



From War Economy to Peace Economy: The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Peacebuilding in Sudan

Author: Amro Awad Ali Osman

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- **Email:** sudandemocracy@amelproject.org
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Executive Summary

This study examines the role that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Sudan can play in supporting the peacebuilding process by contributing to the transition from a war economy to a peace economy. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework of war economies, which identifies three primary dimensions: the conflict economy, the shadow economy, and the coping economy. The research particularly focuses on the latter, as the coping economy is most closely linked to the daily lives of conflict-affected communities; it highlights the survival and adaptation mechanisms developed by individuals and groups in the face of violence, displacement, and the collapse of state institutions.

Through a comparative analysis of the war economy models of both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the study illustrates how each model imposes distinct patterns of economic and social pressure on civilians, and the resulting spaces and opportunities for civil society interventions. The research highlights that CSOs—both local and operating in neighboring countries—are navigating a complex environment characterized by state fragility, social fragmentation, and economic interest networks that fuel the war economy.

The study demonstrates that civil society organizations have the capacity to contribute effectively to peacebuilding in Sudan by targeting the coping economy. Rather than treating the informal economic activities of civilians merely as a crisis response, they can be transformed into economic sustainability programs. To achieve this, the study recommends designing vocational training and rehabilitation programs targeting the most affected groups, while facilitating access to microfinance, supporting the industrial sector, and establishing local socio-economic support networks. Additionally, it emphasizes supporting agricultural production and local value chains to bolster both the formal economy and the peace economy.

1. Introduction

Competition over resources is one of the most prominent root drivers of armed conflict in Africa. Political disputes often transform into economic conflicts over the control of fertile land, mineral wealth, or oil, thereby prolonging wars and complicating the prospects for peace (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Sudan is no exception; the economic dimensions of conflict have constituted a part of its long history of warfare (De Waal, 2007), including the current conflict that has been raging since April 2023. The war in Sudan is not merely a political or military struggle; rather, it is fueled by an entrenched war economy. This economy is predicated on the destruction of formal economic structures and the revitalization of informal and illicit markets, evolving into a self-sustaining system from which the warring parties derive significant economic benefits (Ballentine & Nitzschke, 2005; El-Tahir, 2025).

Since the outbreak of the war, the national economy has collapsed sharply. The Sudanese pound has lost its value in the parallel market, while exports declined by 28% and imports by 66% in 2024 compared to 2022. Total losses are estimated at approximately \$108.8 billion, with an economic contraction approaching 42% ("Sudan News", 2025; "Al Jazeera Net", 2025). Amidst this collapse, informal activities—chief among them looting and the gold trade—have become the primary source of financing for the warring parties. Estimates indicate that 80% of gold production is not recorded in official statistics and is smuggled through security and political networks, draining the country's resources to purchase weapons (Soliman & Baldo, 2025).

Conversely, civilians resort to small-scale activities—such as trade, handicrafts, or even artisanal mining—as a means of survival. However, these activities inadvertently contribute to fueling illicit economic networks (Sudan Conflict Monitor, 2023). This highlights the need for a strategic transition from a war economy to a peace economy through interventions that curb the resources financing violence and support civilian alternatives that enhance stability (DCAF, 2005).

This research is divided into several sections. It begins with a literature review and an overview of the theoretical framework. It then moves to an analysis of the dimensions of the war economy in Sudan, followed by an explanation of the concept of peacebuilding through the transition from a war economy to a peace economy during conflict. Finally, it addresses the current roles of civil society amidst the conflict and concludes by presenting a framework and practical recommendations to enable organizations to contribute effectively to the transition toward a peace economy.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The study of war economies is a significant research field that emerged in the mid-1990s (Berdal and Malone 2000). Following the end of the Cold War and the decline in external support for conflicts, the world witnessed a shift in the nature of civil wars towards becoming self-financed, leading to the emergence of the concept of "war economies" (Jean and Rufin 1996). This concept

describes an integrated system in which economic activities, whether licit or illicit, are used to fund military objectives. These economies often rely on the exploitation of lucrative natural resources such as oil, diamonds, and opium (Zartman 2005; Collier 2003).

Although some early literature attempted to simplify conflict drivers into a "greed" versus "grievance" equation (Collier and Hoeffler 2000), subsequent studies have confirmed that these drivers are complex, pointing to the intersection of economic calculations with political and emotional factors (Wennmann 2019). These studies emphasize that violence can become a profitable economic activity for certain actors, and that modern wars are not solely based on ideological agendas but are linked to economic gains that enable armed groups to survive (Goodhand 2004). Studies from the 1990s onwards indicate that many conflicts are self-financing wars, relying on parallel markets and smuggling (Nitzschke and Pachoud 2003). To analyze the economic dynamics of conflicts, Jonathan Goodhand (2004) offers a crucial conceptual framework that classifies war economies into three overlapping dimensions. This framework helps in understanding the different roles of economic actors, the impact of their activities on the conflict's trajectory, and the potential for transition to peace.

First, the Fighting/Conflict Economy: This dimension encompasses all economic interactions that directly support combat. Its main actors are state security apparatuses and rebel groups that use violent means to fund their war efforts (Brummelhorster and Paes 2003). This economy is funded through aggressive activities, such as taxation, control of natural resources, and "customs" at border checkpoints (Nitzschke and Pachoud 2003). The primary goal is to fund war efforts and achieve military objectives, with leaders' interests being primarily profit-driven or authoritarian.

Second, the Shadow Economy: This represents the informal economy that grows outside state control, dominated by opportunistic actors such as mafias and criminals. These "conflict profiteers" exploit chaos and weak laws to expand their illicit activities, such as cross-border smuggling and illicit trafficking (Wennmann 2019). Combatants often co-opt this economy to become the foundation of the combat economy, as in the case of the diamond economy in Sierra Leone which funded the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels (Smillie et al. 2000), or the smuggling economy in Kosovo controlled by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to fund itself (Yanis 2003). This dimension fuels the war by providing resources or a black market for war, and also constitutes an alternative livelihood for populations who have lost their formal jobs (Goodhand 2006).

Third, the Coping Economy: Unlike the previous two dimensions, the coping economy represents economic activities that allow civilian populations to survive. This dimension includes activities such as subsistence farming, petty cross-border trade, and remittances from the diaspora (Mwanasali 2000). It emerges as part of survival mechanisms when the formal economy collapses and traditional livelihoods are destroyed, providing a lifeline for thousands of people forced to engage in conflict-linked activities that contribute to fueling it—not out of greed, but

out of necessity (Goodhand 2004). Failure to distinguish between the interests of "conflict profiteers" and the motivations of "survivors" relying on the coping economy can lead to harmful interventions that increase civilian suffering while boosting the profits of combatants.

Researchers define civil society as a network of non-governmental organizations and grassroots movements situated between the state, the family, and the market (Parver, Corinne, and Rebecca Wolf 2008). In the context of transitioning from a war economy to a peace economy, civil society plays a pivotal role, especially in fragile and conflict-affected states where state institutions are weak or non-existent (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006). This role extends beyond providing humanitarian relief to contributing to sustainable peacebuilding on both economic and social levels. The role of civil society organizations can be analyzed according to the three dimensions of war economies:

- * The Coping Economy (The Major Role): Civil society's contribution is largely concentrated in this dimension. Given that the coping economy is the lifeline for conflict-affected populations, civil society organizations work to enhance sustainable livelihoods and transform survival mechanisms into productive economic activities independent of the conflict (Goodhand 2006). This includes providing humanitarian aid, supporting local agriculture, providing vocational training, and funding micro-projects. Through these activities, these organizations contribute to building "social capital," strengthening bonds between community members, and providing support networks in the absence of government structures (World Bank 2020). These efforts help individuals cope with conflict conditions in ways that do not increase reliance on war economies, laying the foundation for economic recovery after the fighting ends.

- * The Shadow Economy (A Relatively Significant Role): Civil society contributes to this dimension by working to dismantle its criminal networks. Due to the difficulty of direct intervention in this informal economy, organizations can work to raise awareness about the dangers of engaging in illicit activities and contribute to promoting transparency and accountability, thereby curbing the corruption that allows the shadow economy to grow and thrive (Wennmann 2019). Most importantly, organizations can reduce the appeal of joining organized crime networks by providing legal economic alternatives through support for the coping economy (Zartman 2005).

- * The Combat Economy (A Relatively Minor Role): Although civil society's role in this dimension is less direct, it remains important. Organizations can work to dismantle the combat economy through monitoring and advocacy, and by pressuring international actors to investigate conflict financing sources, such as the illicit trade in resources (Berdal and Malone 2000). They also contribute to Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs to help former combatants engage in alternative economic activities, reducing the appeal of returning to violence (Goodhand 2006).

These roles demonstrate that civil society's contribution is not limited to providing relief, but extends to addressing the economic root causes of conflict, especially by focusing on

empowering civilian populations and transforming wartime survival mechanisms into foundations for establishing sustainable peace (World Bank 2020). The success of the transition to a peace economy depends fundamentally on civil society's ability to offer economic and normative alternatives to citizens. The more organizations succeed in this endeavor, the more likely the transition from a war economy to a peace economy becomes (Zartman 2005).

3. War Economies in Sudan

Understanding war economies in Sudan requires analyzing a complex network of interests, as formal funding overlaps with informal activities, both of which exploit the survival mechanisms developed by civilians. This dynamic is clearly evident across Goodhand's three dimensions of war economy, allowing for an analysis of both the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to understand their funding sources and economic interests in the conflict.

Sudan Armed Forces (SAF):

The SAF relies primarily on its control over state assets and institutions to fund its war, which grants it a significant advantage. Its economic power rests on a vast portfolio of companies with roots dating back to the Bashir era, encompassing sectors such as telecommunications, banking, real estate, and aviation services (Linden, 2024; Elnur, 2008). These companies form part of the army's combat economy and operate within a formal framework, providing it with direct resources. Port Sudan, through which over 90% of Sudan's international (formal) trade passes, is the hub of this strategy (Jamal, 2024); the army's control over it enables the collection of significant fees and taxes (Soliman and Demissie, 2024), in addition to controlling humanitarian aid flows as another source of revenue, alongside proceeds from its gold mining companies such as "Sudan Master Technology," "Aswar," and "Sabika" (Chatham House, 2025).

The shadow economy within the SAF appears in its reliance on informal networks, particularly through gold smuggling to fund its operations (Chatham House, 2025). Although the government companies announced that official production in 2024 reached 64.36 tons valued at \$1.6 billion, recorded exports to Egypt did not exceed \$16.3 million. In contrast, estimates indicate that smuggling to Egypt accounts for about 60% of the production from the Northern, River Nile, and Red Sea states, amounting to over 100 kilograms daily—or more than 60 tons since the outbreak of the war (Sudan Tribune, 2025; Chatham House, 2025). Gold smuggling serves as a strategic tool to bolster regional alliances, granting Egypt short-term interests in the conflict's continuation (Chatham House, 2025). Beyond gold, the shadow economy is also evident in other smuggling activities and the production and export of certain resources, including sesame and livestock in SAF-controlled areas (Soliman and Demissie, 2024).

The army also benefits from the civilian coping economy by controlling roads and ports and imposing informal fees at checkpoints (Soliman and Demissie, 2024); traders and drivers are

forced to pay sums to transport their goods, and fees are imposed on fuel transport via desert routes to Libya, varying by route (Qantara.de, 2025). These payments, borne by civilians to secure their needs, are a direct source of income for the army (Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker, 2025). The army also profits from the humanitarian crisis by charging high fees to organizations for work permits, in addition to extortion at checkpoints. Reports indicate that some of these organizations contract with army-affiliated companies to lease vehicles or buildings (Mercy Corps, 2023).

Rapid Support Forces (RSF):

The RSF's combat economy rests on an economic empire linked to the Dagalo family and its companies, most notably "Al-Junaid" (Alquds.co.uk, 2023; Craze and Makawi, 2025). These companies control strategic resources, especially gold, which has been its financial lifeline (Global Witness, 2019). Before the war broke out, the RSF exported mercenaries to the war in Yemen and controlled key mines such as Jebel Amer (Chatham House, 2025), in addition to exporting livestock and gum Arabic. Estimates now indicate that its gold production reached about 10 tons in 2024 from areas under its control, which was and continues to be smuggled to the United Arab Emirates—the destination for most of Sudan's gold—making the UAE a key actor (with short-term interests) in the continuation of the war (Chatham House, 2025). The RSF economy also includes high-value looting, such as the seizure of government headquarters and banks in Khartoum, as well as the Sudan Gold Refinery, which contained 1.3 tons of unrefined gold worth \$150 million (ACJPS, 2023; Craze and Makawi, 2025).

Organized looting represents the cornerstone of the RSF's shadow economy, as its fighters have been granted a "license to loot" since 2023 to compensate for wage cuts (Craze and Makawi, 2025). This led to the emergence of "Dagalo markets," such as the "Mayo" market south of Khartoum, where stolen goods are sold at cheap prices (Alquds.co.uk, 2023; Ultra Sudan, 2023). These markets became popularly known as "Shafshafa markets" (markets for looted goods) and became part of a system managed by RSF commanders and armed intermediaries (ACJPS, 2023). These forces also control the livestock trade in some markets and impose informal taxes (Accord.org.za, 2024), in addition to participating in gum Arabic smuggling from Darfur and Kordofan, generating significant revenue (UN Security Council, 2025). Thus, the interplay between informal and organized activities fuels its war machine.

The civilian coping economy in RSF-controlled areas intersects with its activities through the imposition of taxes and informal fees on movement and the transport of goods (Accord.org.za, 2024), as well as imposing transit fees on organizations carrying humanitarian aid, or even intercepting and looting them (Mercy Corps, 2023). Thereby, the RSF benefits, directly and indirectly, from civilian activities and livelihoods. This intersection is the result of a systematic strategy, as the RSF has worked since the outbreak of the war to destroy the formal economy and

replace it with a new political economy based on looting and violence (Craze and Makawi, 2025).

The Interplay Between the Three Dimensions of War Economy

The three dimensions of the war economy overlap closely within the army; formal state revenues represent the direct combat economy that funds its military machine and provides foreign currency to secure regional support and purchase weapons. Smuggling and corruption activities, primarily gold smuggling, embody an overlap between the shadow economy and the combat economy, as informal resources turn into a major source of war funding. Conversely, the "Army Support" campaigns (Nafrah) imposed on the industrial sector to support the army, along with informal fees levied on civilians and humanitarian organizations at checkpoints, show another overlap between the coping economy and the combat economy, where civilian survival mechanisms are transformed into revenues supporting military operations (Amro Osman, 2025). As for the Rapid Support Forces, their economic empire is based primarily on looting, followed by gold, gum arabic, and livestock, providing the necessary liquidity to fund the war. The "license to loot" granted by the RSF to its fighters as a means to pay wages and buy weapons is also a direct overlap between the shadow economy and the combat economy. On the other hand, the markets established to sell looted goods (such as Dagalo markets), which civilians utilize to buy goods at cheap prices (coping economy), are part of the shadow economy controlled by the RSF, while it also benefits from taxes it imposes on supply chains.

4. Comparison of the War Economies of the SAF and the RSF

An analysis of the war economy models of both parties reveals a fundamental difference in conflict philosophy. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) seeks to preserve economic legitimacy, relying on the state budget and a vast network of affiliated companies, in addition to front companies operating in vital sectors. Its model is predicated on resource extraction through institutional and semi-official channels, while demonstrating a relative commitment to maintaining certain formal economic activities, such as markets and civil service salaries. Conversely, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) economy represents a predatory model designed to undermine the formal economy and supplant it with a war economy grounded in organized looting and resource control. This model relies on the smuggling of gold, gum arabic, and livestock through complex international networks to finance the war and procure arms, concurrent with the destruction of banks, factories, and state institutions, filling the void with a parallel economy. Consequently, this results in distinct patterns of civilian suffering: in SAF-controlled areas, civilians face a slow economic collapse, whereas in RSF-controlled areas, they are subjected to direct predation on their property and lives.

Comparative Table of War Economies

Comparative Aspect	Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) Economy	Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Economy
Primary Revenue Sources	State budget, a network of military-owned civilian companies, and resources such as gold and sesame.	Systematic looting and theft, seizure of assets, and the trade and smuggling of gold, gum arabic, and livestock.
Economic Model	Institutional / Parasitic: Relies on draining state resources and its formal and semi-formal institutions while maintaining their structure.	Predatory / Extractive: Relies on destroying formal institutions, looting fixed assets, and exploiting natural resources to provide independent and sustainable funding sources.
Impact on the Formal Economy	Partial disruption of institutions and diversion of resources, but with attempts to maintain some formal economic functions.	Comprehensive destruction of financial institutions, factories, and commercial centers, leading to a complete collapse of the formal economy.
Primary Beneficiaries	Military commanders, affiliated companies, and subordinate political and economic elites.	RSF commanders, its recruits, and international networks involved in smuggling.
Impact on Civilians	Suffering from deteriorating public services, cessation of economic activities in combat zones, and high rates of unemployment and inflation.	Direct looting of private property, imposition of forced mobilization policies or ransom demands, and lack of food security and basic services.

5. Transition from War Economy to Peace Economy

A peace economy refers to economic activities that flourish in a stable and secure environment; it is the antithesis of a war economy, which is predicated on violence, looting, and instability. In Sudan, the peace economy represents the foundation for a sustainable future, encompassing agriculture, industry, and services such as transport, telecommunications, and tourism, all of which are directly affected by stability. The peace economy is linked to the formal economy through government institutions, financial systems, and legislation that protects investments and ensures a safe environment for trade, unlike the illicit and informal war economy. Therefore, the peace economy is considered the true engine for growth, development, and the creation of sustainable job opportunities.

Currently, political economy analysis indicates that warring parties and regional states (UAE, Egypt, Chad, CAR, Ethiopia, and South Sudan) benefit from the continuation of the war in the near term, as the war economy constitutes a key factor in their utility (Chatham House, 2025; Craze and Makawi, 2025). Therefore, stopping the war or building peace requires a strategic transition from a war economy to a peace economy through active interventions during the conflict that undermine activities fueling the war and support peace alternatives. Peace cannot be achieved by political or military solutions alone, but through a comprehensive process of economic peacebuilding that makes war more costly than peace for actors currently benefiting from it, as they view a just peace as a threat to their direct or indirect interests.

Civil society organizations alone cannot stop the war and build peace in Sudan, but they can effectively contribute to peacebuilding by transitioning from a war economy to a peace economy. Their primary role in this strategic transition should focus on the coping economy, given that these organizations are close to local communities and possess good operational space. In this dimension, work should not be limited to preventing or reducing citizen participation in the coping economy (which fuels the war economy), but must integrate them into the peace economy to expand the base of beneficiaries who have a direct interest in its sustainability. This contributes to raising the cost of war and lowering the costs of peace. It is worth noting that this research focuses solely on the role of these organizations in this specific dimension, while their direct and indirect contributions to countering other dimensions of the war economy remain outside the scope of this study and require in-depth research to elucidate their full impact.

6. Civil Society Interventions and Their Role¹

Preliminary data from interviews with civil society organizations, in addition to an analysis of their activity reports, show that none of these organizations have incorporated the war economy or political economy analysis into their contextual approach. This deficiency is one of the most

¹ All primary data cited in this section were drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of civil society organizations, as detailed in the interview annex at the end of this paper.

prominent reasons for the weak effectiveness of their interventions in peacebuilding, as their focus is often on the immediate symptoms of the conflict (displacement, hunger, and human rights violations) rather than addressing the economic structure fueling it. The absence of this dimension causes interventions to revolve in a vicious cycle, preventing the transition to an alternative peace economy based on legitimate production, equitable wealth distribution, and the creation of livelihood opportunities outside the circle of violence.

Alongside this analytical deficiency, organizations face a structural challenge related to reliance on external funding (which is diminishing day by day) and the accompanying competition for limited resources. This competition fragments efforts and weakens coordination, whereas the complex Sudanese context naturally requires building strategic partnerships that move beyond the logic of "individual projects" toward integrative and strategic cooperation. This would allow each organization to leverage the expertise and capabilities of others to achieve a broader and more sustainable impact.

The data also reveals a weak reliance on evidence-based research in designing interventions; many organizations, especially those working under general headings such as "peacebuilding" or "empowerment," lack in-depth research to understand the context and identify the most effective leverage points. This lack leads to interventions that are less context-sensitive and harder to measure in terms of results and impact. The matter is further complicated by the significant scarcity of studies regarding the war economy in Sudan—a knowledge gap that civil society, thanks to its field presence, can help bridge to serve all actors and their shared goals.

Finally, the analysis indicates that the private sector represents a crucial factor that has not yet been invested in. While part of it engages in activities linked to the war economy, another part—aligned with its own interests—seeks stability and growth, and possesses the resources and expertise to be a strategic partner for civil society. Building bridges of cooperation with this sector can open new funding sources, create job opportunities for youth, and constitute an economic and political pressure force for peace. Ignoring this actor means losing a strategic opportunity to achieve shared goals.

Work Outside Sudan

For organizations working outside Sudan and focusing their interventions on Sudanese in countries such as Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, etc., two integrated dimensions should be considered in program design and implementation: first, linking the host country context to the war context in Sudan, particularly the war economy; and second, directing interventions to contribute more effectively to building a peace economy. By virtue of their positioning outside Sudan, these organizations enjoy a wider operational space that can be utilized in areas such as enhancing transparency and accountability, monitoring and advocacy, and pressuring international actors to investigate the war economy and its funding sources, such as illicit trade in Sudan's various resources.

Preliminary data indicated the limited effectiveness of organization interventions; however, some of these interventions, despite their small size, left a positive impact on the broader context linked to the war economy. For example, the activities of the "Youth for Peace Initiative," which included a health support project for Sudanese refugees in Egypt, contributed to a small but tangible impact on the social level of peacebuilding. It provided essential health services, reduced economic burdens on families, and helped reduce refugees' reliance on coping economic activities. Despite its small scale and lack of sustainability, this impact was more effective relative to its size, limited resources, and costs.

Conversely, interventions by the "Youth Network for Stopping the War and Civil Democratic Transformation," such as the "Egypt Art Exhibition"—despite its success in attracting a diverse audience and sparking important discussions on war and peace through paintings and documentaries—had higher costs, while its direct impact on reducing refugees' contribution to the war economy remained relatively weak compared to the "Youth for Peace" initiative.

To illustrate the importance of integrating the war economy into the analysis of activities of organizations working in Egypt, the following analysis can be considered: It is estimated that gold smuggled into Egypt accounts for about 60% of gold produced in the Red Sea, Northern, and River Nile states (Sudan's most productive states). Sudanese smugglers sell gold for local Egyptian currency, which is then recycled in the parallel market (black market) through Sudanese residents/refugees in Egypt in exchange for Sudanese currency. These refugees represent the primary demand for Egyptian currency, offering Sudanese currency (often via the Bankak application) to obtain it. Thus, the smuggler benefits twice: once from smuggling and selling gold, and again from repurchasing Sudanese currency, while these operations feed the war economy, directly or indirectly, through complex networks.

The three dimensions of the war economy clearly intersect in this analysis: First, gold smuggling and sales fall under the combat economy if production originates from companies owned by the Armed Forces. Second, if produced by entities not directly linked to warring parties, it falls under the shadow economy. Third, the coping economy appears in the demand created by civilians for Egyptian currency to purchase their needs in exchange for Sudanese currency in the black market.

Based on this analysis, civil society organizations in Egypt can design activities that reduce Sudanese reliance on the black market. For instance, they can work in two integrated fields: vocational training, followed by employment. A significant opportunity exists for this, especially with the relocation of part of the Sudanese industrial sector to Egypt, allowing it to utilize Sudanese labor residing there. These activities are characterized by sustainability in the short and medium term, as they reduce the Sudanese contribution to the war economy via the coping economy. Furthermore, the impact of these activities extends beyond the coping economy to include the other two dimensions (combat economy and shadow economy), because reducing demand in the black market raises smuggling costs and weakens its viability for beneficiaries.

This may drive smugglers to seek hard currencies, such as the dollar, instead of Egyptian currency, thereby reducing the profits they reap and subsequently increasing the cost of war for warring parties compared to the cost of peace.

Civil Work inside Sudan

The comparison between the war economy models of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) reveals a fundamental difference in the nature of civil interventions. In army-controlled areas, where a parasitic character prevails—based on draining state resources and official institutions—some manifestations of the formal economy remain. This reality makes civil interventions more capable of contributing to building a peace economy by supporting the fragile official spaces that still exist. Conversely, in RSF-controlled areas, which follow a predatory model relying on destroying institutions and replacing them with an organized looting economy, most humanitarian and civil interventions turn into direct tributaries to the war economy by nature.

This disparity forces civil organizations to abandon the "one-size-fits-all" approach and adopt what can be termed "economic sensitivity" in program design. If the RSF economy is based on looting and imposing taxes at checkpoints, then bringing in external aid via trucks may directly contribute to financing "militia" activities through transit fees. However, if the aid organization purchases from local producers in relatively safe areas, it supports the peace economy and creates an economic space independent of war profits. This type of intervention reduces the attractiveness of violence and raises the cost of its continuation.

In the context of work inside Sudan, the "Mashish Adila" project for micro-grants and loans, implemented by the "Adila" organization, stands out as a different experience in the nature of its interventions. This model is based on small, flexible grants directed directly to grassroots initiatives, emerging community organizations, and active individuals. Experience has proven, in the period between 2020 and 2024, that funding over 552 initiatives and activities contributed to empowering marginalized groups, particularly youth and women. It created a tangible impact in enhancing social capital through community dialogues and youth engagement programs that helped reduce levels of violence. This intervention was not merely a tool for financial support, but a mechanism to activate local energies and grant them the ability to design context-appropriate responses. This was evident in the ability of more than half of the beneficiaries to sustain their activities or find alternative funding sources after the grants ended. Furthermore, the networking strategy led by "Adila" enabled initiatives to operate in highly security-sensitive areas and enhanced their presence and influence on community cohesion. However, it can be said that the project did not yet sufficiently incorporate political economy into its context analysis. It focused primarily on the social dimension, whereas it would have been possible to direct part of this support toward economic projects, entrepreneurship initiatives, or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the communities themselves. Such an

approach would have created direct economic interests linked to peace and stability, establishing an organized economic class that benefits from security and seeks to protect it. This, in turn, would contribute to expanding the base of the peace economy by providing new job opportunities and enhancing productive activity, thereby reducing the benefits of war and raising the cost of its continuation. The success of such a model demonstrates that building a peace economy requires combining the enhancement of social capital with the encouragement of productive economic activity, so that social and economic interests intersect in support of sustainable peace.

The "Strengthening Community Resilience" project, implemented by Mercy Corps in the states of Kassala, River Nile, and Northern State (in partnership with the Sadagaat organization in Northern State), represents a prominent model of how to transform the coping economy into a driver for sustainable growth in relatively safe areas. Instead of settling for traditional humanitarian aid, which may indirectly contribute to fueling the war economy, the project adopts a developmental approach aimed at building resilient and climate-smart food systems. The project relies on developing specific agricultural value chains, such as sorghum and wheat, through three main components: first, enhancing agricultural production and resilience by providing inputs and training to agricultural associations; second, supporting value addition through cash grants to SMEs working in storage, packaging, and wrapping; and third, expanding and strengthening consumer cooperative societies to create direct links between producers and consumers.

This model reveals a deep understanding of economic dynamics in the context of war. Rather than distributing ready-made food, the project focuses on empowering farmers to produce their own food, thereby enhancing communities' capacity for self-sufficiency. Most importantly, it does not stop at focusing on agricultural production but extends to supporting value chains by funding SMEs, creating an integrated economic cycle independent of the war economy. Thus, the project constitutes a counter-force to the predatory model based on looting and the parasitic model based on draining state resources, by building a legitimate productive economy that establishes the foundations for sustainable economic recovery supporting stability and peace.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Although this research focused primarily on the role of Sudanese civil society organizations in the coping economy, their contributions extend to include other dimensions of the war economy, but these are outside the scope of this study.

The preceding analysis shows that these organizations are required to integrate the political economy analysis of the war and the concept of transitioning from a war economy to a peace economy into their reading of the local context. This analysis should become an integral part of designing and implementing various interventions, even those that do not appear directly linked

to peacebuilding or political and economic tracks. Every intervention, regardless of its size or field, leaves a long-term impact that can contribute to reinforcing either the war economy or the peace economy, negatively or positively. To achieve greater effectiveness, these organizations must move beyond the logic of narrow competition and move toward cooperation and establishing strategic partnerships that allow for the harmonization and integration of efforts, thereby multiplying collective impact and raising the level of effectiveness.

There is also a clear need to establish research units or teams within these organizations dedicated to enhancing the context-sensitivity of interventions and developing them based on evidence, alongside conducting in-depth studies on the war economy in Sudan, a field that still suffers from a clear deficiency. In the same context, building strategic relationships with the private sector is pivotal due to its role in supporting the goals of sustainable peace and development. As for organizations with declared political goals, they should make achieving a peace economy a direct objective of their programs by enhancing transparency and accountability, expanding monitoring and advocacy efforts, and pressuring international actors to investigate the war economy and its funding sources, including illicit trade in Sudan's resources. The comparison between the war economy of the Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces shows that the effectiveness of civil and humanitarian interventions varies according to the context. In army-controlled areas, interventions can contribute to building a peace economy by supporting the fragile official economy. Meanwhile, organizations operating in RSF-controlled areas must minimize their interventions to the necessary limit and design them cautiously to reduce the benefit these forces derive from them, while being careful to strengthen the local formal market. Accordingly, interventions must be designed with an awareness of this difference.

Specific Recommendations

1. Support Vocational and Transformational Training Projects Civil support programs must shift toward funding vocational training projects that lead to a tangible transformation in the lives of individuals and communities, giving them a direct interest in the sustainability of peace. This type of training should focus on two main tracks: first, training individuals and communities in specific crafts and professions that contribute to local production, such as carpentry, blacksmithing, electricity, and appliance repair ; and second, equipping individuals with skills that directly help them find work or engage in productive sectors within the formal economy and peace economy, such as the industrial and agricultural sectors.

The goal of this dual approach is to directly link individuals to legitimate and sustainable economic pathways, creating tangible material interests for them in stability and security.

Providing sustainable job opportunities and establishing real professions reduces the attractiveness of joining armed groups that rely on the war economy. The more the cost of war increases for the individual and society, and the value of peace rises, the more realistic and sustainable the shift toward a peace economy becomes. This approach contributes to building an

economic base that opposes violence and works to protect the economic gains achieved under stability.

2. Support Agricultural Production and Develop Value Chains Organizations must focus on supporting agricultural production to increase its volume. This support should not be limited to distributing seeds and equipment only, but must follow a comprehensive model, such as the "Strengthening Community Resilience" project. This model focuses on three key components:

- **Enhancing Production:** Providing agricultural inputs and training agricultural associations to increase production and enhance resilience against climate change.
- **Supporting Value Addition:** Providing cash grants to small and medium-sized enterprises working in storage, packaging, and wrapping, which adds value to crops and increases farmers' income.
- **Creating Market Linkages:** Expanding and supporting consumer cooperative societies to establish direct links between producers and consumers.

This approach not only enhances food security and secures self-sufficiency but also creates an integrated economic cycle independent of the war economy. Supporting agricultural value chains helps revitalize the local market in conflict-affected areas, increasing market volume and contributing to reconstruction and the return of civil life.

3. Support Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Civil projects must direct part of their support to the private sector, particularly entrepreneurship and SMEs, which have a direct interest in stability and security. This support can be provided through small, flexible grants, similar to the "Mashish Adila" project experience, but with a strategic orientation toward economic projects with a direct interest in stability. Supporting this organized economic class aims to:

- **Create Material Interests:** Link the success of these projects directly to peace, prompting them to act as guardians of stability.
- **Provide Job Opportunities:** SMEs have the capacity to employ large numbers of individuals, broadening the base of the peace economy and reducing the cost of peace.
- **Build a Peace-Beneficiary Class:** Establish a socio-economic class with a vested interest in sustainable security, which is then prepared to contribute effectively to peacebuilding efforts and opposing violence.

This approach combines enhancing social capital with encouraging productive economic activity, ensuring that social and economic interests intersect in the direction of supporting sustainable peace.

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Interview Annex

Interview Order	Entity / Organization	Date
First Interview	Member of the Sudanese Youth Network to End War and Establish Civil Democratic Transformation	August 25, 2025
Second Interview	Member of the Youth for Peace Initiative	August 29, 2025
Third Interview	Member of Development Hope Organization	August 31, 2025
Fourth Interview	Member of Waey Organization	September 2, 2025
Fifth Interview	Member of the Youth Rights Movement	September 5, 2025
Sixth Interview	Member of the Sudanese Initiative to Stop the War and Build Peace	September 8, 2025
Seventh Interview	Member of Fikra for Studies and Development	September 8, 2025
Eighth Interview	Member of Adeela Organization	September 10, 2025
Ninth Interview	Member of Sadagaat Organization	September 17, 2025