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"Building peace from the ground up": Challenges and Prospects of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Peacebuilding in Africa

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Abstract
Effective peacebuilding remains a challenging aspiration for many African countries. This challenge is underscored by diverse approaches, paradigms, and actors. Within this landscape, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) emerged as prominent stakeholders and have established a pervasive presence in peacebuilding initiatives across all sub-regions of the continent. This prevalence arises from the growing recognition of the necessity to adopt an inclusive approach to peacebuilding. However, given the relatively fragile state of stability and peace, reevaluating the experiences of civil society organisations in peacebuilding becomes imperative. This re-evaluation aims to extract insights that can be more effectively utilised to enhance security and promote peaceful outcomes. Employing a cross-national research design as its framework, this article explores the potential of civil society engagement in peacebuilding endeavours. The article delves into successful practices, underlying achievements, and plausible explanations for instances of failure, drawing upon carefully selected case studies to illustrate these dynamics and highlight the factors contributing to variations in the experiences of CSOs. The paper considers the idea that pushbacks from the public sector and cultural nuances offer viable explanations for such variations. Consequently, these challenges suggest the imperative of the "bottom-up approach," which is modified to balance inclusivity with political dynamics, as a crucial strategy to unlock the peacebuilding potentials of civil society organizations.

Keywords: peacebuilding, civil society organizations, stability, cross-national research, peace.

Introduction

There is little merit in disputing the fact that African political systems have been continuously preoccupied with the central problem of achieving sustainable peace. Engaging with this central issue entails an attempt to construct a condition of peace that addresses the structural deficiencies deeply ingrained in Africa's political history. Such attempts have covertly and implicitly aimed to extract African states from their colonial contexts and address associated issues, including the "underlying paradigm of war and violence, its coloniser model of the world, and

colonial political economy" (Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 10). Arguably, post-colonial African states have exhibited an inability to fully reshape their societies away from the violence-based paradigm underpinning state formation during the colonial era (Mazrui, 2010). This failure, which continues to negatively impact the development and peace prospects of the African continent, has given rise to various paradigms and interventions by various actors to achieve sustainable peace.

In recent times, these activities have unfolded within an institutional framework established by the African Union, which has identified peacebuilding as a key component of sustainable peace (ACCORD, 2017). These initiatives have involved civil society organizations (CSOs) that have assumed increasingly prominent roles due to the shift towards multilateralism away from the state-centric approach to addressing social problems Highlighting the significance of civil society organizations in contemporary governance, it has been noted that this importance has led to the proliferation of such organizations, which has arguably imparted an impression of omnipresence and pervasiveness to them (Obi, 2018). While the emergence of civil society organizations underscores a deep-seated dissatisfaction with deficits in state capacity and efficiency in addressing social and developmental challenges, the involvement of CSOs in peacebuilding has seemingly not resulted in broad positive changes. The latest Global Peace Index rankings show that only 7 countries made it into the top 60, with the majority of countries ranked as having moderate to very low scores (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). This disheartening statistic closely mirrors observations of the generally crisis-prone and unsuccessful state of peacebuilding (Ojendal et al., 2021). The relatively fragile state of peace and stability on the continent underscores the need to reevaluate the potential of civil society organisations in peacebuilding in Africa, particularly on account of their increasing prominence as alternatives to state structures and institutions. Specifically, the paper addresses the following questions: (1. In what ways have civil societies engaged in peacebuilding in Africa? (2. What types of civil society organisations have participated in peacebuilding in Africa? (3. What factors account for the disparities in experiences among civil society organisations leading peacebuilding initiatives? (4. What are the challenges and opportunities for civil society organisation participation in peacebuilding initiatives?

While engaging with these questions, the paper also examines the impact of resistance from the public sector and the influence of cultural nuances as significant drivers of variations in the peacebuilding experiences of civil society organisations. The paper assesses whether evidence from case studies supports this preliminary proposition outlined previously. Essentially, these efforts aim to suggest the importance of a "bottom-up approach," tailored to balance inclusivity with political dynamics, as a pivotal strategy to unlock the peacebuilding potential of civil society organisations.

Methodology

This study employs a cross-national research design as its methodology. The cross-national research design is comparative and oriented towards analysing data from multiple countries to highlight variations and engage in data development (Karanasios, 2008). By adopting the cross-national research design, the study acknowledges the litany of difficulties associated with such a design, primarily related to sample selection, which primarily manifests in the form of the problem of selecting the study area selection (Karanasios, 2008). This paper develops inclusion and exclusion criteria centred around a geographic location to determine the scope of countries. Consequently, the adopted samples are chosen

from five regions of Africa: Northern, Central, Eastern, Western, and Southern Africa. The Global Peace Index ranking (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023) is used to narrow the study's focus to specific case samples. This study relies on content analysis to evaluate the role of civil society organizations in peacebuilding in selected sample countries. To collect data for analysis, the study utilises a search strategy involving the combination of keywords with Boolean operators to extract both academic and grey literature from academic databases.

Defining Civil Society Organizations

A fundamental understanding of civil society organizations cannot exist independently of the concept of civil society. One might argue that these organizations represent entities that derive their identity from state-economy interactions occurring within a societal context (Cohen & Arato, 1992). However, this association remains a subject of contention due to the dynamic nature of the concept, leading to a multitude of conflicting propositions that have lent an elusive dimension to the concept (Doyle, 2017). This elusiveness is well-illustrated in the literature and affects perceptions of civil society organizations. Such disparities largely revolve around inclusion criteria, particularly what types can be considered eligible for categorization as civil society organizations.

It is posited that civil society organizations represent a conceptual category characterized by hybridism. This implies that it encompasses a spectrum of formal and informal organizations, including women's organizations, community groups, faith-based entities, advocacy collectives, and established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Doyle, 2017). This assortment of organisations also encompasses what is labeled as "community-based organisations, churches, development NGOs, relief agencies, advocacy coalitions" (Brown & Jagadananda, 2007). According to the United Nations, this classification applies solely to non-profit-seeking entities and encompasses "mass organisations (such as those of peasants, women, or retirees), trade unions, professional associations, social movements, indigenous people's organizations, religious and spiritual entities, academia, and public benefit non-governmental organizations" (United Nations, 2004, p. 13). As used in this paper, thus, civil society organisations refer to a broad range of organisations, both formal and informal, whose ontological basis is in the representation of public interests rather than economic interests and are distinct from the state.

Peacebuilding: From Origins to Shifting Paradigms

Despite its prevalence in contemporary discourse, peacebuilding is a concept with relatively recent origins. The genesis of this concept can be largely attributed to the intellectual contributions of Johan Galtung and Paul Lederach. However, its prominence can be traced back to its adoption by the United Nations in the early 1990s (Ojendal et al., 2021). Johan Galtung's seminal work, "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peace-making, and Peacebuilding," is often regarded as the starting point for the integration of this concept into the global policy and political lexicon (Jabri, 2013). Simultaneously, the concept has gained traction against the backdrop of worsening security conditions across many international states, often taking on transnational dimensions.

Nonetheless, the question of what precisely constitutes peacebuilding remains a topic that sparks significant controversy and varying opinions among practitioners and academics alike. These variations in understanding are underpinned by individual perceptions of the concept of peace (Paffenholz, 2010). The Brahimi Report defines peacebuilding as "activities undertaken on the far side of the conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace

and provide the tools for building on those foundations something more than just the absence of war." (United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 2000, p. 2) It is also described as a range of measures aimed at reducing the risk of relapsing into conflict by strengthening conflict management capacities at all levels and laying the groundwork for sustainable peace and development (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010). Such measures encompass various reconstruction and reform efforts in fragile, fluid, and unpredictable political environments (International Peace Institute, 2009, p. xii). Peacebuilding is also depicted as an intrinsically methodical and rational concept that includes a variety of perspectives that aspire towards "determining and removing sources of conflict, reconciling parties in conflict as well as addressing or tackling perceived issues that can trigger future conflict" (Adegbami, 2020).

Moreover, viewed from a United Nations perspective, peacebuilding is a multi-phased process that consists of three principal features: national ownership, national capacity, and a common strategy (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010). These conceptions imply that peacebuilding encompasses a broad array of perspectives. It can be argued to be both proactive and reactive, as it is often engaged in anticipatorily or as a form of remedy.

According to Alex McCandless and Erin Bangura, peacebuilding is "a strategic process involving a series of actions targeted at addressing the sources of conflict and supporting the structures and capacities for peace; usually includes a variety of institutional and socioeconomic measures, at the local or national level aimed at institutionalizing peace, building positive peace" (McCandless & Bangura, 2007, p. 101). Additionally, interventions carried out under the umbrella of peacebuilding address various aspects of a social system and are typically designed to address the root causes of conflict (Blagojevic, 2007).

These disparities have tangible implications for practical application. Reflecting on this, it has been suggested, in various quarters, that peacebuilding has evolved beyond its initial foundation centered around the state and liberal perspectives (Belloni, 2019). This shift can be attributed to the increasing prominence of counterterrorism and counter-extremism as pivotal objectives for both national and international institutions, responding to the evolving nature of global security threats. The growing significance of Track Two diplomacy has also contributed to the redefinition of peacebuilding. Devised by Joseph Montville, Track Two diplomacy refers to the range of unofficial interactions aimed at resolving conflicts involving unofficial actors whose legitimacy is tied to the nature of service provision and associated implementation strategies (Abdulrahman & Tar, 2008). Within this context, civil society organizations have become dominant actors. The integration of civil society organizations flows from a growing recognition of the value these organizations possess, especially in terms of resource and knowledge capital (UN Security Council, 2015). Again, civil society organizations are also considered important as they assert a claim to an identity of being representatives of the grassroots, i.e., organizations "representative of, or in touch with, 'the people'" (Orjuela, 2003, p. 197). Peacebuilding is a strategic and multifaceted process aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and supporting the structures necessary for sustainable peace, which often encompasses include contributions from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, outside the structures of state institutions such as civil society organizations, and span local, national, and international levels to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to achieving positive and lasting peace.

Civil Society in Peacebuilding: A Framework and Proposition

The prominence of civil society organizations in peacebuilding processes can be attributed to the diverse array of roles they undertake. These functions are generally aligned with the inherent characteristics of these organizations. As outlined by Paffenholz (2010), civil society organizations assume various roles within the realm of peacebuilding, which can be categorized into seven variables: protection, monitoring, socialization, social cohesion, advocacy, service delivery, and facilitation. These variables can be assessed through the following terms (Paffenholz, 2015):

1. Protection: Ensuring security provision for social systems, often achieved through collaborative efforts. This role is intrinsically driven by the understanding that security forms the foundational requirement for the effective functioning of civil society organizations.

2. Monitoring: Civil society organizations undertake oversight functions, ensuring adherence to decisions and fostering accountability among various actors.

3. Advocacy: These organizations guide actors in conflict situations by influencing agendas and applying pressure to drive change.

4. Socialization: Civil society organizations play a pivotal role in reshaping behaviors within individual and group contexts.

5. Social Cohesion: This function involves reconstructing social relationships and attaining social harmony.

6. Facilitation: Civil society organizations facilitate peace and transition processes, acting as intermediaries to bring conflicting parties together and secure access to areas of disruption to deliver social service programs.

7. Service Delivery: This role primarily applies when state capacity has collapsed or weakened. It is particularly valuable in the context of war-affected societies that require reconstruction.

These concepts provide a useful framework for understanding the participation of civil society organizations in peacebuilding and find support in the literature. As has been argued, civil society organizations can participate in peacebuilding by modifying attitudes towards conflict, transforming the character of conflict from a violent to non-violent phenomenon, mobilizing people for peace through the production of support and application of pressure, helping to construct agreements and developing partnerships for peace (Barnes, 2006). Interestingly, the roles of civil society organisations in peacebuilding does not always conform to a positive inclination. Civil society organisations have demonstrably, under certain circumstances, worked antithetically to peacebuilding programs, generating forms of resistance and non-participation (Edjus & Juncos, 2018). Civil society organizations can actively dissuade mass participation in political processes and engagements with peace building programs when they feel that such initiatives are at odds with the ontological and epistemological considerations of their operations. These dynamics may virtually reflect the circumstances of their formation and establishment. As Orjuela (2003) suggests, through her empirical study of Sri Lanka, civil society organizations that draw their essence and identity from contexts of identitarian politics can transform into militant organizations that impede mass buy-ins to peace processes or transform into what may be described as 'uncivil' entities.

From the previous discussion, it can be hypothesized that: (1). The effectiveness of civil society organizations in peacebuilding is contingent on the extent to which they can fulfil their roles effectively; (2). Civil society organizations are crucial in providing services

in war-affected societies characterized by weakened state capacity, contributing to post-conflict reconstruction; and (3). The participation of civil society organizations in peacebuilding contributes to modifying attitudes towards conflict, promoting a more peaceful environment within conflict-affected regions.

How well do these propositions stand in Africa? This is the focus of attention in the succeeding sections, which present a concise exploration of pertinent case studies.

Case Study Analysis of CSO engagement in peacebuilding

Sierra Leone and Liberia

Civil society organization (CSO) engagement in peacebuilding initiatives in Sierra Leone was influenced by the country's transition from a history scarred by political violence, epitomized by the civil war that ravaged the nation from the late 20th century into the early years of the 21st century. In this context, the involvement of civil society organizations was prompted by the breakdown of state institutions. It was primarily focused on facilitating the logistical network for distributing humanitarian aid provided by international organizations like the United Nations (Lawrence, 2014). This partnership between civil society and the United Nations emerged out of necessity (Heemskerk, 2007). The conflict, resulting from a complex interplay of factors, was fundamentally characterized by the dominance of patrimonialism as the prevailing political paradigm and the marginalization of the youth (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2004).

Given the ongoing threat posed by the unresolved issues surrounding the latter of the two principal factors, much of the engagement of civil society organizations, often in collaboration with international counterparts, has centred on improving the well-being of the youth, ostensibly to mitigate the consequences stemming from their persistent marginalization. This heightened attention resulted in the initiation of approximately 1800 youth-centred projects across the country (Lawrence, 2014). Nevertheless, the landscape of civil society organizations remains a highly fragmented ecosystem comprising various types. Typically, formal non-governmental organizations, indigenous and culturally rooted entities, and community-based groups have constituted the prevalent organizational forms found in Sierra Leone (World Bank, 2007).

Amidst this fractured and diverse landscape, certain "success stories" have emerged due to their ability to "generate local ownership," addressing a criticism often levelled against peacebuilding projects. One such non-governmental organization, Fambul Tok, effectively reconstructed shattered social relationships from the ground up through localized reconciliation initiatives, earning widespread acclaim. According to Datzberger, these initiatives took place in "village ceremonies, around a bonfire, to encourage victims and perpetrators to share war stories, confess to victims, seek forgiveness, and be forgiven." (Datzberger, 2014, p. 53) Essentially, the organization, whose name is derived from the Krio term for "family talk," mainstreamed the local population, particularly those from rural areas, into post-conflict peacebuilding through inclusive and participatory means. This approach utilised culturally specific practices and locally mobilised resources and knowledge systems (Cole, 2012). Consequent upon the transition from conflict, the civil society organisation has focused on institutionalising non-violence, advocating for political tolerance using its community structures, and bringing political factions through dialogues (Civicus, 2023).

Just like Sierra Leone, Liberia's experience with violent conflict has provided a context that has fostered the emergence of civil society

organisations to a position where they have been virtually an omnipresent feature. As a prominent feature of Liberia's political system, civil society organisations have been intimately involved in attempts to further the goals of democratisation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding (Toure, 2002). The post-war landscape was dominated by religious organisations and had an actively gendered outlook, thanks to the emergence of women groups as key players. These groups assumed several functions, from protective to monitoring and advocacy, as well as service delivery (cf. Toure, 2002). Such tendencies are emphasized by initiatives such as Peace Huts, a collaborative programme of Liberian civil society organisations, and initiatives such as run by the Camp for Peace, which was targeted at empowering youths and women to attain active, vocal roles in sustainable peace using socio-economic instruments, including education (GPPAC, 2018).

Tunisia

Coming off the back of a tumultuous period occasioned by the Arab Spring protests, the Tunisian state has proceeded through a political transition. Within this context, civil society organizations have been dominant, prominent actors. Such organizations have various types, including unions, activists, the press, and media organizations (Baker, 2015). Such organizations act locally and in concert with support from external entities. According to the United States Institute of Peace, USIP (2023) has funded a Coalition of Tunisian Facilitators (TCF), offering material and technical resources to grassroots groups to intervene with and resolve conflict drivers and dynamics, with various initiatives focused on preventing violent extremism, transforming relations between young citizens and state security institutions as well as addressing structural drivers and dynamics of conflict (United States Institute of Peace, 2023). Perhaps the greatest contribution of the civil society space in this context is illustrated by the roles played in the transition from dictatorial rule to democratic rule. Drawing on grassroots support, groups such as Tunisian Bar Association and Tunisian League for Human Rights consolidated ranks and worked separately to mediate among disparate political factions, challenge authoritarian political norms and provide protective functions (Hudakova, 2021).

Cote d'Ivoire

Cote d'Ivoire has been a historically fractured, violent society, and a decade of violence terminated in 2011, setting off a string of efforts designed to reconstruct and rebuild the Ivorian society (Babo, 2019). Such efforts have conspicuously featured civil society organisations. A dominant species of these organisations has been non-governmental organizations, mainly religious-based groups such as Aid to the Church in Need ,who have intervened through initiatives designed to facilitate disarmament and actions aimed at recreating social cohesion among the various social groups (Allouche & Jackson, 2019). However, specific civil society organizations had an identity problem, expressed in and informed by difficulties separating civil society organizations from conflict actors. Such an indistinctiveness was described succinctly by Allouche and Jackson (2019) when they contended that communities and armed actors were virtually indistinctive and shared a porous boundary, with “peacebuilders” often attaining access to armed groups ostensibly for concessionary purposes.

A Regurgitation of Discussion

Each of the examined countries' contexts emphasises these organisations' various roles and tasks in peacekeeping and social reconstruction. An examination of these positions through the lens of the seven functions of CSOs reveals how diverse and vital their contributions. Sierra Leone's interaction with CSOs was greatly influenced by the country's tragic history of political violence, particularly the civil war that ravaged

the country from the late twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. In this scenario, the breakdown of state institutions compelled the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs), primarily to facilitate the logistical network for distributing humanitarian supplies provided by international organisations such as the United Nations. This collaboration arose out of necessity, highlighting the facilitative and service delivery functions of CSOs.

Given the ongoing issue of young marginalisation, most of the CSO participation, frequently in partnership with international partners, has focused on improving the well-being of youth. This lobbying resulted in almost 1800 youth-focused programmes around the country. Despite the fragmented organisational landscape, some success stories, such as Fambul Tok's, stand out. Fambul Tok successfully rebuilt social connections through localised reconciliation efforts, which addressed social cohesion by enabling victims and abusers to share their tales, seek forgiveness, and promote mutual understanding. This organisation showed the protective, advocacy, and socialisation functions by encouraging nonviolence and political tolerance through community structures.

Liberia's post-war atmosphere encouraged a strong presence of CSOs, particularly religious organisations and women's groups. These organisations took on protective functions, campaigning for community safety and encouraging peace. Women's organisations, particularly, were critical in monitoring peacekeeping operations and advocating for democratic standards. They also engaged in service delivery, including education and community support, empowering young people and women to assume active roles in peacebuilding.

Following the Arab Spring demonstrations, Tunisia saw a political change largely influenced by civil society organisations. These organisations, which included unions, activists, and media outlets, acted locally with outside assistance. The Coalition of Tunisian Facilitators, backed by the United States Institute of Peace, facilitated conflict resolution by providing resources to grassroots groups. CSOs like the Tunisian Bar Association and the Tunisian League for Human Rights played important roles in mediating between political factions, criticising authoritarian norms, and providing protection and campaigning. These organisations also observed the political transition to ensure it remained democratic.

Cote d'Ivoire's post-conflict operations heavily relied on CSOs, notably religious-based groups, which facilitated disarmament and tried to restore social cohesion among various communities. These organisations, however, frequently grappled with identification issues because the line between civil society and conflict players was weak. Despite these obstacles, some CSOs could campaign for peace and reconciliation, while their proximity to armed groups occasionally jeopardised their protective functions.

Across contexts, CSOs have emerged as critical actors in supporting peacebuilding, advocating for marginalised communities, and providing important services where state capacity is limited. Their ability to operate in demanding circumstances demonstrates their value in promoting stability and social cohesiveness.

Challenges and Prospects of Civil Society Organizations in Peacebuilding

Civil society organizations have encountered several difficulties. Foremost among such difficulties has been the issue of government interference, which has materialized through pushbacks from the government or concerted attempts to manipulate and control such organizations. In Cote d'Ivoire, government control and manipulation significantly altered the civil society organization landscape. This

susceptibility to government control arguably derived from certain dynamics embedded in the political process of the Ivorian society. As Campbell &Fusheini (2006) emphasize it thus, the period following the outbreak of the Ivorian civil war in 2002 had been marked by the co-optation of civil society organizations by the political actors-a trend that followed years of deliberate fragmentation and weakening of the civil society space by the government as well as the politicization triggered by civil society attempts to position itself as a counterweight to political actors. The latter factor arguably triggered apprehension within the government, which was wary of having their roles usurped by civil society organizations (Campbell & Fusheini, 2006) and implicitly had citizen perception of government legitimacy impacted on, therefore. This trend paralleled dynamics in Tunisia, where the Tunisian state pursued a policy of co-opting civil society organisations or suppressing insurgent civil society organisations that attacked the ontological basis of its authority (Hudakova, 2021)

Furthermore, the social ecology within which civil society organisations operate is a prime determinant of the effectiveness of their impact. For women-led organizations, the influence of social-ecological factors is visible in terms of gender 'norms' and 'values' built into social structures. This manifests in several ways. In the first instance, women-led civil society organizations often may find themselves intervening in contexts dominated by partnering institutions that may operate in line with the dictates of masculine, individualistic, competitive, and hierarchical structures (Pankhurst, 2000). In the other sense, effective peacebuilding initiatives must increasingly take cognizance of 'gendered power' relations and social inequalities to attain a comprehensive picture of the causes of conflict on which intervention is made (Anderlini, 2007, p. 29) as well as tailor interventions to fully cater for the nuances in needs of men and women.

Nevertheless, civil society remains a critical actor in peacebuilding. This is because they emphasize the idea of "local ownership" and "inclusivity." Consistently, civil society organizations have a demonstrated ability to generate local ownership in peacebuilding initiatives, as they often utilize culturally specific practices and involve local communities, thereby fostering inclusivity and grassroots involvement. Moreso, some civil society organizations have shown innovative approaches to peacebuilding, such as Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone, utilizing localized reconciliation initiatives. These approaches have received widespread acclaim and have proven effective in reconstructing shattered social relationships.

Noteworthily, women-led civil society organizations have actively participated in peacebuilding efforts, contributing significantly to protective functions, human rights advocacy, and political participation, particularly in countries like Liberia and Somalia. The grassroots-based nature of these organizations allows them to draw on external and internal funding sources. Other than funding from international donor institutions and external entities such as the United States and the United States Institute of Peace, the ability to draw on local sources to implement peacebuilding projects and initiatives.

Civil society is crucial in peacebuilding because it engages local communities, innovates approaches, and advocates for inclusivity. However, overcoming challenges such as government interference and resource constraints and addressing societal norms remains essential to fully realize the potential of civil society in sustainable peacebuilding efforts. Efforts to strengthen the autonomy, capacity, and collaboration among civil society organizations are vital for enhancing their prospects in peacebuilding.

Concluding Notes

It is incontrovertible that peacebuilding has transitioned away from a horizontal endeavour towards a vertically inclined process. A significant change associated with this has been the departure from elitist, state-centric models towards a bottom-up approach distinctive for its emphasis on expanding the space of participation to incorporate diverse organizational forms from the civic space, creating an increased range of opportunities for participation by civil society organizations (Annan et al., 2021). This paper explored this dynamic within the context of peacebuilding in Africa. It considered the diverse ways civil society organisations have engaged in peacebuilding, the types of organizational forms that have engaged, and the factors that explain the variations in experiences of such organizations.

From the discourse, it is visible that the participation of civil society organizations has been defined by dynamism and diversity, such that an assortment of organizations, ranging from formal non-governmental organizations to advocacy coalitions, have featured significantly within the picture. At the same time, there have been noticeable variations in the peacebuilding experiences of civil society organizations in Africa, from political to economic and social dimensions, which collectively imperil the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions. The existence of these challenges necessitates the need for moves and processes that guarantee the autonomy of civil society, develop networks of collaboration, provide enhanced capacity for civil society organizations, and ensure diverse and inclusive representation in peacebuilding. Importantly, it is incumbent on civil society organizations to commit to developing a robust ecosystem of learning, which facilitates knowledge sharing. That said, the ultimate objective should be to empower local communities to build sustainable peace.

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