

Challenges and opportunities affecting the efficacy of conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma refugee camp

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Recommended Reference: Juma, J. W., Onkware, K., & Sitawa, M. (2026). Challenges and opportunities affecting the efficacy of conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma refugee camp. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 3(4), 642–652. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.4.51>

ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges and opportunities affecting the efficacy of conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, Kenya. The study has adopted a descriptive and evaluative research designs using a mixed-methods approach guided by the Structural Theory of Conflict of Johan Galtung and an interpretivist approach. 384 participants were sampled from the refugee communities and key stakeholder groups using stratified, purposive and snowball sampling. Structured questionnaires, Key Informant interviews, Focus group discussions, Documentary review and non-participant observation were used to gather data and provide triangulation of findings. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis of quantitative data and NVivo was used to analyze qualitative data thematically and with discourse analysis. The results identified the lack of trust in the mediators and peace structures (83%), inadequate resources for peace building activities (78%), perceived ethnic bias in leadership (74%), fear of retaliation (73%), cultural and traditional barriers (65%) as the main factors that limited the efforts of the conflict management. Other barriers were political interference, weak communication, institutional weaknesses, late response to conflict, spillover of conflict dynamics from South Sudan, and lack of involvement of women and youth in humanitarian access. Notwithstanding these difficulties, ongoing efforts, such as traditional mediation, peace committees, community dialogue, community policing, peace education, psychosocial support and youth empowerment programmes all offered space for building social cohesion and inter-ethnic relations. Results also revealed that such interventions helped build a sense of community cohesion and trust, but with limited resources and capacity, segregated practices and limited attention to underlying structural and historical grievances. The study concludes that sustainable conflict management cannot be limited to the control of overt violence, but must involve a restructuring of the conflict promoting structural, institutional, socio-economic and cultural conditions. The study calls for strengthening mediation and security institutions, resource equitability and transparency, inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation, the involvement of women and youth, and the strengthening of cooperation between government institutions, humanitarian actors, community leaders and refugee communities. This can enhance the effectiveness, reach and sustainability of conflict management approaches within the Dinka and Nuer refugee groups in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

Keywords: conflict management strategies, inter-ethnic conflict, Dinka, Nuer, refugees, Kakuma

I. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, ethnic, political and historical conflicts have been increasingly displaced from countries of origin to refugee settlements and host communities. Rivalry over limited resources, overcrowding, poor institutional capacity, social exclusion and lack of coordination between humanitarian actors can compromise peacebuilding initiatives and make them less effective. However, there are opportunities to enhance peacebuilding and social cohesion through community engagement, inclusive dialogue, community leadership, youth involvement and cooperation between humanitarian and government actors (Constant & Zimmermann, 2017).

In Africa, refugee conflicts have been linked to ethnic differences, past conflicts, political differences, and competition for scarce resources. While these drivers have been identified in prior studies, little has been done to examine factors at the institutional, social, cultural and operational level that impact the success and sustainability of conflict management strategies. There are however opportunities for enhancing peacebuilding outcomes in refugee contexts, through community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, traditional leadership, women's and youth's engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration (Belaid, 2022).

Recurrent inter-ethnic tensions (IET) between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camps (KRC) in Kenya have been attributed to historical grievances, ethnicity, political differences, resource competition, and the legacy of conflict in South Sudan. The government institutions and humanitarian organizations have developed strategies including community policing, mediation, peace dialogue, civic education, youth engagement, capacity building, and community-based conflict resolution. Even though some of these interventions have taken place, conflicts and tensions have continued, in part to the lack of effective coordination between the various stakeholders, insufficient resources, limited community participation, weak integration of formal and traditional mechanisms, and lack of adequate attention to the root causes of conflict (Seffo et al., 2014; Porobic, 2012; Okello, 2024).

While the literature on the causes and effects of refugee conflicts and the difficulties faced by refugee populations in the implementation of these conflicts is abundant, there is little empirical evidence on issues related to refugee conflict management effectiveness for Dinka and Nuer refugees. The study is therefore focused on the factors that limit or facilitate the effectiveness of the conflict management strategies in solving inter-ethnic conflict in Kakuma Refugee Camps for evidence to support strengthening of sustainable peace, social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Inter-ethnic conflict continues to be a significant humanitarian, protection, and security issue in refugee contexts. Refugee camps may be a safe haven for people facing violence, but ongoing ethnic, political, and historical grievances can lead to conflict. Conflict between Dinka and Nuer has, at times, led to high levels of violence, loss of lives, injuries, property damage, psychological trauma, displacement and loss of social cohesion among Dinka and Nuer communities in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement among South Sudanese refugees.

In response, the Government of Kenya, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], humanitarian actors, religious actors, refugee leaders and community-based actors have adopted conflict management approaches such as mediation, dialogue for peace, reconciliation, peace committees, community policing, psychosocial support and youth empowerment. But the ongoing inter-ethnic conflict is a concern about the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions. They can face challenges in effectiveness due to deeply ingrained ethnic identity, historical grievances, mistrust, political pressure, lack of resources, poor coordination of stakeholders, and lack of women and youth involvement. At the same time, there are opportunities to enhance conflict management through community-based peace structures, traditional and religious leaders, inter-ethnic dialogue, youth engagement, local knowledge and institutional collaboration.

The available studies (Mehta & Gupte, 2003; Ginn, 2023; Milner, 2021) have concentrated mostly on refugee protection, humanitarian assistance and livelihoods, while empirical evidence on the context of refugee conflict and how it affects conflict management strategies to address Dinka–Nuer conflict in Kakuma has been limited. Thus, there is not enough evidence specific to the challenges that limit the effectiveness of these strategies, nor are there enough examples of these strategies being enhanced. The study, therefore, looks at the problems and potentials of the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in resolving inter-ethnic conflict between Dinka and Nuer refugees, as well as how it can impact policymaking, enhance peacebuilding interventions, and foster sustainable peace and social cohesion in refugee contexts.

1.2 Objective

The overall objective of the study was to examine the challenges and opportunities affecting the efficacy of conflict management strategies in addressing inter-ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camps

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in Galtung's Structural Theory of Conflict, which posits that conflict is not caused only by overt violence, but also by inequalities in opportunities, social services, resources and power (Galtung, 1969). The theory applies to the conflict between the Dinka and Nuer community in Kakuma Refugee Camps, because the unequal access to humanitarian support, employment, leadership and security can lead to felt resentment, distrust and competition between the two.

The theory distinguishes between latent conflict, where there are unaddressed grievances, exclusion, discrimination and mistrust and manifest conflict, where latent conflict becomes violence, threats, protests, or destruction of property. The concept of cultural violence by Galtung (1990) also contributes to understanding how stereotypes and historical grievances and beliefs can legitimate and perpetuate inter-ethnic differences.

The theory is applicable to the study in terms of determining the effectiveness of conflict-management approaches, including mediation, peace committees, community policing and dialogue, in tackling the root causes of

conflict or merely managing its surface symptoms. It focuses on issues of resource distribution, power and representation, institutional effectiveness, historical grievances, socio-economic opportunities and culture perceptions.

Thus, according to the theory, sustainable peace cannot be achieved simply by diminishing the level of violence. Conflict-management strategies should focus on structural inequalities, equity in resource allocation and representation, shared socio-economic opportunities and change of negative inter-ethnic perceptions. Although the theory has been criticized for its focus on structural factors, and its problem with empirical operationalization (Höglund & Öberg, 2011), it offers a suitable prism for examining how the structural conditions of Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma affect the effectiveness of conflict-management strategies.

2.2 Empirical Review

This literature indicates that the prolonged presence of refugees creates complex humanitarian, social, economic, political and security challenges. Refugee camps are set up as temporary shelters but protracted displacement has led to high overcrowding, resource pressure and tense refugee–host community relations. There have also been complex social and political issues arising from the long-term presence of several refugee groups in Kakuma.

The issues of overcrowding and limited resources are significant as limited access to water, food, shelter and healthcare can affect the quality of life and lead to malnutrition and diseases. Resource scarcity has also led to environmental degradation among Rohingya refugees, and rising commodity prices and competition for jobs (Nilsson & Badran, 2021.) with insufficient funding exacerbating humanitarian conditions (UNHCR, 2025).

The legal and political exclusion also impacts on the wellbeing and conflict management of refugees. The denial of citizenship to the Rohingya made them stateless (International Organization for Migration, 2024; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024), but a focus on repatriation over integration has restricted their political integration (Cheesman, 2017). Restrictions on movement and poor conditions in camps are also exacerbating insecurities and aiding in the recruitment of children into armed groups and trafficking (Amnesty International, 2017). The lack of adequate infrastructure and overcrowding can also make people more vulnerable to disaster and less likely to have access to WASH services (Bucken-Knapp & Zelano, 2023).

The review also keyed in on language and communication barriers as to access to employment, education and healthcare. Refugee integration can be hampered by limited language proficiency, discrimination and non-recognition of qualifications (Seffo et al., 2014; Bucken-Knapp & Zelano, 2023) War and displacement can lead to mental health and trauma, which can result in PTSD, depression and anxiety and limit the refugee's social and economic integration (Adepoju, 2005). Economic competition for limited jobs and resources may also raise conflicts and violence between refugee groups (World Bank, 2021).

Ethnic and political divisions are still a significant barrier to peacebuilding in Africa. Refugee settlement divisions and conflict or party loyalties can continue to exist, limiting the process of reconciliation and enabling loyalty to former political or military groups (Afolayan, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2002). The weak law enforcement, lack of accountability, refugee-host conflicts, and lack of basic services also pose challenges for conflict management (Afolayan, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2002). Mediations have also been complex within the Congolese refugee population in Burundi due to cultural and ethnic differences, and diverse cultural practices and beliefs can make mediation difficult in Uganda (Adepoju, 2005).

However, while there are obstacles, there are also opportunities for effective conflict management that can be learned from literature. Economic resilience, self-reliance and social cohesion can be fostered through education, vocational training, livelihood programmes and community-based activities (IOM, 2021). Conflict-sensitive humanitarian programming and engaging refugees and host communities in decision-making processes can help mitigate grievances and foster peaceful coexistence .

Community engagement and social networks/cultural resilience can reinforce refugees' sense of belonging and help them to integrate (Porobic, 2012), and education and employment can enhance their socioeconomic integration (Constant & Zimmermann, 2017). Through inclusive dialogue and empowerment, refugees can have opportunities to voice their grievances, to be involved in making decisions and developing community resilience; and mental health support can enhance their capacity to engage in peaceful conflict resolution (Mehta & Gupte, 2003).

Governance structures are inclusive in African refugee contexts, utilizing camp committees, elders, women and youth as avenues to dialogue, mediate and make decisions for the community (UNHCR, 2004). A combined effort of trauma counselling can help heal the psychological roots of violence, and of joint projects, cultural festivals and mutual resource-management can help the refugee–host community relationship. (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Afolayan, 2001). Early conflict detection and grassroots dialogue can also be supported by refugee-led peace committees, women's forums and youth forums (UNHCR, 2022).

Importantly, community-based volunteering in Kakuma Refugee Camp has demonstrated the ability to foster collaboration, understanding and social cohesion between refugees and members of host communities. The literature shows that an integrated conflict management approach is needed that includes inclusive governance, community

dialogue, psychosocial support, livelihood opportunities, refugee participation and improved refugee–host relations. There exists, however, a gap in the evidence because much of the evidence is from other refugee situations and thus there is a need to determine the effectiveness of the conflict management strategies specifically for the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach using descriptive and evaluative research designs. The descriptive design examined the nature, patterns, and characteristics of inter-ethnic conflict, existing conflict management strategies, and levels of social cohesion and trust among Dinka and Nuer refugees by addressing the "what," "where," "when," and "how" of the phenomenon (Babbie & Edgerton, 2023). The evaluative design assessed the effectiveness of conflict management interventions, their implementation challenges, opportunities, and their contribution to community cohesion and trust. Data were collected through key informant interviews, direct observation, and document analysis, enabling methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Flick, 2018; 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 intervention.

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, 2024d). 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 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 Turkana 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 (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

This study targeted population living in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement in Turkana West Sub County, Turkana County, Kenya.

3.4. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

3.4.1. Sampling Techniques

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.

The first non-probability sampling technique that was used is purposive sampling, which was responsible for selecting information rich participants, including government personnel, NGOs, ethnic leaders, and religious leaders with comprehensive knowledge about conflict management in the refugee camps. The stratified sampling technique was adopted to stratify the participants into homogeneous groups including refugee men, women, youth, ethnic leaders, and religious leaders to give room for different perspectives from each group. Moreover, the snowball sampling technique was helpful in locating hard to reach participants such as the Dinka and Nuer youth who had been in violent conflicts but who were hesitant to be identified for security reasons. Collectively, these sampling techniques enhanced the richness, diversity, and credibility of the study data.

3.4.2. Sample Size

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 (Kothari, 2004). 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).

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.

The review of documentaries complemented the main data collection by analyzing literature, policy papers, and reports from UNHCR, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Government of Kenya, and other sources to give context in the area of conflict management among refugees.

Furthermore, four focus group discussions (FGDs) of 8 to 10 people were held involving youths, women, elders, and mixed groups to collect group experiences related to ethnic conflict, traditional ways of conflict management, opinions on existing interventions, and suggestions for fostering peaceful coexistence.

Finally, non-participant observations were used during the community dialogue sessions, peace talks, and social events to observe behavioral interactions and mediation strategies adopted by the communities and provided contextual data along with interviews and questionnaires.

3.6. Data Analysis and Presentation

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes in the collected qualitative data. Thematic analysis provided the researcher with an opportunity to interpret the data in light of the research objectives and questions. Through thematic analysis, the researcher had a deeper insight into the role played by stakeholders in peace-building activities (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For instance, coding interviews and focus group discussions would help unearth recurring themes on the cause of conflicts among the Nuer and Dinka refugees at the camp.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis in line with the six phases recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019). Transcripts and documents for interview and focus group discussions were read repeatedly in order to be well acquainted with the data. The qualitative data were coded using NVivo software and the codes were categorized according to themes of conflict management measures, peace practitioners' roles, challenges and opportunities. The themes were reviewed and revised accordingly to fit in with the study objectives. Discourse analysis was also used to analyze how the language used by the participants was used to construct meaning of conflict management among the Dinka and Nuer refugees.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of statistical software. Numerical data generated from questionnaires were coded and analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, tables, and charts to summarize the findings. Inferential statistics were used to examine relationships among study variables and test the study hypotheses, consistent with quantitative research principles.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Challenges affecting the success of conflict Management mechanism

A question probing on the challenges affecting success of conflict management mechanisms was posed to the respondents. From the questionnaires, respondents were allowed to select more than one choice that was under listed. The challenges included ethnic bias within leadership or peace committees, lack of trust in mediators and peace structures, inadequate resources (such as funds, meetings, venues, and security), fear of retaliation among community members, political interference and influence, poor communication and coordination, limited participation of women and youth, cultural and traditional barriers, and others. The table below shows how respondents reported:

Table 1

Major Challenges Affecting Conflict Management between the Dinka and Nuer Refugees

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnic bias within leadership	128	74
Lack of trust in mediation	144	83
Inadequate resources	135	78
Fear of retaliation	127	73
Political interference	102	59
Poor communication	103	59
Limited participation of women and youth	93	53
Cultural and traditional barriers	113	65

Source: Researcher (2026)

The results highlight the limited effectiveness of conflict management tools among Dinka and Nuer communities because of the interplay of institutional, structural, socio-cultural and psychological issues. The greatest obstacle to mediation and peace structures is the lack of trust in mediators and peace structures, with 83% reporting this. This indicates that bias, lack of credibility and lack of trust in the past decrease community participation in mediation. The result corroborates Galtung's Structural Theory of Conflict which focuses on the need for legitimate and equitable institutions to resolve conflict (Galtung, 1969).

The second significant challenge (78% reporting it) was inadequate resources for peacebuilding. Decreasing resources and funding were also seen as a challenge to peace programmes by key informants. Lack of resources can affect mediation, community dialogue, psychosocial support and early-warning efforts, affecting the sustainability of peacebuilding interventions.

Leadership bias in ethnic structure (74%) was also a hinderance in the management of conflicts. Ethnic divisions may be strengthened and confidence in leadership diminished due to perceived unequal representation and/or preferential treatment. This is in line with the focus of Galtung's definition of structural conflict as an unequal access to power and to decision making.

Fear of retaliation (73%) suggests that community members may be reluctant to voice grievances or to engage openly in peace processes because of their fear of reprisals. This fear can mean that tensions build and do not get resolved and can also pave the way towards open violence. Likewise, cultural and traditional barriers (65%) highlight the ways in which social norms, historical grievances and ethnic narratives can perpetuate divisions, as Galtung has argued in his discussion of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990).

Political interference and poor communication (59%) and limited participation of women and youth (53%) were other challenges. This research indicates that lack of political interest and poor information sharing and exclusion of relevant community groups can undermine the legitimacy and inclusiveness of peacebuilding processes.

The qualitative results corroborated the quantitative results, and included spill-over of conflict from South Sudan; mistrust; lack of funding and institutional weaknesses; delayed response; cultural barriers; lack of humanitarian assistance; and limited involvement of women and youth. In general, the results uphold the literature and Structural Theory of Conflict, which shows that sustainable peace goes beyond the management of direct violence. But inequality, institutional trust, resource limitations, inclusive leadership, cultural differences and historical grievances and meaningful participation of both communities must also be addressed if conflict is to be managed.

Table 2

Key Informants' Perceptions of the Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of Conflict Management Strategies between the Dinka and Nuer Refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Spillover of conflict from Sudan	38	29
Mistrust between the communities	25	19
Institutional weakness & delay in security response	19	14
Cultural practice and barriers	19	14
Humanitarian assistance and inequalities	12	9
Institutional coordination	7	5
Youth vulnerability	7	5
Language barriers	6	5
Total key informant and percentage score	133	100

Source: Researcher (2026)

Table 2 shows the key challenges affecting conflict management according to respondents. The findings indicate that spillover of conflict from Sudan was the leading challenge at 38 (29 %), followed by mistrust between communities at 25 (19 %). Institutional weakness and delayed security response, as well as cultural practices and barriers, each accounted for 19 (14 %). Humanitarian assistance inequalities contributed 12 (9 %), while institutional coordination, youth vulnerability, and language barriers were the least reported challenges at 7 (5 %) each. These findings suggest that both external conflicts and internal social factors continue to hinder effective conflict management.

The themes discussed in this chapter were derived from the questionnaire responses with the highest percentage scores and the key issues emphasized by key informants. The findings identified five major challenges affecting the efficacy of conflict management strategies among the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camps and Kalobeyei Settlement: spillover conflicts from South Sudan, lack of trust, inadequate funding and resources, institutional weaknesses and delayed security responses, and cultural and social barriers.

The spillover conflicts from South Sudan was mentioned as one of the challenges by 38 respondents (29%), whereas inter-ethnic conflict emanating from historical grievances in the country of origin was mentioned by 41 respondents (31%). It became clear that political rivalry, historical trauma, ethnic tension, and the narrative of violence in South Sudan still continue influencing the relations between the Dinka and Nuer in the refugee setting. The key informants have pointed out that peace and conflicts in South Sudan always affect the lives of people living in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. At the same time, the newcomers might bring the narrative of violence and revive the trust issues thus undermining the already conducted peace-building processes. The current findings are supported by Conflict Transformation Theory developed by Lederach (1997, 2014) which focuses on solving historical grievances, identity-based issues, and damaged relationships in contrast to addressing the triggers of conflict (Lederach, 1997, 2014). The findings are also supported by Kriesberg (1991) who argue that refugee settlements remain connected to political dynamics and social divisions in refugees' countries of origin.

Lack of trust was yet another major obstacle with 144 participants (83%) and 25 key informants citing distrust as one of the main obstacles. Violence in the past, political competition, ethnic prejudices, collective blame, and perceived bias on the part of the mediators deterred people from engaging in the dialogue process and undermined both the legitimacy and sustainability of the conflict resolution process. According to Social Identity Theory, the strength of the ethnic identities may increase in-group cohesion and out-group hostility, leading to individual disputes being seen as group conflicts (Collier, 2003). The results are in line with the arguments presented by Lederach (1997, 2014), Kriesberg (1991), that stress the importance of trust, legitimacy, mutual understanding, and positive relationships for sustaining the peacebuilding process. Enhancing the neutrality, transparency, inclusiveness and ongoing inter-ethnic interaction of mediators could thus have a positive impact on the management of conflicts.

Peace building was also limited by reduced funding and lack of resources. While 10.5% of the respondents specifically mentioned funding, 78% (136) reported that resources invested in peace programmes were insufficient. Reductions in funding led to reduced size of peace committees, dialogue forums, community outreach programmes and Community Peace Protection Teams thus impacting on the efficiency of preventive actions and the increased reliance

on reactive responses. Frustration, competition and social tensions also resulted from the scarcity of resources, unemployment, low opportunities for livelihoods and from the perceived unequal humanitarian assistance. The results are consistent with Galtung's Structural Conflict Theory, which relates to inequities in access to resources and opportunities, and perceptions of marginalisation and intergroup conflict. They also endorse the necessity of a high level of predictable funding, institutional capacity and ongoing investment in community based peacebuilding as outlined by Collier (2003) and Lederach (1997).

19 respondents (14%) pointed to institutional weaknesses and slow security response as challenges to effective conflict management. Poor coordination among security agencies and humanitarian organizations, weak coordination of the response, limited transport and communication facilities, poor infrastructure, inadequate staffing, and limited funding decreased the capacity to prevent and respond to conflict. Slow reactions fueled conflicts, and refugees' suspicions of corruption and lack of objectivity in formal justice undermined their confidence in formal justice institutions. These results are in line with Adepouju's (2005) contention that inadequate institutional capacity reduces the institutional capacity to govern and makes a country more susceptible to conflict. Improving security personnel, logistical support, accountability and inter-agency coordination, and enhancing the collaboration between security agencies and refugee communities could help to strengthen conflict management strategies.

Sixty-five percent (113) of respondents reported on cultural and social barriers. High bride-price demands, cattle raiding, retaliatory violence and the limitation of inter-ethnic relationships were identified as cultural issues that can cause tensions and make mediation and reconciliation more difficult. The authors' results and findings are in line with the work of Human Rights Watch (2003) who associates cattle-based economies and bride wealth among the Dinka and Nuer with recurring conflict, which attributes identity, culture, and historical grievance to the persistent conflict. The study also confirmed that patriarchy-based leadership systems are constraining women's roles in peacebuilding, although they could play a part in reconciling society, as they were observed to do. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Collier (2003) that gender exclusion is one of the challenges that hinder inclusive peace processes. Yet, opportunities to improve inclusive and sustainable conflict management include affirmative action programs, women's forums, youth involvement, and gender-responsive leadership programs.

Generally, the results show that factors such as historical, relational, economic, institutional and cultural variables are interdependent and affect the effectiveness of the conflict management strategies among the Dinka and the Nuer refugees. Efficient and durable conflict management thus needs interventions addressing the root causes of conflict, rebuilding trust, providing sufficient and predictable funding, building institutional and security capacity, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and inclusive participation of women, youth and both ethnic communities.

4.2 Opportunities for Improving Conflict Management Strategies in Kakuma Refugee Camps and Kalobeyei Settlement

Despite numerous challenges discussed above that affect conflict management mechanisms between the Nuer and Dinka communities, findings of the study have indicated several opportunities that can be applied to mitigate the said challenges. They include but not limited to strengthening community dialogue and reconciliation mechanism, addressing root causes through conflict transformation approaches, increasing investment in Peacebuilding programs, strengthening capacity and security response, promoting inclusive and transparent Humanitarian assistance, youth engagement and empowerment and promoting Gender inclusive in Peacebuilding.

The findings indicated that strengthening community dialogue and reconciliation mechanisms could enhance peacebuilding among the Dinka and Nuer refugees, as confirmed by 92 key informants (69%). Community dialogue may provide safe spaces for refugees to express grievances, clarify misunderstandings, address mistrust, and rebuild relationships. Strengthening community peace committees, traditional leadership structures, religious institutions, and the involvement of neutral non-governmental organizations may therefore promote inclusive, impartial, and effective dialogue and reconciliation processes.

Similarly, 122 questionnaire respondents (69.9%) emphasized the importance of involving elders in conflict management. Elders are widely respected within the Dinka and Nuer communities and possess moral authority and social influence that can be used to mediate disputes, facilitate dialogue, promote tolerance, and encourage peaceful coexistence. However, their influence may either mitigate or exacerbate conflict depending on how it is exercised. Therefore, engaging elders as impartial peace actors can strengthen community-based conflict management and contribute to sustainable peacebuilding among the refugee communities (Belaïd, 2022).

At the same time the elders and religious leaders contain rich traditions of conflict resolution and reconciliation, which can be harnessed to address disputes. This was confirmed during an interview carried out to one of the key informants, a church pastor from Dinka community. He had this to say:

"My role as a pastor is to preach the message of peace to both Dinka and Nuer members of the society. I am a Dinka but three quarters of my church members are Nuer. The Dinka and Nuer have one thing

in common – they are both refugees and must fellowship together and live-in peace and harmony”.
(Interview: Dinka pastor, 16.2.2026, Dinka Youth Centre).

The study identified several opportunities for improving the efficacy of conflict management strategies among the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camps. First, strengthening community dialogue and reconciliation mechanisms was identified as a major opportunity by 92 respondents (69%). Traditional elders were recognized by all key informants as central actors in mediation and reconciliation because of their cultural legitimacy, community acceptance, and ability to promote binding peace agreements. The findings further showed that the effectiveness of community-based mechanisms could be enhanced through training, logistical support, incentives for peace committee members, increased community participation, and collaboration with NGOs as neutral facilitators. These findings are consistent with (Bucken-Knapp & Zelano, 2023), which emphasize the importance of community-based dialogue, peace committees, elders, and religious leaders in promoting conflict resolution.

Second, the study emphasized the need to address the root causes of conflict through conflict transformation approaches. More than 93 respondents (70%) indicated that Dinka–Nuer conflicts were largely connected to historical grievances, political divisions, identity-based tensions, and traumatic experiences originating from South Sudan. The findings suggested that conflict management should move beyond responding to immediate disputes and incorporate trauma healing, historical dialogue, reconciliation, psychosocial support, and sustained relationship-building. This supports Lederach’s (1997, 2014) Conflict Transformation Theory, which emphasizes transforming relationships and addressing historical trauma, identity issues, and structural injustices to achieve sustainable peace. Mehta and Gupte (2003) similarly argues that conflict transformation involves changing adversarial relationships into cooperative ones through trust, empathy, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving.

Third, increased investment in peacebuilding programmes was identified as an important opportunity. The findings showed that peace initiatives received limited funding compared with protection and livelihood programmes, despite the high human and economic costs associated with violent conflict. Respondents recommended increased support for community dialogue, mediation training, peace education, youth engagement, cultural exchanges, joint sports activities, religious gatherings, livelihood programmes, trauma-healing centres, and peace centres. Such initiatives could reduce stereotypes, strengthen trust, promote cooperation, and improve social cohesion. This finding is consistent with Collier (2003) which emphasize sustained investment in prevention, dialogue, reconciliation, and psychosocial support as essential for reducing conflict recurrence and promoting long-term peace.

Fourth, the study identified strengthening institutional capacity and security response as an opportunity for improving conflict management. Participants reported delays in police responses, inadequate security personnel, limited patrol capacity, and weak coordination between security agencies and humanitarian organizations. The findings recommended increasing the number of police and security personnel, establishing additional police posts and reporting desks, improving communication and coordination, strengthening early-warning systems, and training security officers in mediation, negotiation, and conflict-sensitive approaches. These measures could support early detection and prevention of conflict while improving trust between refugees and law-enforcement agencies. The findings are consistent with Milner (2003), which emphasize strong institutions, community policing, early-warning systems, coordination, and trust-building in fragile and refugee settings.

Finally, the study identified the promotion of inclusive and transparent humanitarian assistance as an important opportunity for reducing inter-ethnic tensions. Participants expressed concerns that perceived inequalities associated with differentiated assistance contributed to grievances and reinforced existing ethnic divisions. They recommended transparent communication, equitable and accountable aid distribution, representation of both Dinka and Nuer communities in aid committees, and equal access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. These findings support Galtung’s (1969) Structural Theory of Conflict, which links structural inequalities to the emergence and persistence of conflict. They also align with UNHCR (2022) which emphasize transparency, accountability, inclusive participation, and equitable assistance as mechanisms for reducing perceptions of bias and strengthening social cohesion.

Overall, the findings indicate that effective conflict management among the Dinka and Nuer refugees requires an integrated approach that combines culturally legitimate community mediation, conflict transformation, sustained peacebuilding investment, strengthened institutional and security capacity, trauma-informed support, and transparent humanitarian assistance. Such an approach can address both immediate conflict triggers and the underlying historical, relational, institutional, and socioeconomic factors that influence inter-ethnic conflict.

The study identified youth engagement and empowerment as an important opportunity for strengthening conflict management among the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camps. Youth constitute a substantial proportion of the refugee population and may be vulnerable to recruitment into violence when they experience unemployment, idleness, exclusion, and limited access to meaningful opportunities. The findings indicated that education, vocational training, skills development, employment opportunities, sports, youth clubs, and leadership programmes can reduce



frustration, promote economic self-reliance, and discourage involvement in antisocial behaviour and inter-ethnic violence. Youth-led peace initiatives can also promote dialogue, tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence between Dinka and Nuer youth. These findings are consistent with Lederach (1997), who recognizes young people as important agents of peace, and with UNHCR (2022) which emphasize that youth participation, vocational training, livelihood support, and employment opportunities can strengthen social cohesion and reduce vulnerability to violence.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

In regards to objective three, the study concludes that conflict management mechanisms between the Dinka and Nuer refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement are constrained by challenges such as mistrust, ethnic bias, inadequate resources, spill over conflicts from South Sudan, institutional weaknesses, and social inequalities. These factors continue to undermine the effectiveness of existing Peacebuilding mechanisms.

However, the study also identified important opportunities for improving conflict management which includes strengthening community dialogue, addressing root causes of conflict, increasing investment in Peacebuilding programs, enhancing institutional capacity, promoting equitable humanitarian assistance, and empowering youth and women. Overall, sustainable peace requires an integrated approach that combines community-based reconciliation, inclusive participation, institutional support, and long-term strategies which aim at addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings for Objective Three, the study recommends increasing and sustaining funding for Peacebuilding programmes to support dialogue forums, peace committees, and community outreach initiatives. It also recommends shifting from short-term conflict management to long-term conflict transformation by addressing root causes such as historical grievances.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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