding operations. A case in point is the 2021 UNMISS alignment with the UNSC resolution to identify and address the specific challenges facing South Sudan in its path to peace (Lähnemann, 2022). Some of the expected outcomes include reducing violence and conflict and conflict-related sexual violence. This could be achieved by supporting the implementation of peace agreements and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups in conflict environments. One respondent remarked that;

...The mission has been able to engage and bring to the table warring parties to negotiation through various mediation and facilitation efforts. The mission has further been able to support the establishment of various transitional government structures thus laying the ground for feasible and stable government reforms. Through this the mission has been able to build trust and confidence and promote political settlements...

This has helped the mission to create a conducive environment and further assist in strengthening government structures to promote accountability and support the rule of law trust and legitimacy. The mission has been able to shield civilians and assist them in carrying out peace accords for more than 13 years. Its mandate was established to "avoid the return to a state of war, establish a lasting ceasefire at the local and national levels, and promote free, fair, and peaceful elections as well as democratic and transparent government" since 2011. This cannot be achieved without addressing, monitoring and promoting human rights in all divides as posed by Mutua (2017) who further reiterates that the promotion of human rights is closely linked to political stability. According to him protection of human rights is paramount to building trust, legitimacy and social cohesion.

By utilizing the good offices of the Secretary-General at the national, state, and local levels, the mission, as it carries out its four-pillared mission, has played a significant role in promoting stability and peace in South Sudan by engaging with political actors, promoting dialogue and negotiation, and inclusivity among various political actors. This has ensured political stability by ensuring their involvement in decision-making and peaceful resolution of political disputes.

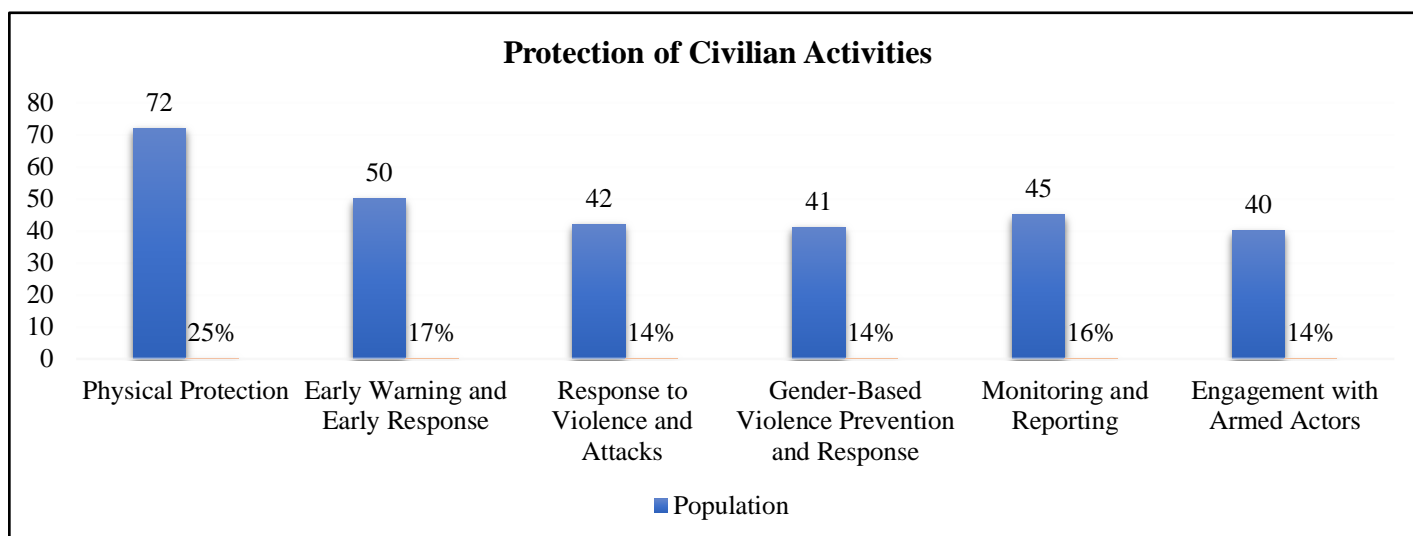
According to Lederach (2019), by resolving grievances, fostering trust, and assisting in the settlement of fundamental political problems, conversation and reconciliation promote stability in government. Paris (2004) reiterates that UNMISS has a critical role in supporting the political process and the rule of law in South Sudan. These roles are key in ensuring a stable environment and post-conflict settings. Equally, supporting the electoral process is also vital in ensuring legitimacy and promoting inclusivity in political institutions.

The mission's roles are consistent with the institutionalism theories which highlight how foreign organizations impact and shape national political processes (Keohane and Martin, 1995). UNMISS helps South Sudan's institutions to grow and lays the groundwork for a just and stable political system by interacting with political players and assisting with governance and election procedures. UNMISS's overall approach to peace building in South Sudan includes these kinds of initiatives to support long-term peace and improve political stability.

#### **4.6 Protection of Civilians**

Empirical data repeatedly shows that where there are United Nations troops, there is less violence against civilians and war is managed (Ronzitti, 2012). A fundamental component of humanitarian law is the protection of the civilian population. This means that those who are not involved in the battle must never be targeted and must always be spared and protected. Despite this, the facts demonstrate that the victims of armed conflict are primarily the civilian population. This is clearly outlined under the 159 provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The study sought to explore the nature of the mission by interrogating the opinions and perspectives of 290 respondents regarding the role of UNMISS in protecting civilians in South Sudan. The respondents were questioned on the significance of key activities like conflict early warning, and response, physical protection, gender-based violence prevention and response, response to violence and attacks, engagement with armed actors and monitoring and reporting mechanisms and the findings presented in the subsequent figure 2 below.



**Figure 2**  
*Protection of civilian activities*

The findings indicate that respondents view the protection of civilians as one of the most important roles and mandates of the mission. The findings provided an insight into key activities which the respondents perceived to be paramount in the protection of civilian strategy. It was observed that one of the main challenges in protection of civilians is due to the fact that UNMISS fails to inquire “*how the civilians need to be protected*”. Physical protection a role performed by both the military and police components was rated the highest with 25% of the respondents as an important role (Ronzitti, 2012)

Followed by the early warning and response mechanisms which serve to warn and prevent attacks on vulnerable populations including women and children. The findings align with the mission’s mandate to provide a safe and secure environment for vulnerable groups who are affected by conflict (Gillespie, 2018). Through this, UNMISS has been able to contribute to the well-being and safety thus mitigating displacements and refugee flows.

One of the main goals of the mission and as a crucial component of peace-building initiatives in areas impacted by violence is the protection of people. To guarantee the creation of a safe environment for civilians, the mission has improved civilian protection through interaction and communication with national and sub-national authorities, with an emphasis on IDPs, women, youth, children, and other returnees according to Themnér and Wallenstein (2014).

Because of its mandate, which includes important responsibilities like facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid, assisting in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and the peace process, and monitoring, looking into, and reporting on transgressions of international law, UNMISS has made commendable efforts to guarantee the complete protection of civilians (Richmond, 2009). Since the main objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives and lessen suffering, protection in armed conflict is a vital and fundamental part of emergency operations. Emergency operations in war zones are guided by the core humanitarian objective of protecting civilians. One respondent, a local leader observed that;

.....One of the biggest challenges of protection of civilians is due to the fact that UNIMSS does not know how to protect civilians. They go wrong because they do not ask civilians how they (civilians) want to be protected, instead they protect civilians how they (mission) wants.....

It is imperative to analyse the mission's roles and strategies in providing security safety and prioritising the well-being of the population of South Sudan (Ronzitti, 2012). In high-risk areas, the missions mandate is geared toward preventing, deterring, and ending violence against civilians, including politically motivated violence. It also aims to swiftly and efficiently deal with any actor who is preparing or conducting attacks against civilians, IDP camps, and the missions Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites.

Dealing with the demands and critical requirements of conflict-affected populations is not easy. The mission has endeavoured to offer both physical safety by putting up robust measures to ensure the physical security and safety of the affected populations including both IDPs and Refugees as discussed by Autesserre (2011). This has been done by preventing direct indiscriminate attacks on vulnerable populations. This was exemplified in Malakal in September 2016 when UNMISS amidst ongoing conflict was able to deploy peacekeepers and provided visible presence in conflict areas thus deterring further escalation of conflict and protecting civilians affected by conflict.

They also worked closely with humanitarian agencies to ensure a constant supply of medical, food water and lifesaving aids apart from ensuring the physical protection of the valuable populations. The mission was also able to physically protect civilians in Bentiu in March 2018 by offering support to Bentiu's protection of civilian units and focal points. This was possible as mission was able to understand the diverse needs of civilians in PoC sites ensuring community policing mechanisms, and conducting security and human rights awareness campaigns that were able to address the multidimensional aspects of civilian protection (Thomas,2018). War analysts have used a variety of techniques and approaches to map out and identify various dangers and security concerns to a migratory population of IDPs and refugees in the aftermath of war. If done correctly, this will assist in identifying gaps and areas for improvement to guarantee the efficacy of UNMISS peace-building measures.

To ensure the protection of civilians, the mission must be able to not only maintain a robust and initiative-taking deployment posture but also utilise early warning systems (Conning, 2018). The robust initiative-taking patrol includes having a footprint in communities' villages and towns to deter violence and offer protection for civilians. The active presences also assist the peacekeepers to monitor the situation and gather information and intelligence that helps in the process of early warning mechanisms (Thomas, 2018). Inter-communal clashes were very frequent within the various communities in South Sudan, and this has been mitigated by having continued presence of peacekeepers within the vicinity of vulnerable communities. This has served to promote peace-building activities and thus promote sustainable peace in South Sudan. One key informant remarked that;

.....The mission has been able to provide a haven for vulnerable populations through the rapid deployment of peacekeepers who have been able to establish the protection of civilian camps and sites. Through this UNMSS has been able to protect IDPs and refugees shielding them from threats and facilitating humanitarian assistance.....

Early warning mechanisms have also been put in place to anticipate and offer quick responses to emerging threats to vulnerable civilian populations. The mission has invested in information collection and analysis from many dissimilar sources which may include the local communities, satellite imagery, and humanitarian agencies and through this it has been able to identify and respond to any triggers to the violence. A case in point is the UNMISS activities in the Unity state where UNMISS has collaborated severally with community elders to monitor intercommunal conflicts which precisely timely alert peacekeepers ( Wallenstein, 2014). This has reduced violent conflicts therefore preventing harm to civilians and helping South Sudan move towards sustainable peace and prosperity. Similarly, the mission has been able to protect individuals by maintaining public safety and security awareness within the mission-designated areas for civilian protection. In case the security situation worsens, it has also operated tightly watched camps under the government's sovereign authority.

In addition, the mission has aggressively intervened to protect civilians and survivors of sexual assault, ensuring appropriate deterrence, prevention, and timely response to sexual and gender-based violence as highlighted by Thomas et al. (2018). The mission's duties of monitoring and reporting centre on keeping an eye out for, recording, and reporting on human rights breaches and abuses that have an impact on civilians. By bringing transgressions to light and promoting justice, monitoring and reporting support accountability, transparency, and the safety of civilians. UNMISS peacekeepers have also engaged with armed actors thus influencing their behaviours and promoting strict adherence to international humanitarian law thus minimising harm to the civilian population.

#### **4.7 Protection of Human Rights**

The United Nations has two complementary goals: promoting human rights and fostering peace. The principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that the basis of freedom, justice, and peace globally lies in the recognition of inherent dignity equality and unalienable rights of every member of the human family (Richmond, 2011). Maintaining peace encourages a comprehensive strategy that incorporates the UN's three pillars of involvement. This covers human rights, peace and security, and development to address the underlying causes of conflict and stop violence before it starts, in addition to containing its immediate effects. One key informant, Payam administrator remarked that;

.....On Feb 2023, UNMISS peacekeepers in Malakal moved swiftly to intervene and protect civilians including women and children when violence broke out at the PoC camp and armed rebels broke into the PoC site and were threatening the safety and security of IDPs. Equally, they have been able to monitor and report human rights violations, support justice and accountability, and promote gender equality ...

Conflict is frequently sparked by abuses of human rights and the absence of responsibility and prosecution for these transgressions. Sufficient oversight of human rights can aid in the early detection of and mitigation of social instability. According to Guterres, (2017), respecting human rights is essential to promotion of equality, social justice and human dignity because maintaining peace is inextricably tied to upholding human rights.

Protection of human rights ensures that the mission complies with international legal obligations which promotes the principles of equality and justice pushing the mission image to the global stage. This will also serve to hold it more accountable for any failures and shortcomings and by setting high standards for the protection of human rights among all stakeholders and partners. Through this the mission has been able to promote accountability by ensuring implementation of robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms for violations.

Equally, it allows the mission to address any human rights violations and support the justice mechanisms through collaborative efforts with other partners and stakeholders thus contributing to sustainable peace. The mission strives to achieve the protection of human rights through comprehensive protection of civilians as opined by Richmond (2011), prioritising civilian protection helps to create a secure environment and promote fundamental human rights.

In a conflict-ridden environment such as South Sudan, it is important to support justice and accountability to combat impunity and hold those responsible for human rights crimes accountable (Buchanan, 2023). To promote reconciliation and establish trust, support for justice and accountability is essential, which in turn ensures the preservation of human rights.

The mission is dedicated to promoting the principles of Human rights and the rule of law which are key components of missions' success criteria as they support consent, legitimacy, credibility, and national ownership of any peace support operations (Mutua, 2017). This is also in line with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), issued by the United Nations secretary general on 13 July 2011. The policy spells out recommended measures that the United Nations and its entities are expected to undertake within the scope of their mandates. This is also based on the state's existing standards and obligations and is accepted as being a signatory to the United Nations. One respondent observed that;

...UNMISS has made commendable efforts to achieve its role of promoting and protecting the fundamental human rights of all individuals within the country through various initiatives and programs like monitoring and reporting mechanisms, advocacy efforts, and capacity-building initiatives .....

This promotes the universal declaration of human rights at all levels within the state regionally and globally and forms a solid foundation for the promotion of positive peace and peacebuilding efforts (Agutu, 2022). By bringing attention to injustices and fighting for a worthy cause, the mission will be able to act autonomously and with accountability, creating and promoting national ownership. This helps to assist the process of monitoring, recording, and reporting all types of human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual assault and gender-based violence, allowing for the protection of women and children, who are the most vulnerable populations in war-torn areas.

The mission has aided in information dissemination, human rights advancement, and defence through the training and capacity-building of local actors. The mission has implemented capacity-building and training initiatives to assist good governance, enhance institutions, and foster a human rights-abiding culture. The study shows a clear connection between promoting human rights and fostering peace (Thomas, 2018). By using preventative resolutions, the protection of human rights aims to improve institutional collaboration and indirectly promotes peacebuilding. But in other parts of South Sudan, specific connections and cooperation with the UN's peacekeeping organizations continue to be elusive despite efforts to boost participation.

#### **4.8 Social Economic Development**

A government's choice of economic policies has a considerable influence on how likely conflict is to occur. Deliberate actions which are aimed at undermining state institutions to facilitate political leaders' enrichment may give rise to policies that fuel conflict. Even after almost ten years of independence, South Sudan continues to experience instability, economic stagnation, and fragility. According to world Bank (2024), poverty is ubiquitous, and it is made worse by external shocks, displacement, and violence.

Over 2500 kilometres of roads have been rehabilitated by engineering units from various nations collaborating with the Mission in South Sudan to promote economic growth and reconciliation so that the conflict-affected nation may create a more peaceful and prosperous future. South Sudan's poverty rate is exceedingly high, with 7.7 million people expected to need emergency food assistance in 2022 (Richmond, 2011). The GDP is expected to shrink by 0.4% in 2022–2023 and then expand by 4.6% in 2023–2024 because of rising local oil output and rising oil prices

globally. The mission can support South Sudan's citizens' long-term stability and well-being by emphasizing social and economic development.

However, the COVID-19 epidemic and catastrophic floods have undone the slight economic rebound that was noted once oil production resumed. Due to severe shocks to its mostly oil-dependent economy, South Sudan's economic future is now uncertain. This is because the ongoing conflict has exacerbated the declining oil prices. This therefore underscores the necessity of diversification (Autesserre, 2011) as there is a need to ensure that South Sudan's economy is not over-reliant on oil production only.

They can invest in other economies like infrastructure, agriculture and other non-oil sectors to boost economic growth. The mission has supported South Sudan's citizens' long-term stability and well-being by emphasizing social and economic development. This has been achieved through humanitarian aid and various capacity-building programs. They have ensured that the locals have access to basic needs including health care good education and, in some areas, clean water. This has ensured that the local communities enjoyed improved social welfare and living conditions (Richmond 2011).

The mission also provides security and protection of critical infrastructure which support the maintenance of critical services thus ensuring community resilience and economic development. The mission has also been able to provide various livelihood supports and provide economic opportunities which are essential in empowering communities and individuals by providing them with jobs and means to sustain their livelihoods thus improving their economic conditions. One diplomat a key informer was observed;

....Provision of basic needs is a critical function of the mission and so far, the mission has been able to facilitate the delivery of services like education, healthcare, and provision of clean water to conflict-affected areas like Malakal, Juba, Wau, Aweil and Rumbek and Bor regions. Through this, it has been able to support the rebuilding and development of vital infrastructures like roads, schools, hospitals and water systems ....

The mission has also supported agriculture and food security in South Sudan thus contributing to the poverty reduction, social stability, and overall well-being of the population. Moreover, UNMISS highly supports agriculture and food security in South Sudan. According to Thomas et al. (2018) supporting agriculture and ensuring food security are essential for improving livelihoods, reducing conflicts over resources, and promoting sustainable development. Regarding reintegration, UNMISS has promoted the creation of a secure atmosphere where IDPs and refugees might migrate, resettle, or (re)integrate into host communities in regions with favourable conditions according to Lederach (2019).

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

The study concluded that early warning systems are crucial for three main reasons. First, it helps the mission to map out conflict areas, and second, to identify and prevent conflict escalation. Thirdly, they assist the mission to respond to potential triggers of conflict by putting into place measures to intervene and mediate disputes thus preventing escalation of conflict and attack on civilian populations. It also helps to protect civilians and support peacebuilding processes.

This they do by helping to anticipate threats to the civilian population, and the high influx of civilian refugees and IDPs thus preventing Human rights abuses and violations. In terms of peacebuilding, early warning mechanisms prevent conflict and promote conflict resolution. This is it does by first identifying causes of conflicts including resource competition and then by actively engaging local stakeholders in dialogue and reconciliations and encouraging them to support the peace process.

The mission has also reduced political unrest by engaging in political dialogue and mediation which promoted inclusivity in governance processes. UNMISS has been able to bring together leaders with diverse views and standpoints and resolve political disputes leading to the signing of the revitalized agreement on resolution of the conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018.

The mission has also supported social services and infrastructure development which has had a positive impact by promoting stability and bolstering livelihoods. This has been achieved through closer liaison and coordination by government authorities, humanitarian agencies and various development partners in South Sudan. This social service includes medical, healthcare, water and sanitation, roads and infrastructure rehabilitation.

Community engagement and empowerment are also important tools that have been used by UNMISS to promote peacebuilding and development initiatives. This has been achieved through various community-based projects, quick impact projects, capacity building and various workshops and seminars which support civil societies

and strengthen social networks around the country. The mission has also fostered active citizenship through strengthening social networks empowering communities and promoting local ownership that prioritized peace and development processes.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Due to the complex nature and challenges of the mission, UNMISS requires additional financial and budgeting allocation. This is because it operates in one of the most complex environments globally. Coupled with diverse conflict dynamics, more financial and budgeting allocation will enable the mission to meet its mandate including the protection of civilians, support upcoming elections, more deployment of peacekeepers to strengthen humanitarian assistance and to support capacity building and development projects.

There is a need for effective planning and coordination. Looking at the complex nature of South Sudan, achieving the mandate of the mission may be elusive if there is no proper planning and coordination between various stakeholders' actors' partners and agencies which work toward achieving sustainable peace in South Sudan. Proper coordination will allow for the mission to address the root causes of conflict, utilize the limited resources and deal with negative peace at all levels. Equally, these efforts will enable the mission to align its activities and programs with the national priorities and local development plans thus ensuring synergy and coherence in an integrated approach to peacebuilding activities.

For South Sudan to achieve sustainable peace, there will be a need to encourage political will. This will promote diplomatic engagement and advocacy thus helping the mission to leverage enact and implement the peace agreements to help resolve the underlying cause of conflict. Favourable political will aids in the enhancement of trust and regional and international cooperations. Even the best-planned peace initiatives are likely to fail if there is no political will to support them. Indeed, creating and sustaining strong political will is critical in overcoming recurrent obstacles in multidimensional peacekeeping operations. Unless this is done, sustainable peace in South Sudan may remain elusive.

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