

Efficacy of existing conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in resolving the persistent inter-ethnic conflict between the refugees from Dinka and Nuer community in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyi Settlement, Kenya. The study was descriptive and evaluative research designs under the Conflict transformation theory and interpretivist approach. The target groups included Dinka and Nuer refugees, community leaders, peace practitioners, religious leaders, government security forces, humanitarian organisations and other stakeholders in conflict management in Kakuma and Kalobeyi. The sample population of 384 participants was obtained through stratified random sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) for quantitative data and thematic data analysis (coding, categorisation, developing themes) for qualitative data. It was found that inter-ethnic conflicts continue as a result of fear, insecurity, trauma and youth violence, competition for limited resources and historical grievances from South Sudan. Mistrust, lack of resources, institutional capacity, cultural barriers and low youth participation were all challenges for the efficacy of traditional mediation, peace committees, dialogue forums, security interventions, and psychosocial support and youth empowerment, all of which led to better community cohesion (73%) and trust (66%). The research findings show that, sustainable peace is dependent on coordinated, inclusive, long-term approaches to conflict management, which address conflict root causes, resource allocation justice, enhance trust and involve youth in peacebuilding. The study recommends that youth should be more involved in Peacebuilding by having them in decision making, leadership and peace committees, as well as youth mentorship, leadership development and peer mediation programmes. It also calls for better coordination between humanitarian actors, government bodies and community actors in the form of joint planning, frequent and regular coordination and information sharing processes to improve efficiency of conflict management coordination processes.

Keywords: Conflict Management Strategies, Dinka, Inter Ethnic Conflict, Kakuma, Nuer, Refugees

I. INTRODUCTION

The global refugee population reached approximately 46 million by 2022, with major refugee groups including Syrians, Venezuelans, Rohingya, Ukrainians, and South Sudanese. As more and more refugees have been displaced, the nature of the conflict has shifted to host countries, and where resources are limited and institutions are weak, competition and creating a 'new' population of refugees can be a source of conflict too ([United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees]UNHCR, 2023). Lebanon, in the Middle East, has faced increasing sectarianism among its refugee population, and Palestinian refugee camps are still severely overcrowded, impoverished and plagued by political conflicts. To date, however, there is limited research that examines the effectiveness of long-term conflict management interventions (Nilsson & Badran 2021; Knudsen, 2009; Tarnas et al., 2024) and the existing studies tend to concentrate on the causes of conflict.

In the same way, there are tensions in Bangladesh regarding the competition for land and jobs, and access to public services, which are experienced by Rohingya refugees, but of which few studies have focused on sustainable conflict management processes that foster social cohesion (Milton et al., 2017; Eluère, 2023). The Bosnian refugee experience in Europe showed that historical ethnic divisions and trauma still affected peaceful co-existence despite efforts of integration, and there was little evidence to show that any peacebuilding strategies worked to improve the long-term peacebuilding process.

Historical grievances, ethnic divisions and competition for limited resources have also caused refugee conflicts among Liberians in Nigeria, Congolese in Burundi and refugees in Uganda in Africa. Although such drivers have been

identified in previous studies, there remains a lack of empirical evidence that interventions to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion (SPSC) are effective (Najjuma, 2011; Uzuegbunam, & Nwofia, 2014; . Tella, 2018).

In Kenya, despite the deployment of a number of peace-building and development programmes – including community policing, talk show, civic education, youth engagement and capacity development – by humanitarian actors and governments – the recurring clashes between Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp have continued. Lack of appropriate coordination among stakeholders, lack of proper integration of humanitarian and development efforts and lack of addressing structural drivers of conflict (World Health Organization, 2025) have been cited as reasons for the persistence of violence. The literature has shown that the root causes of refugee conflicts are ethnic divisions, historical grievances, resource lack and weak institutional coordination. Most studies tend to focus on the causes of conflict and fail to examine conflict management strategies for their effectiveness and sustainability. The gap is the basis for the current study which focuses on the efficacy of the conflict management strategies for the Dinka and Nuer refugees in the Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya (UNHCR, 2023).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Inter-ethnic conflict has become a significant issue for refugee camps as a humanitarian challenge and security concern. While refugee camps are created to protect refugees from violence, many refugees are still subjected to violence, due to unaddressed ethnic, political and historical grievances that they brought with them from their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2024). The tension between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups that has been observed in South Sudan has also spilled over to refugee camps in neighboring countries, such as Kenya (Juma, 2000). In Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement, South Sudanese refugees constitute about 58% of the population, who form the largest ethnic group (UNHCR, 2023). While not everyone is involved in violence, some members and groups of these communities have been involved in repeated cycles of violence, leading to deaths, injuries, destruction, psychological harm, and disruption of schooling and a diminished sense of community belonging. According to UNHCR Protection Monitoring (2017) 74% of recorded ethnic violence was between the Dinka and Nuer and International Rescue Committee (2021) recorded more than 150 conflict incidents in one year resulting in at least 26 deaths and over 300 injuries.

Mediation, peace dialogues, community policing, psychosocial support, youth participation and peace committees are some of the interventions that have been implemented in response to these challenges by the Government of Kenya, UNHCR, humanitarian agencies, and refugee communities. These efforts have not succeeded in eliminating inter-ethnic conflict, however, and there are concerns that current conflict management strategies are not working. Most previous studies have concentrated on refugee protection, humanitarian assistance, livelihoods (Betts et al., 2026) and less on the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in addressing the persistent conflict between Dinka and Nuer in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement. As a result there is limited empirical evidence on effective interventions and on factors that impact sustainable peace and social cohesion. The study thus assessed the effectiveness of the conflict management strategies in resolving inter-ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in order to provide evidence to inform policy formulation and enhance Peacebuilding interventions in refugee environment.

1.2 Research Objective

The overall objective of the study was to examine the efficacy and effectiveness of existing conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Conflict Transformation Theory.

2.1.1 Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory is a theory of conflict that is rooted in John Paul Lederach, and it is a comprehensive theory of conflict. Conflict transformation is different from conflict resolution (the process of ending conflict), and conflict management (the process of managing the intensity of the conflict), in that it aims to change the personal, relational, structural and cultural contexts which perpetuate violence (Lederach, 2014). The theory sees conflict as a natural part of human relationships that can stimulate positive change when it is dealt with constructively. Conflict can thus be a catalyst for better relations, social integration, institutional change and social justice. This view is especially relevant to the Dinka-Nuer conflict, as it moves beyond a reductionist approach to violence suppression to a focus on changing the dynamics that give rise to it.

One of the key tenets of the theory is the shift of relationships between conflicting groups. According to Lederach (2003), conflict has a negative impact on relationships, communication, perceptions of the self and the other;

therefore, sustainable peace needs to involve a re-building of the relationships. The same principles were promoted by Mitchell (2002), who highlights the importance of building relationships of trust, empathy, dialogue and respect between individuals and parties to break the cycle of conflict and forge a cooperative rather than adversarial relationship. Structured and trauma-informed dialogue with Dinka and Nuer elders, women and youth can create space for sharing experiences, recognizing suffering and challenging hostile stories in Kakuma. There is potential to enhance these through cultural activities and community based initiatives, especially those supported by trusted local mediators (Lederach, 2014; Mac Ginty, 2022). This relational approach is a practical example of what Catholic sisters do in Kakuma, helping to build peace by supporting dialogue and counselling/reconciliation between Dinka and Nuer refugees (Benyera, 2019).

The theory also focuses on the transformation of structural and cultural conditions which cause conflict. In the case of sustainable peace, Lederach (1997) and Miall (2004) contend that inequalities, power imbalances, negative attitudes and institutional structures that perpetuate violence must be addressed. Historical and political grievances are not the only issues affecting the tensions between the Dinka-Nuer in Kakuma, however; there are also competition for resources in the community, including for livelihoods, education, water and shelter. Conflict transformation can thus contribute to the development of programmes that facilitate and foster equitable resource access and mutual economic pursuits such as savings clubs, agricultural endeavours and vocational training, which are often conflict-sensitive (Okpara & Yunus 2026).). These can help to alleviate material concerns and foster frequent contact and collaboration between the two communities.

The multi-level and inclusive aspect of transformation is another key principle. Lederach (1997) suggests interventions at a personal, relational, structural and cultural level and engages grassroots communities, middle-level actors and political elites. Together, Dinka and Nuer refugees, leaders of refugees, religious leaders, humanitarian organizations, UNHCR, camp administrators, police and government authorities must cooperate in Kakuma to achieve sustainable transformation. It also highlights the need for peacebuilding to be locally driven and not driven by outsiders. In order to transform, continuous engagement is required, as transformation is a long term process that involves ongoing dialogue, reconciliation, institutional change and adaptation to new situations (Lederach, 2003). The theory has, therefore, been put to use in community, inter-ethnic and post-conflict peacebuilding settings (Bloomfield et al., 2003; Mac Ginty, 2022).

Conflict Transformation Theory is very relevant to this study as it allows for the examination of whether current conflict management practice in Kakuma is more than just preventing violent escalation; it is also shifting the relationships, structures and attitudes that fuel the Dinka-Nuer conflict. Various strategies including dialogue forums, peace education, inter-ethnic committees, religious interventions and psychosocial support can be evaluated in relation to their role in fostering trust, reconciliation, social cohesion and interdependence (Lederach, 1997). The theory, however, has been shuttled and idealized, especially as it is hard to operationalise deep relational and structural change in polarized environments (Richmond, 2005). This does not diminish its value as a theoretical framework for understanding the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes between Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma, however, due to its focus on root causes, inclusiveness, local ownership and long-term transformation, it is suitable.

2.2 Empirical Review

Refugee camps worldwide have adopted similar approaches to conflict management, such as humanitarian assistance, community engagement, dialogue, psycho-social services, empowerment of youths, peace education, organization and collaboration, cultural integration and diplomatic relations. The Joint Response Plan brings together protection, shelter, health, livelihoods and disaster management sectors, while community-based programmes foster self-reliance and social cohesion in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Government, IOM & UNHCR, 2025; IOM, 2021). Community dialogue, disaster-risk reduction programmes and youth programmes are also employed to tackle the conflict between refugees and between refugees and host communities (Ripon et al., 2022). Resource scarcity, insecurity, refugees' status and environmental degradation, however, continue to have a negative impact on these interventions (Cheesman, 2017), and there remains a lack of systematic evidence of their effectiveness.

Participation in governance, peace building, psychosocial interventions, and legal recognition and access to labour markets have been strong among Bosnian refugees in Sweden. The use of refugee participation in governance also fosters ownership and helps with dispute resolution (UNHCR, 2023), and peace camps and non-violent communication programmes aim to lessen ethnic prejudice and facilitate dialogue. However, experience with the UN safe areas during the conflict in Bosnia shows that externally imposed interventions can be unsuccessful when the resources and mechanisms for enforcement are insufficient (Security Council Resolution 819, 1993). Permanent residence and labour-market access further facilitated refugee stability and integration in Sweden (Dahlberg et al., 2022), where however limited research has examined the impact of specific reception and integration measures in the long-term.

Conflict management has been based on transparency in the distribution of humanitarian resources, refugee governance, community dialogue, peace committees, human rights protection and regional cooperation for the refugees in Nigeria and Burundi. The women, youth, and elders' refugee committees in Nigeria were designed to provide a forum for representation and mediation, and the transparent distribution of food, health care and education was meant to reduce conflicts (Afolayan, 2001). Burundi's regional diplomacy, community peace committees and humanitarian coordination have helped resolve conflicts, resource and protection issues (UNHCR, 2022). However, there is little empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of these interventions over the long-term, either in both settings.

Community dialogue, peace clubs, collective farming, and refugee governance and education have been employed in Uganda's Bidibidi settlement to encourage peaceful coexistence. Refugee to host community and local organisation dialogues focus on shared points of tension and peace clubs encourage youth to interact through sports, music, drama and debates. Block farming promotes peace and cooperation between refugees and host communities, and Refugee Welfare Councils offer opportunities for participation and conflict resolution (Odongo, Neema, & Odongoh, 2025). Although these efforts have been made, insufficient infrastructure, teacher shortages and language barriers and long distances remain issues that impact education and wider outcomes for integration (Akampurira, 2024).

Community outreach, Peacebuilding, religious leadership, peace and reconciliation committees, youth engagement, cultural integration and peace education are some of the strategies that are implemented present in Kakuma Refugee Camp. Religious leaders, in particular Catholic sisters, have been involved in counselling, dialogue, forgiveness, emotional support and reconciliation between Dinka and Nuer refugees (Okello, 2024). There have also been peace committees set up to help settle conflicts, but they have failed to be effective due to lack of refugees' participation and because of the top-down discourse (Omondi, 2017). This is in line with the evidence that neglecting local conflict-resolution practices can result in the failure of externally driven Peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2024). Youth programmes, cultural activities and peace education also aim to enhance cooperation and conflict-resolution capacities (Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR, 2024).

Overall, the literature shows that local involvement, inclusive government, dialogue, psychosocial support, youth empowerment and peace education play a critical role in the management of inter-ethnic conflict in refugee settings. Many studies are descriptive, however, with little empirical evidence for reductions in violence, trust, reconciliation and sustainable social cohesion. The conflict between the Dinka and Nuer is ongoing in Kakuma despite several interventions, indicating that the presence of conflict management processes does not always lead to effective results. There therefore is a huge knowledge gap on the effectiveness and efficiency of existing conflict management mechanisms in the context of Dinka-Nuer inter-ethnic conflict in Kakuma Refugee Camp as far as refugee participation, involvement of traditional and religious leaders, institutional coordination, inclusiveness and sustainability are concerned.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach using descriptive and evaluative research designs. The descriptive design examined the existing conflict management strategies, among Dinka and Nuer refugees by addressing the "what," "where," "when," and "how" of the phenomenon (Babbie & Edgerton, 2023). The design helped assess the effectiveness of conflict management interventions. Data were collected through key informant interviews and direct observation enabling methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Flick, 2014; Schulze, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews generated in-depth insights from state and non-state actors, while observation and document analysis provided contextual and historical evidence on conflict dynamics and peacebuilding interventions.

3.2 Study area

The study was carried out in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, at the Turkana West Sub County, Turkana County, Kenya. The two sites formed the principal study area to look at the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in resolving inter-ethnic conflict between Nuer and Dinka refugees. In 2023, the two refugee sites of Kakuma and Kalobeyei had a total population of refugees and asylum seekers of about 288,206, which made them one of the key refugee hosting sites in the world (UNHCR, 2023). The Kakuma Refugee Camp was set up in 1992 and comprised four sections (I, II, III and IV), which are managed by the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) in partnership with UNHCR. Refugees from many countries come to the camp, including a significant number of South Sudanese and a variety of ethnic neighbourhoods, markets, religious centres and other community services have been established.

The Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement was set up due to overcrowding in Kakuma, and is about 20 kilometres away from Kakuma. It was a process of consultation and joint development between UNHCR, DRS and both the host community and the County Government of Turkana that offers an alternative community structure to support refugee

self-reliance and socioeconomic integration. The settlement aims to decrease refugees' reliance on humanitarian aid and enhance access to livelihoods and services for both host communities and refugees. UNHCR, in collaboration with the World Bank has undertaken various economy, service delivery and socioeconomic development strengthening programmes under the Kalobeyei Integrated Social and Economic Development Programme (KISED). For these reasons, Kalobeyei offers a unique context for the study of the potential impacts of integrated settlement approaches on relations, resource sharing and conflict management between refugees and host communities.

The main host community around Kakuma and Kalobeyei is the Turkana community. Turkana pastoralists are mostly pastoralists relying on livestock, small scale agriculture, fishing and other livelihood activities appropriate to the arid and semi-arid environment of the region (Lamphere, 1992). There have been instances of tensions between host communities and refugees regarding access to limited resources, and perceptions of unequal treatment. Some members of the refugee community view refugees as being given access to better education, health and water and food assistance services than the host community, which is sometimes not the case (Okello, 2024). These perceptions have been part of conflicts and hindered processes of peaceful co-existence and integration (RCK, 2022; Okello, 2024). The refugee settlements and the Turkana host community are therefore included in the study area, thereby giving a good context to evaluate the role of conflict management strategies and their effectiveness in promoting sustainable inter-ethnic peace.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprises individuals from whom the researcher collects data to address the study objectives and draw valid conclusions (Alvi, 2016). A clearly defined target population enhances the validity and generalizability of research findings by ensuring alignment between the research objectives and the selected participants (Asiamah et al., 2017). This study targeted stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in conflict management within Kakuma Refugee Camp and the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. The study population included state actors, such as officials from the Office of the Sub-County Commissioner, the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), and security agencies (OCPD, DCIO, and NIS), who are responsible for refugee administration and conflict management. It also included non-state actors, notably UNHCR and its implementing partners, including the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), World Food Programme (WFP), International Rescue Committee (IRC), World Vision, and other humanitarian organizations involved in peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance.

Other participants comprised religious leaders, local administrators (chiefs, assistant chiefs, and village elders), local peacebuilding NGOs such as Lokado, head teachers of schools serving refugee children, and refugees, particularly Dinka and Nuer community leaders and ordinary refugees, as well as refugees from other nationalities. These groups were selected because of their direct involvement in conflict management, peacebuilding, and their lived experiences of inter-ethnic conflict, enabling them to provide comprehensive insights into existing conflict management strategies, their effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities for improvement (Refugee Consortium of Kenya [RCK], 2022; Okello, 2024; Mehta & Gupte, 2003).

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

This study employed a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques to ensure the selection of participants capable of providing relevant and credible information. Appropriate sampling enhances the reliability, validity, and representativeness of research findings, with sample selection guided by the study objectives, population characteristics, and available resources (Flick, 2018). Probability sampling was applied to refugee populations, including Dinka and Nuer men, women, and youth, while non-probability sampling targeted key informants with specialized knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

The primary non-probability technique was purposive sampling, which enabled the selection of information-rich participants such as government officials, NGO representatives, ethnic leaders, and religious leaders who possessed in-depth knowledge of conflict management within the refugee camps (Palinkas et al., 2015). Stratified sampling was used to categorize participants into homogeneous groups—including refugee men, women, youth, ethnic leaders, and religious leaders to ensure that each subgroup was adequately represented and could provide perspectives unique to their roles and experiences. Additionally, snowball sampling complemented these approaches by identifying hard-to-reach participants, particularly Dinka and Nuer youth previously involved in violence who were reluctant to identify themselves due to security concerns. Collectively, these sampling techniques enhanced the richness, diversity, and credibility of the study data.

A total of 384 people from a wide range of stakeholder groups were involved in the study. There were equal numbers of 72 men (18.76%) and 72 women (18.76%) from the Dinka and Nuer communities, and 72 youth (18.76%) from both communities. The Dinka and Nuer were represented by ethnic leaders, with 40 participants (10.42%). 28 participants (7.30%) were religious leaders, which included Christians and Muslims.

Thirty-six members of the NGO staff (9.39%) came from UNHCR, NRC, and IRC, while 20 participants (5.20%) were from government agencies, such as the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC), Directorate of Criminal

Investigations (DCIO), Office of the County Police Commander (OCPD), National Intelligence Service (NIS), and Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA). The study also involved 10 members (2.60%) of the local administration which included chiefs, assistant chiefs and village elders. To gain insight from other refugee and host communities, there were 4 Congolese refugees, 4 Burundian refugees and 4 Ugandan refugees (each with male and female participants). In addition, 16 youth (4.16%) aged 11-17 years and 18-35 years, and 6 representatives from the local NGO, Lokado participated in the study. In total, the groups included the study sample (384 respondents; 100%).

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess the efficacy of conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between the Nuer and Dinka refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement, Kenya. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods enabled data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were collected over a six-month period from July 2025 to January 2026. Key informant interviews were conducted with 15 purposively selected respondents, including community leaders, elders, religious leaders, NGO representatives, and camp administrators. Semi-structured interviews explored the nature of inter-ethnic conflicts, existing conflict management strategies, implementation challenges, and recommendations for improving peacebuilding efforts (Kallio et al., 2016; Brennen, 2013).

Structured questionnaires were administered to randomly selected Nuer and Dinka refugees to collect quantitative data on demographic characteristics, perceptions of conflict, and the effectiveness of conflict management strategies such as mediation, arbitration, community dialogue, and humanitarian interventions. Pilot testing was undertaken to improve clarity, while data were analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. A documentary review complemented the primary data by examining academic literature, policy documents, and reports from UNHCR, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Government of Kenya, and other relevant sources to provide contextual information on conflict management in refugee settings. Additionally, four focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising 8–10 participants each were conducted with youth, women, elders, and mixed groups to capture collective experiences of inter-ethnic conflict, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, perceptions of existing interventions, and recommendations for strengthening peaceful coexistence. Finally, non-participant observation was employed during community dialogues, peace meetings, and social gatherings to document behavioural interactions, mediation processes, and community responses, providing contextual evidence that complemented data obtained through interviews, questionnaires, and FGDs.

3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and to identify patterns, themes, meanings and insights from interviews, focus group discussions, documents and observations. The process used can be summarized as follows, and falls within the six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021): familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, writing the findings. Transcripts and recordings were repeatedly read and codes were extracted by the researcher which was clustered together into themes and themes were further categorized into themes that reflect the research objectives. In quantitative data analysis, the data collected in the form of numbers from the study instruments were analysed descriptively and statistically. The analysis involved identifying patterns, relationships and trends that existed between the study variables and the findings were presented in the form of a table, charts and graphs (Cohen et al., 2007).

Qualitative results were presented in narrative form with supporting quotes from the interviews and documentary source, where applicable; and thematic maps and diagrams were used to illustrate the data. Data was presented quantitatively with tables, graphs, charts and cross tabulations presenting frequencies and percentages. The qualitative and quantitative results were pieced together to give a full description of the conflict management techniques and how effective they are in resolving inter-ethnic conflict between Nuer and Dinka refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings of Existing conflict management strategies among the Dinka and Nuer Refugees in Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei settlement.

Majority of respondents from Dinka and Nuer respondents reported that the various mechanisms exist in the camp to manage Inter ethnic conflict.

Table 1

Respondents' Awareness of Conflict Management Mechanisms by Respondent Category

Respondents	Group aware	Not aware	Total	Aware%	Not aware %
Dinka men	23	6	29	79.3%	20.7%
Dinka youth	20	9	29	69.0%	31.0%
Nuer women	21	8	29	72.4%	27.6%
Nuer men	22	7	29	75.9%	24.1%
Nuer youth	19	10	174	65.5%	34.5%

The results indicated that overall, there was a high awareness of conflict management mechanisms in Kakuma, with 73.6% of the respondents stating they were aware of them. The highest awareness was reported by Dinka women (79.3%), Dinka men (75.9%) and Nuer women (72.4%). Awareness was also smaller for Dinka youth (69.0%) and Nuer youth (65.5%) suggesting that youth may be less engaged in peacebuilding and dispute-resolution processes. These align with the recommendations of Omondi (2017) and UNHCR (2024) on the need to promote peace education and community outreach to enhance awareness of conflict-resolution options.

While the overall level of awareness was high (74%), there was a gap in information and participation with 26% not knowing about the mechanisms that exist. This is consistent with Okello (2024) who suggest that there has been top-down approach to peacebuilding in Kakuma that does not sufficiently engage refugees. Likewise, Mac Ginty (2024) highlights the need for local ownership and inclusive participation in sustainable peacebuilding.

The results also show that conflict management within Kakuma is not a simple situation, but is complex with both formal and informal structures involved. Dispute mediation is led by the elders and ethnic representatives, with support from security agencies and humanitarian organisations. This aligns with findings in refugee contexts from Kakuma and elsewhere on the significant role of community leaders, peace committees, religious leaders and humanitarian organisations in conflict management (RCK, 2022; Okello, 2024; UNHCR, 2004).

In general, the results show that locally legitimate institutions, especially elders and ethnic representatives, continue to play an important role in dealing with the Dinka-Nuer conflict, and formal institutions also contribute to this. However, there is still a lack of awareness of the youth and some refugees are not included in the peacebuilding processes which could limit effectiveness. The findings thus underpin the importance of including more refugees in the peace-making process, involving more youth and the need for better coordination between traditional and formal conflict management. The 133 key informants interviewed almost reported the same results like those of the above questionnaires.

Table 2

Distribution of Conflict Management Strategies reported by Respondents

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Use of community leaders, elders refugee leadership structure	45	34 %
Government security (police, law, and peace meetings)	24	18 %
Psychological support and counseling	18	14 %
Youth engagement, sports, and schooling programs	18	14 %
Public awareness, media, and sensitization campaign	15	11%
Livelihood and service provision program	13	9 %
Total key informants and percentage score	133	100%

The results show that community leaders, elders and refugee leadership structures were the most significant conflict management strategy, with 45 (34%) responses. This builds on the experience in Nigeria and Burundi where refugee committees, elders and community leaders are engaged in mediation and dispute resolution, as well as important roles in Burundi (UNHCR, 2022; Afolayan, 2001). The discovery also reinforces the arguments of Autesserre (2010) and Mac Ginty (2024) who state that participatory and locally owned peacebuilding approaches are important. The second most reported strategy was government security interventions, which included police involvement, arrests and

peace meetings at 24 (18%). It lines up with what has been observed in Bangladesh and Burundi where governments and humanitarian providers offer protection and security services (Islam & Hoque, 2025; UNHCR 2022). Given their lower ranking, however, than community-based mechanisms, respondents may be more confident in community-based mechanisms than in formal interventions. Other significant strategies were psychological counselling (19, 14%) and youth engagement (19, 14%). The results align with available literature, as counselling and psychosocial support have been found to be effective in supporting refugees to cope with trauma and negative emotions (MSF & Save the Children, n.d.; RCK, 2022). Likewise, sports, education and conflict-resolution programmes are used to help youth interact and lower tensions in youth programmes, for example in Uganda and Kakuma (Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR, 2024).

Public awareness and sensitisation reported by 15 (11%) align with the use of peace education and community outreach in Kakuma, reported by UNHCR (2024), Omondi (2017). The moderate ranking, however, might indicate that to resolve ethnic grievances, greater attention must be paid to awareness itself. The least reported items were livelihoods and service provision at 12 (9%). International literature shows that livelihoods and service provision can help ease resource-related tensions and enhance the welfare of refugees (Islam, & Hoque 2025). The overall results show that community-based and locally trusted mechanisms are the preferred processes of conflict resolution in Kakuma. They further recommend that formal security, psychosocial support, youth programs, awareness campaigns and livelihood interventions are best provided in combination with local leadership. This reinforces the call for the inclusion of refugees in the process of sustainable peacebuilding, for the need of culturally sensitive processes and for the effective integration of traditional/community-based structures and formal institutions.

Table 3

Distribution of Respondents by Key Conflict Management Actors

Key Stakeholders	Frequency	Percentage
Community Leaders (Block & Zonal leaders)	33	25 %
NGOs and humanitarian agencies	28	21 %
Religious leaders	24	18 %
Government of Kenya security organs	19	14 %
Women and youth leadership groups	17	13 %
Schools and teachers	7	5 %
Media institutions (Radio/ Film Aid)	5	4 %
Total key informants and percentage score	133	100 %

The results show that 33 (25%) responses were from community leaders and that they were the most influential actors in conflict management. This aligns with the reviewed literature which has highlighted the value of locally based conflict-resolution processes in refugee settings. The cultural knowledge and social legitimacy of community leaders, combined with their awareness of local grievances, allows them to resolve conflicts effectively in Kakuma. Likewise, elders and refugee representatives in Liberia have mediated and resolved conflicts in Nigeria (UNHCR, 2004; Afolayan, 2001), and elders in Kakuma have played a role in peace and reconciliation. The second most important actors were NGOs and other humanitarian groups, as mentioned by 28 (21%) respondents. This finding agrees with evidence from Bangladesh and Burundi, where humanitarian organisations provide protection, basic services, psychosocial support and Peacebuilding programmes (Islam, & Hoque 2025; UNHCR, 2025). In Kakuma, their significant contributions clearly illustrate the need for institutional and material assistance to prevent and manage conflict. The literature indicates, however, that interventions are more likely to be effective when they are carried out in a collaborative way with local communities, rather than by imposing them from above.

The Religious leaders were also identified as important Peacebuilding actors by 24 (18%) respondents. This is in line with research conducted in Kakuma that found that Catholic sisters are key interlocutors for the Dinka and Nuer refugees in facilitating dialogue, counselling, forgiveness, reconciliation and emotional healing, among others (RCK, 2022; Dorine, 2023; Okello, 2024). Women and youth organisations (13%) and Government security organs (14%) were also identified for their role in protection, violence prevention and youth engagement. These findings align with literature noting that youth programmes, peace clubs, sports and intercultural activities can be used as tools to decrease tensions (Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR, 2024).

The comparatively low recognition of schools/teachers (5%) and media (4%) implies that they have a more indirect role in conflict management. Education is how schools can support peace, human rights awareness and conflict resolution skills (Omondi, 2017; Tozzer et al., 2011) and media can promote peace through awareness and information dissemination. Overall, the results indicate that community-based actors play a central role in conflict management in Kakuma, but for effective and sustainable Peacebuilding, there is a need to cooperate among community, humanitarian,

religious, government, women, youth, schools and media. This aligns with the body of literature which has called for locally led, participatory and inclusive approaches to development, as opposed to externally led, top-down Peacebuilding interventions (Autesserre, 2010; Sergio, 2016).

Major Conflict Management Strategies Identified: The key informants divided conflict management strategies into eight categories. They included ethnic leadership and traditional leaders, Government and Security Enforcement, community dialogue and peace meetings, psychological support and trauma counselling, youth engagement through sports and education, livelihood and service provision and public awareness and media sensitization. **Ethnic Leadership and Traditional Leaders:** This was the most dominant strategy in table 2 above, 45 (34 %) which involved use of block Leaders, zonal leaders, ethnic Leaders, Council of elders and Women and youth Leaders. Most of the key informants (DRS, LWF and DRC) reported that Community Leadership structures were the most trusted mechanism of conflict management because they understand their cultural norms, command community respect, and intervene quickly upon conflict emergencies. An interview with one Key informant had following to say on traditional elders;

“Traditional Leaders/ Community elders have Immense influence over the youths and elderly people in the community. They are chosen by their respective ethnic tribes and therefore have much trust in them. They understand Cultural issues of the community and the dynamics on the ground” (Interview with LWF officer, 12.2.2026, Kakuma, compound one)

Traditional leaders play a central role in conflict management among Dinka and Nuer refugees because of their cultural legitimacy, moral authority, and strong community influence. Elders block leaders, clan heads, and refugee representatives are widely trusted to mediate disputes, promote dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, making traditional mediation the most relied upon conflict resolution mechanism. These culturally embedded practices are effective because they align with shared norms and customary justice systems from South Sudan. However, traditional mechanisms have limitations, particularly when leaders become politically or ethnically biased or when conflicts escalate beyond community capacity, necessitating support from formal security and justice institutions. Consequently, integrating traditional conflict resolution with formal systems is recommended to enhance effectiveness. These findings are consistent with studies by UNHCR (2018, 2020, 2022, 2024), the Danish Refugee Council (2020), Rithi (2015), and Muskvale (2007), which emphasize the effectiveness of ethnic leadership, community participation, and preventive approaches such as dialogue, youth and women engagement, and awareness campaigns in promoting sustainable peace and social cohesion.

Community Dialogue and peace meetings: All 133 respondents (100%) confirmed the existence of community dialogue and peace meetings as key mechanisms for managing conflict between the Dinka and Nuer communities. These initiatives, facilitated by UNHCR and implementing partners such as LWF, NRC, and World Vision, include community meetings, mon forums, inter-ethnic engagements, and joint refugee dialogues. Peace committees, composed of respected and elected representatives from both ethnic groups, were identified as the most effective conflict management mechanism due to their legitimacy, cultural understanding, and community trust. Focus group discussions further highlighted dialogue sessions, mediation, and reconciliation processes as central approaches to resolving disputes.

Similar community-based peace committees have proven effective in Burundi, where they successfully addressed resource conflicts and cultural misunderstandings before they escalated into violence. These findings are consistent with studies by NRC (2019) and the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (2022), which emphasize the effectiveness of inclusive peace committees and dialogue forums in reducing violence in Kakuma. The results also support Allport's (1954) Contact Theory, which argues that structured intergroup interaction, supported by equal participation, shared goals, cooperation, and institutional backing, promotes mutual understanding and reduces prejudice. Overall, community dialogue and peace committees play a critical role in strengthening social cohesion, preventing conflict escalation, and fostering peaceful coexistence among refugees.

Table 4

Respondents' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Peace Committees

Respondents group	Effective	Non-effective	Total	%Effective	% Non-effective
Dinka women	20	9	29	69	31
Dinka men	22	7	29	76	24
Dinka youth	19	10	29	66	34
Nuer Women	20	9	29	69	31
Nuer men	22	7	29	76	24
Nuer youth	18	11	29	62	38

Table 4 reveals that in general, peace committees were seen to be useful in resolving the conflict between the Dinka and Nuer refugee communities. The effectiveness of the committees was rated by 69.0% of the women, 75.9% of the men, and 65.5% of the youth of the Dinka, while 69.0% of the women, 75.9% of the men, and 62.1% of the youth

of the Nuer rated the committees as effective. The level of confidence was highest among men, and lowest among youth, especially among the Nuer youth. The results indicate that, overall, peace committees played a positive role in dialogue, reconciliation, community engagement, peace education, emotional support and social integration, as reported by Okello (2024) and RCK (2022).

The results also show that quite a large percentage of the respondents did not consider the committees as effective, ranging from 24.1% of the men, to 37.9% of the Nuer youth. However, this suggests that while peace committees had a positive role in conflict management, not all peace committees were effective. The lack of confidence among youth and relatively high share of women that the system is ineffective could be due to not seeing them participate, represent, or respond to their concerns. In the study it is recommended to increase the inclusiveness of peace committees to increase participation of youth and women in peace committees, to strengthen mediation and peacebuilding competencies and to incorporate community-based mechanisms with professional psychosocial and conflict resolution assistance. During interview with a key Informant, this is what she said concerning Committee meetings;

“We have been from time to time been involved in facilitating meetings which brings together members of the Dinka and Nuer Communities. The aim is to bring them together to reduce tensions and foster cooperation between them which is essential for long term peace in the camp. In the meetings we encourage them to embrace dialogue, reconcile one another and live-in peace and harmony”. (Interview with Catholic Sister, 13.2.2026 Don- Bosco, Compound)

Government and security enforcement: Government and security enforcement emerged as an important conflict management strategy, with 24 (18%) of key informants identifying measures such as police patrols, police, night movement restrictions, law enforcement, and community policing. Security agencies, including the police, GBV units, and the Ministry of Interior through the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC), were recognized for restoring order during violent clashes between the Dinka and Nuer communities. While respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of security personnel in containing violence, many criticized their interventions as largely reactive rather than preventive, often occurring only after conflicts had escalated. Concerns were also raised about delayed responses, alleged corruption, excessive use of force, discrimination, and the creation of fear and mistrust among refugees. Despite these challenges, respondents emphasized that security enforcement remains essential for protecting vulnerable groups, deterring violence, and maintaining law and order. They recommended integrating policing with community-based conflict resolution and collaboration with ethnic leaders to promote sustainable peace. These findings align with Glück (2017), who argues that while heavy policing may temporarily suppress violence, it can also foster resentment and distrust, highlighting the need to complement security measures with community-driven peacebuilding approaches.

Psychological Support and trauma Counseling: 18 (14 %) of respondents indicated that organizations provide trauma Counselling support and healing sessions. They reported that organization Such as Jesuit Refugee Services and Danish Refugee Council offer psychological support to victims of violence. The psychosocial Support helps to address emotional trauma resulting from conflict, which can otherwise lead to revenge attacks and prolonged hostility. Most refugees have wounds carried out from their Country-of-Origin civil wars. The political turmoil in South Sudan caused nearly 40,000 death and displaced about four million people with about 2.2 million Sought refugees either here in Kenya or in Uganda. Some lost their children, husbands, or close relatives (Yusuf, 2021). The Wounds of Such tragedies are not easily healed and anything however small it may be can trigger into conflict. For example, during Interview with one Key informant had for following to say:

It should be noted that the war erupted first on a minor issue of the headscarf which caused more than 15 lives. The conflict was between the Nuer and Anyuak but the Dinka because of the past differences with the Nuer sided with the Anyuak in fighting the Nuer.

In 2024 during world refugee day, there was a conflict between the Nuer and Anyuak communities. One girl from Anyuak tribe snatched a head scuff from a Nuer girl. They fought and it attracted both communities. In the evening the war erupted in Kalobeyei which cost all Anyuak to flee to Nairobi. From this Conflict, we lost 15 people (Interview with LWF officer, 18.2.2026, Kakuma, Compound 1)

These study findings 18 (14 %) align with studies carried out by the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS,2021), which highlighted that many refugees carry unresolved trauma from South Sudan conflict which consequently contribute to cycles of revenge and violence. The finding is of the view that the only strategy is to embrace counselling and healing programs to reduce aggression and improve coexistence. Similarly, UNHCR (2022), reports that mental health interventions are critical yet they are underutilized especially among youth and men. This supports these study findings which observes that unhealed trauma can escalate minor disputes into major conflicts. From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Human Needs Theory advanced by John Burton, which posits that unmet psychological needs such as identity, security, and recognition can drive conflict behaviour. Psychosocial interventions, therefore, play a critical role in restoring emotional stability and reducing conflict triggers. Despite its importance, access to psychosocial

services remains limited, indicating that there is need for expansion of such programs. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating mental health interventions into Peacebuilding strategies.

Livelihood and service provision: 13 (9 %) of key informants reported that Agencies in Kakuma refugee camp manage conflict through employment opportunities, livelihood program and service provision (Table 5.2). Organization like Norwegian refugee council (NRC) and World Food program (WFP) are the UNHCR implementing agents for these programs. A key informant from WFP confirmed that humanitarian organizations and NGOs play a critical role in supporting conflict management efforts. The organizations conduct peace education programs, community awareness campaigns and training sessions on conflict resolution and social cohesion. The researcher was able to attend one of the trainings organized by LWF on drug abuse at Hong Kong youth centre.

The NGOs also facilitate joint activities involving members of the Nuer and Dinka communities such as sport programs and cultural events aimed at promoting inter-ethnic interactions. The involvement of agencies strengthens Peacebuilding efforts by provision of technical expertise like Don Bosco training institute, financial resources, and neutral facilitation of dialogue process. This help to contribute improvement of relationships between the Dinka and Nuer communities (Interview with LWF 18.2.2026, Kakuma 1 compound 1). It should be noted that service provision like economic opportunities reduces competition over scarce resources which is key to refugee conflicts. During focus group discussion, however, there was a general complaint when it comes to food distribution. The Nuer perceives that World Food program (WFP) is biased with the new system of food distribution called Differentiated Assistance. This is where assistance is pegged on vulnerability of refugees. For example, category one and two qualify for food ration and category three and four are not given any food assuming they can sustain themselves.

The finding on livelihood intervention align with World Food program (WFP, 2021), which found out that economic opportunities reduce competition over scarce resources, although aid system like Differentiated Assistance can create perception of inequality and bias. Consequently, research carried out by International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020) in Kalobeyei also shows that livelihood programs improve self-reliance and social cohesion, but unequal access can trigger tensions between the groups. This supports this research finding on perceived bias in food distributions which may fuel conflicts.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study finds that informal, community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, based on traditional leadership structures, are the predominant approach to conflict resolution among Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma. Elders, block leaders and zonal representatives are well trusted because they are cultural legitimate, familiar with the dynamics of the communities and easily accessible. Unlike formal government and humanitarian responses, which tend to be more reactive than preventive, UNDP's work is more focused on prevention. While formal government and humanitarian responses are generally seen as more reactive than preventive, UNDP's work is more preventive. The results therefore suggest that to achieve sustainable conflict resolution, it is necessary to invest in strengthening community-based peace mechanisms and improving the linkages and coordination between these and formal mechanisms.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that youth should be more involved in Peacebuilding by having them in decision making, leadership and peace committees, as well as youth mentorship, leadership development and peer mediation programmes. It also calls for better coordination between humanitarian actors, government bodies and community actors in the form of joint planning, frequent and regular coordination and information sharing processes to improve efficiency of conflict management coordination processes.

Declaration of Interest

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