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Transition From Fragility to Sustainable Development: Case Study of Darfur in Sudan

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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2020

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Despite adopting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG-16, to transition the Sudan's Darfur Region out of fragility, limited progress has been made in achieving peace and long term development. Prior studies investigated the reasons for the slow pace focusing on the factors driving fragility. None have examined the different visions of development organizations as a barrier to multi-stakeholder collaboration to achieve the SDGs. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs. The research question examined how the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affected their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region. The main data source was a review of SDG official documents and survey transcripts, complemented by key informant interviews with six officials of the development organizations working within the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Sudan to implement the SDGs. Data were analyzed using content analysis and inductive thematic coding informed by complexity theory and systems thinking perspective. Key findings were that fragmented understandings of SDG-16, weak leadership and loose governance structure of the UNCT impeded collaboration of the multi-stakeholders to achieve the SDGs. This study provided guideposts for policy makers' decisions in designing awareness campaigns and training programs for future leaders of the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform for implementing the SDGs in Darfur leading to positive social change.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my late wife Mrs. Blessing Chinwe Ezeibe-Nweke. I will forever remain grateful for your encouragement that made me to return to school to pursue my dream of getting a doctorate degree and the unconditional love that you showed me and our children. May your soul continue to rest in peace!

This work is also dedicated to my children: Tobenna Nweke, Angel Nweke, and Dilinna Nweke. I hope my returning to school at this stage in my life to acquire a PhD degree will inspire you to aspire to greater heights and enhance your love for education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In September 2015, leaders of 193 member-states of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) endorsed Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an internationally agreed upon blueprint for economic, environmental, and social development (United Nations, 2015). Also, on April 27, 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council adopted the UN Sustaining Peace resolutions A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 on peacebuilding that highlighted the importance of ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels as well as the substantial role of civil society in sustaining peace (DCAF, 2018). The sustaining peace concept was informed and inspired by Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development that contained 17 SDGs and 169 targets built on the spirit of the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 that called for sustainable development and expanded the focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the UN in 2000 (Horne et al., 2019).

The SDGs aimed to move beyond "reducing poverty, supporting growth and public services to provide funds and tools to also address environmental risks, reduce vulnerabilities and pursue peace, justice and equality" (Martínez-Solimán & Fernández-Taranco, 2017, Para 6). Most analysts considered that at the heart of the SDGs was their promise to "leave no one behind" and to reach the furthest behind first as a legitimate policy framework upon which governments, civil society, and businesses should plan, measure, and communicate their contribution to sustainable development (Horne et al.,

2019; Ingram & Papoulidis, 2017a and 2017b; McEntee-Atalianis, 2017). Specifically, SDG-16's emphasis is on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels in fragile states. The UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017 meeting reported that many countries in complex situations, such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Sudan's Darfur Region, and Togo have embraced SDG-16 as a strategic framework to inform long-term and comprehensive policy responses to cycles of violent conflict and to eradicate poverty linked to the conflict (Caparini et al., 2017; Martínez-Solimán et al., 2017).

According to the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS; 2017), most fragile states signed the Stockholm Declaration on Addressing Fragility and Building Peace in a Changing World in April 2016 and committed to the implementation of SDG-16 as their pathways towards building transparent, effective, inclusive, and accountable institutions to advance poverty eradication and sustainable development. Over the 5 years since the countries in complex situations adopted SDG-16 as part of Agenda 2030 as a strategic framework to transition conflict-affected states from fragility to resilience, studies have revealed that the key conditions for sustainable development (i.e., peace, security, and political stability) have continued to elude those fragile states that have made limited progress in achieving peace and long term development (Christian Aid, 2018; Horan, 2019).

A study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2016) noted that fragile territories/countries have continued to exhibit weak

governance capacities that have resulted in increased numbers of displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as "severely challenged the promotion and protection of human dignity and wellbeing of women and girls" (Oldekop et al., 2016, p. 58). Öjendal et al. (2017) found that despite the adoption of the SDG-16 as a policy framework for transition from fragility to resilience, a bulk of the fragile societies, like the Sudan's Darfur Region, were still characterized by "low socio-economic development, high levels of group animosities, political tension, and communal violence" (p. 10; Valencia et al., 2019). For their part, the United Nations and the World Bank estimated that about a third of the world's extremely poor people still live in fragile and conflict-affected settings and projected that the number would grow by 82% by 2030 (Martínez-Solimán et al., 2017). The indices above show that the SDG-16 as a policy framework to transition fragile states to peace and sustainable development has not accelerated multi-stakeholders' engagement that is a "pre-condition for success" in the SDGs implementation in fragile countries (Filho et al., 2017, p. 1; Filho, 2020).

The limited progress of SDG-16 as a policy framework for achieving peace and long-term development in fragile territories has generated international policy debate and considerable academic discourse on the possible factors contributing to the slow pace of advancement of the SDGs policy implementation in fragile states. According to Horan (2019), SDG-16 has made limited progress in ending poverty as well as achieving peace and sustainable development in fragile states due to lack of local ownership of the SDGs policy initiatives and peacebuilding mechanisms at the national and subnational levels. Bejaković (2019) contended that SDG-16 as a policy framework has been slow to

advance the pace of transition of fragile states to peace and sustainable development because there has been competition in the efforts of donor countries to assist war-torn countries that has created a chasm between domestic and international understandings and approaches to the SDGs policy implementation and peacebuilding in fragile settings (Ross, 2019). Caparini et al. (2017) and de Coning (2016 and 2018a) argued that the SDG-16 implementation has made limited progress in fragile states because there was no conceptual framework to integrate global peace and sustainable development practices.

Furthermore, Beisheim and Simon (2018) as well as Malunga and Holcombe (2017) traced the limited progress to achieve the targets of SDG-16 in fragile settings to lack of synergy between domestic and international development theories and practices to peacebuilding in fragile settings. Moreover, Assal (2016) and Schneider et al. (2019) argued that the SDG-16 implementation has been slow to advance the pace of transitioning fragile states to peace and sustainable development because civil society organizations (CSOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were not involved in peacebuilding and policy execution of SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region, even though the SDGs initiatives were predicated on improved coordination between various parties as the most effective way of implementing the SDGs (Beisheim & Simon, 2016 and 2018).

My study will contribute to the international policy debate on the reasons for the limited progress made in achieving peace and long-term development in fragile contexts after over 5 years of adopting SDG-16 as a policy framework for transitioning fragile territories to resilience, peace, and sustainable development. This qualitative exploratory

case study aims to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in Darfur through exploring how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 on building transparent and efficient institutions affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs.

According to Osieyo (2017), although the SDG-based policy initiatives were predicated on improved implementation coordination to ensure the most effective way of implementing the agenda, there has been little discussion on how the differences in focus, actions and interests of the development organizations impede collective multi-stakeholder action to achieve SDG-16 targets. In a recent study, Valencia et al. (2019) found that the development organizations involved in the SDGs policy implementation have "different visions and interests, meaning that the exact sustainability dimensions to be prioritized can become points of contestation" (Valencia et al., 2019, p. 4). Additionally, as perceptions include norms that are known to influence the decision processes of organizations (Stern et al., 2018), Bexell and Jönsson (2017) have pointed out that policy texts are often open to multiple interpretations, shaped the construction of worldviews and perceptions of problems and solutions by multiple stakeholders involved in the SDGs implementation (Florini & Pauli, 2018).

This study will use the Sudan's Darfur Region as a case study to enable an in-depth investigation that can provide insight on the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on collaboration of the UN organizations in the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) as a multi-stakeholder governance platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation (Zachary, 2018). This study aims to contribute to

the acceleration of the implementation of SDG-16 that entails building transparent and efficient institutions in Darfur by providing guideposts to inform policy makers in their efforts to develop effective governance and collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to achieve the SDGs in Darfur, Sudan.

Background of the Problem

The Sudan's Darfur Region has been a scene of violence and the conflict has continued unabated since 2003. In 2008, the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) deployed the UN-AU Assistance Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) to stabilize the territory as well as provide humanitarian and bilateral aid to the displaced population (Strachan, 2016). However, according to Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith (2018), the enduring feature of the conflict in Darfur has been its fluidity since the areas of apparent stability in one year might be the scene of violence and displacement the following year. De Waal (2015 & 2017) stated that there was generalized insecurity in Darfur and that the fragile situation in Darfur was comparable to "a Hobbesian description of 'warre' and the peacebuilding efforts in Darfur was 'a cynical political marketplace' that created permanent political unsettlement" (Castro, 2018, pp.163-164). In 2016, the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) listed the Sudan's Darfur Region among 19 African states in the 'Harmonized List of Fragile Situations.' AfDB (2018) reported that those fragile states were "often hampered by widespread poverty, frequent conflict, poor governance, weak administrative capacity, high perceptions of corruption, and challenging climates for doing business" (AfDB, 2018, p. 9).

Following the UN's endorsement of the SDGs in 2015, as a holistic and comprehensive long-term policy instrument for transitioning fragile regions out of instability, in 2016, the Government of Sudan (GoS) designed a 5-year country strategic plan and adopted SDG-16 of Agenda 2030 as a policy framework to move the Darfur Region to stability, peace, and sustainable development (Bromwich, 2018; UNCT, 2017; Young & Ismail, 2019). The international development community in Darfur simultaneously launched an "Integrated Peacebuilding and Development Project" to transition Darfur towards peace and sustainable development (OECD, 2017; UNCT, 2017; UNDP-Sudan, 2018).

Despite the increased focus on SDG-16 as a strategic framework and coordinated programs of the Government of Sudan and the international development community, political freedom has remained curtailed and human rights abuses have been rife in Darfur (Baldo, 2017). This has resulted in about 382,901 Darfur refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and East Africa, almost 3.1 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within Sudan as well as in the country's borders with neighboring countries namely, Chad, South Sudan and Uganda. Additionally, about 50% of Sudan's population, mostly in the Darfur Region, still lives in poverty (Strachan, 2016). The slow pace of SDG-16 as a policy framework to accelerate poverty eradication, achieve peace and sustainable development in the fragile and conflict affected Sudan's Darfur Region has generated considerable academic studies that have attempted to explain the limited success of the SDGs policy in complex situations (Malunga & Holcombe, 2017).

Some of the seminal researchers supporting this study, such as Brett (2016), Bromwich (2018), Castro (2018) and De Waal (2017) have described the onset of the violent conflict in Darfur in 2003 and the deployment of the UN-AU Assistance Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2008 to stabilize the territory and challenges to provide humanitarian and bilateral aid to the displaced population. The authors explained the escalation of armed violence that led to Darfur's classification as a fragile territory "with weak governance capacities" (Brett, 2016, p. 5). Those studies focused on the causes of fragility to explain the limited success of the SDGs policy but failed to explore the complex relationships that can underpin the design of a multi-stakeholder SDGs policy implementation platform to build the resilience of local governance structures in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region.

In their studies, Ingram and Papoulidis (2017a and 2017b), Öjendal et al. (2017), as well as Oldekop et al. (2016) explained that the continued war-like conditions in Darfur were a threat to achieving the visions and targets of SDG-16. The authors argued that since leaving no country behind is a major challenge in implementing the SDGs, the Sudan's Darfur Region has been placed "at the center of global development crisis" (Ingram, & Papoulidis, 2017b, Para 1). Baldo (2017), and Brosig and Sempijja (2017) argued that a comprehensive and lasting solution to fragility in Darfur required addressing the rights of the direct victims of ethnic purges and proposed using the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) to measure the success of the UN peacebuiding efforts in Darfur. Muddathir (2018) took stock of the changing nature of risk in fragile Darfur that has been affecting its ability to achieve the SDGs. The study

then explored how resilience thinking could be used to strengthen public policy to enable Darfur's transformation towards the SDGs.

Malunga and Holcombe (2017) and Ross (2019) traced the limited progress in achieving the targets of SDG-16 in fragile settings like Sudan's Darfur Region to lack of synergy and resultant chasm in understandings and approaches to peacebuilding in fragile settings. IDLO (2019) stated that since fragile states have "insufficient capacity to manage and mitigate the consequences of societal, political, economic, security and environmental risks" (UNDP, 2016b, p. 9), SDG-16 on transparent, effective, inclusive and accountable institutions should be considered the preconditions for transitions from fragility to resilience. Beisheim et al. (2018), and Guha and Chakrabarti (2019) argued therefore, that building the capacity of local leaders and strengthening political leadership at the same time are prerequisites for achieving country-owned transitions to build sustainability of local governance institutions in fragile territories like Darfur.

Assal (2016) and Schneider et al. (2019) called for a renewed involvement of the CSOs and NGOs in peacebuilding in Darfur in order to achieve the goals and objectives of SDG-16. Horan (2019) and the IDPS (2017) argued that development actors should recommit to using the principles of the 'New Deal' to guide efforts to achieve the visions and targets of SDG-16 in fragile territories, especially the preeminent role of development actors in supporting country-owned transitions towards prioritization and sequencing of the SDGs in fragility. For their part, Caparini et al. (2017), Martínez-Solimán and Fernández-Taranco (2017) argued for a break with the past mentality of resolving issues of conflict and sustainable development with step-by-step piecemeal

programs. To prevent fragile territories from relapse into violent conflict, the authors argued that SDG-16 as a policy framework for transition from fragility to resilience should highlight the importance of ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels as well as the substantial role of civil society in sustaining peace (Christian Aid, 2018).

None of the previous studies reviewed above explored the effect of the development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on collective multi-stakeholder action to achieve SDGs in Darfur since the United Nations (UN) assigned an important role to multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs implementation. UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution A/RES/70/224 defines multi-stakeholder partnerships as "voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose…share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits" (UNGA, 2016, Para 2). In practice however, studies show that the development organizations involved in the SDGs policy implementation have different perspectives on the institutional setup of the multi-stakeholder platforms for the SDGs implementation and how each partnership should be metagoverned by the UNCT (Beisheim et al., 2016).

As policy texts are open to multiple interpretations and shaped perceptions of problems and solutions by multiple stakeholders involved in the SDGs policy implementation, understanding the perspectives of those development organizations of the SDGs policy might help policy makers in building trust, consensus, and leadership to collaboratively deliver on the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace, and sustainable

development (Bianchi, 2019). This study contributes to literature on how to accelerate the implementation of SDGs, especially SDG-16, to build transparent and efficient institutions in Darfur by providing policy makers with guideposts to inform their policy support which in turn will aid in the development of effective governance and a collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to transition Darfur from fragility to stability, peace, and sustainable development.

Statement of the Problem

In 2015, the UN adopted the SDGs as a holistic and comprehensive long-term policy instrument to, among other things, transition fragile regions out of instability, eradicate poverty, and realize peace, the rule of law, and effective governance (UN, 2015). In 2016, the Government of Sudan embraced SDG-16 as part of Agenda 2030 and as a strategic policy to move the Darfur Region to stability, peace and sustainable development (Bromwich, 2018; UNCT, 2017; Young & Ismail, 2019). The international development community in Darfur, in their part, launched an "Integrated Peacebuilding and Development Project" to transition Darfur towards peace and sustainable development (OECD, 2017; UNCT, 2017; UNDP-Sudan, 2018).

Despite the GoS and the development communities increased focus on using SDG-16 as a strategic framework to achieve stability and sustainable development in Darfur, poverty eradication, peace, justice, and strong institutions have remained elusive in Darfur. According to Hutchinson (2017), after adopting SDG-16 as a strategic framework to move Darfur from fragility to resilience, conflict has continued and has exacerbated instability, resulting in continued issues of poverty, lack of infrastructure,

slow human development, human rights abuses, and ineffective rule of law institutions

(UNDP, 2018). Political freedom has also continued to be curtailed in Darfur, which has

resulted in a massive flow of refugees and asylum seekers to Europe and East Africa and

contributed to a rising number of IDPs within Sudan and at its borders (Jaspars &

Buchanan-Smith, 2018; Sitcawich, 2017; Strachan, 2016).

The limited progress of SDG-16 as a policy framework for achieving sustainable

development in a fragile Darfur has generated international policy debate. A review of

literature showed that some researchers have tried to explain the limited success of SDG-

16 as a policy to achieve peace and stability in Darfur by focusing on remote and

proximate causes of fragility (Leib, 2016; Yousif, 2016). Other studies attributed the slow

pace of SDG-16 to realize sustainable development in Darfur to the chasm among

development actors and the application of competing theoretical approaches to

peacebuilding and sustainable development (Brosig & Sempijja, 2017). None of those

studies reviewed explored the different visions and interests of development

organizations as a barrier to collective multi-stakeholder action to achieve the targets of

SDG-16 in Darfur. According to Valencia et al. (2019), the development organizations

involved in the SDGs policy implementation in Darfur have "different visions and

interests that the exact sustainability dimensions to be prioritized has become points of

contestation" (Valencia et al., 2019, p. 4). Exploring how the development organizations

perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the

SDGs can aid the understanding of how they can respond collaboratively together to the

sustainability challenges in Darfur (Zachary, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in Darfur by exploring how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs. The development organizations usually collaborate within the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) as a multi-stakeholder governance platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation in fragile contexts like the Sudan's Darfur Region. This study aims to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in Darfur by providing guideposts to inform policy makers redesigning the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform to collaboratively implement the SDGs and transition Darfur out of fragility towards peace and long-term development. According to IDLO (2019), SDG-16 is closely interlinked with other SDGs because if there was no peace, justice, and inclusion, which are among the goals of SDG-16, the other SDG goals, cannot be achieved. In a recent study, IDPS found that using the principles of SDG-16 to support the efforts of national actors and their international partners to achieve the SDGs entailed "greater coherence and accountability between country-led planning, stakeholder consultation processes, and partner support" (IDPS, 2017, Para 1).

This exploratory case study on Darfur provides preliminary information to help researchers to better understand how the development organizations perceptions of the SDGs can impact policy makers efforts to collaboratively steer social change to realize the SDG-16 goals of poverty eradication, peace, justice, and strong institutions in Darfur. According to Bianchi (2019), understanding the perceptions of SDG-16 by the

development organizations in the UNCT in Sudan can help to build trust, consensus, and leadership to achieve "collective outcomes' that emerged from Agenda 2030 and the 'humanitarian-development-peace nexus'" in Darfur (Dalrymple, 2019, Para 2). Chimhowu et al. (2019) have also noted that the adoption of SDG-16 has raised the need to build the capacity of local governance institutions because the state and elites are the 'owners' of national development plans.

Research Question

The central research question addressed in this qualitative exploratory case study is: How do the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region?

Geoghegan and Bass (2016) observed that one of the barriers to realizing the goals of the SDGs at the national levels is the differing understandings between policymakers on the prioritization of the SDGs (Wahlen, 2019). Osieyo (2017) has also advanced the need for a study to address a key research question on the underlying perceptions of SDG-16 implementing development organizations through exploring the "assumptions different interest groups have about the existing progress of Agenda 2030 of the SDGs" (Osieyo, 2017, Para 7).

In a recent study, Interpeace (2016) found that previous studies on peace and sustainable development in fragile territories paid undue attention to better understanding and addressing the key sources of fragility. Interpeace therefore, emphasized that a new study of the SDGs should examine how development actors perceive their collaborative

efforts to foster shared benefits envisaged in SDG-16 calling for integration of peace and sustainable development (Interpeace, 2016). Also, Obrecht (2017) proposed that research on the SDG-16 perceptions of the development organizations operating in Darfur was required to clarify priorities and decision-making processes since Agenda 2030 on the SDGs called "for operational coherence by humanitarian, development and peace actors" (OECD, 2019, p.5; Moorehead, 2019) and SDG-16 is a critical driver for the achievement of all other SDG goals (Gostin et al., 2019; IDLO, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Complexity theory and systems thinking perspective by Fowler (2008) and Teisman and Klijn (2008) was used to explore how the UNCT member development organizations interact as multi-stakeholders to achieve the SDG-16 goals in Sudan's Darfur Region so that, ultimately, outcomes cannot be assigned to any single organization (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018). According to El-Ghalayini (2017), Teisman and Klijn introduced the main characteristics of complexity theory that informed public policy intervention in the "public management field" (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018, p.949; Weible & Sabatier, 2018). In addition, Verkoren (2008) explained that Fowler presented complexity theory as a part of systems thinking to understand the patterns of interaction between system elements at different levels and times (Gear, Eppel & Koziol-Mclain, 2018; Eppel, 2017; Mercure et al., 2016).

According to the United Nations (2017), SDG-16, as part of Agenda 2030, is predicated on multilateralism as the crucial foundation to achieve poverty eradication,

peace and security and other SDG goals (IDLO, 2019). Filho (2020) explained that complexity theory is used to investigate the complexity of the relationships between the SDGs and the differences in resources, development capabilities, needs, and cultural features that exacerbate the ability of the development actors to achieve the goals and targets of Agenda 2030. Combined with systems thinking to explore "multiple perspectives, including analyzing the inter-linkages between SDGs, prioritizing the goals and analyzing the essential transformations" envisioned in Agenda 2030 of the SDGs in a fragile territory (Fu et al., 2020, p. 839).

The central idea of the complexity theory and systems thinking perspective is that systems tend to develop nonlinearly with various feedback mechanisms (Klijn, 2008). Also, the perspective is pluralistic, pragmatic, and scientific, and proposes that claims be empirically tested (Moldavska & Welo, 2019). According to the Scientific Advisory Board (2016), science is the most critical means for "inclusive and people-centered" of SDGs implementation (Scientific Advisory Board, 2016, p. 3). Furthermore, the complexity theory and systems thinking perspective can facilitate conversation and cooperation between organizations (Szennay et al., 2019) and analysis of the multi-stakeholder interactions should discover synergies and trade□offs between SDGs in any given case study (Pradhan et al.,2017). According to Hendrick (2009), since the perspective is characterized by transdisciplinarity, it can bridge academic and policymaker roles (Cairney, 2012) and offer insight to both practitioners and scholars into the perceptions of SDGs role in Darfur (Clark, 2017; Wuelser & Pohl, 2016).

As an exploratory case study seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of various development organizations on SDG-16, the complexity theory and systems thinking perspective was used in this study to explore how policy makers and UNCT member development organizations can co-design a multi-stakeholder platform to strengthen local governance institutions and facilitate achievement of the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development in Darfur (Eppel et al., 2011).

Nature of the Study

I conducted a qualitative exploratory case study research to explore the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation in Darfur. The qualitative exploratory case study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the UNCT member organizations implementing the SDGs "within a bounded setting or context", Darfur (Mohajan, 2018, p.33), to conduct a holistic analysis of interactions that occur among the multi-stakeholders in that physical space (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Also, I sought to provide an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of the SDG-16 as a real-life issue (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, I explored empirical events as narrated by the officials of development organizations implementing SDG-16 to ensure reliability (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

This study applied a combination of documents analysis, key informant interviews and content analyses of reports, official documents, and evaluations to collect

and analyze data from development organizations involved in the SDGs implementation

in Darfur (Ahmad et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gaus, 2017). The first step of the

study was to examine the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 through

desk reviews of open source documents on the United Nations (UN) established web-

sites, including reports, concept notes, existing strategies, and plans of the UNCT

member SDGs implementing organizations in Darfur. The documents analysis was a desk

review of transcripts of original survey data of development organizations involved in the

SDGs implementation on the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group websites

(IAEG-SDGs). This was done to discover differences in the individual organization's

subjective persuasion about SDG-16 and subsequently finding themes and developing

categories. The documents analysis also entailed reading the Reference Guide for

mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development created by the United

Nations Development Group (UNDG) to understand the different perceptions of SDG-16.

The other documents analyzed included reading a large number of transcripts of a recent

study by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Sudan to understand how

the differing interpretations of SDG-16 by development organizations impeded

collaboration to implement the SDGs (UNDP, Sudan, 2018). The idea here was to

discover the thematic structure, link the identified themes to SDG-16 perceptions where

appropriate, and analyze the co-occurrence of SDG-related topics in the documents. The

use of documents analysis to examine the perceptions of SDG-16 was then

complemented by elite interviews with officials of those development organizations to

understand how the different visions affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs.

The second step of data collection method, therefore, was to conduct key informant interviews with officials of the development organizations in Darfur to investigate how their perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders in the implementation of the SDGs. According to the IRB, site permission was not required to conduct asynchronous e-mail interviews with about 10 key UN personnel because I used snowball sampling techniques that entailed referrals to recruit respondents. Those officials of the development organizations as the target population were purposively selected using snowball sampling technique (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018) to enable me to understand the world from the subjects' point of view (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This means that the elite of the development organizations who were interviewed were identified from a series of referrals, support, and cooperation from the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator (RC) in Sudan, and from relevant members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Darfur. The RC in Sudan is the leader of the UNCT, a metagovernance platform that coordinates the peacebuilding and SDGs policy implementation activities in Darfur. I anticipated that saturation would be reached after conducting between 10 and 20 key informant interviews (see Maxwell, 2013; Vasileiou et al., 2018) because the key informants are an elite group that are believed to have the most knowledge of the subject matter (Commuri, 2017; Gray & Jones, 2016).

Central to my data analysis plan was a four-stage extensive desk review process using the methods of qualitative content analysis and inductive thematic coding of data informed by an understanding of complexity theory and systems thinking. I manually transcribed the texts of the key informant interviews and subjected the texts to an inductive coding method (see Saldana, 2016). I also conducted content analysis of the interview transcripts and analyzed the data collected from both the key informant interviews and desk review of reports, official documents, and evaluations to initially develop overarching themes using Dedoose software (see Gupta, 2018; Jagnoor et al, 2018; Tseng & Yeh, 2018). For trustworthiness and transparency, I cross-verified data from key informant interviews through data source triangulation, member-checking, and external audits (Creswell, 2013) by ensuring that the key informant interviews went hand in hand with other methods of providing in-depth information about participants' inner values and beliefs.

Definitions of Key Terms

Fragility: OECD States of Fragility report (2016) gives the most widely accepted definition of a fragile region or state as having "weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions and lacks the ability and political will to develop mutually constructive relations with society" (OECD, 2013, p. 15) making the citizens vulnerable to violence (Mehdi et al. 2019). McLoughlin and Idris (2016) have pointed out however, that fragility is not an absolute concept and has been defined differently by various international organizations due to "operational differences in application and because of the normative expectations that are applied to those fragile states" (Steeves, 2019, p. 51).

Mehdi et al. (2019) have compiled a compendium of the various operational definitions of fragility by organizations but for this study, fragility is seen as an indication that state structures are weak, lacking both the capacity and political will to deliver the transformation envisaged in Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

Resilience: The concept of resilience originated from "Latin resiliens, which literally means 'rebounding'" from a shock (Koolmeister, 2019, Para 1). To avoid the confusion arising from multiple definitions of resilience, this study will use a more encompassing definition of the concept of resilience by the OECD (2019b) as the "ability of households, communities and nations to absorb and recover from shocks" (Para 1). According to Rico (2019), resilience is about addressing the root causes of crises while strengthening the capacities and resources of a system to cope with risks, stresses and shocks while keeping the integrity of the system intact (IPCC, 2019). Within the framework of SDG16, resilience is usually applied to help build the capacity of states and societies to address inequalities, strengthen institutions, and ensure that development strategies are risk informed (Cockayne et al., 2017). According to the UN Pathways for Peace Report (2018), and Ingram et al. (2018c), resilience can be applied to achieve the goals of SDG-1 on poverty eradication and SDG Goal 16 on peaceful, just and equitable societies for sustainable development in most post-conflict countries.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were eight goals with 21 targets and 63 indicators signed in September 2000 by 189 member states of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as a blueprint that committed the world leaders and the international community to form a new global

partnership aimed at reducing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental

degradation, and discrimination against women by the end of 2015 (Oleribe & Taylor-

Robinson, 2016). According to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals

Report of 2015, the MDGs were planned to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,

achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality,

improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensure

environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development.

According to Cha (2017), the MDGs enjoined all countries to set their own strategies and

policies together with their global partners to ensure that poor people receive their fair

share of the benefits of development.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) are a universal set of 17 goals, 169 targets, and 243 indicators, which were

agreed by UN member states in September 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development. The SDGs called on world leaders to frame their policy

agendas and political policies from 2015 to 2030, in order to end poverty, protect the

planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The SDGs were

built on the spirit and foundation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but

according to the UN summarized differences between the two approaches, the 17 SDGs

with 169 targets were broader in scope and went further than the MDGs by addressing

the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that would work for all

people (Brissett, 2018). The objectives that set the SDGs apart from the MDGs are the

goal on accountable and inclusive institutions under the SDG-16 and the assertion of the

General Assembly that "All voices [had] demanded that we leave no one behind… at all levels..." (McEntee-Atalianis, 2017, p. 4). Moreover, the UN stated that the "core feature of the SDGs is their strong focus on means of implementation: the mobilization of financial resources; capacity-building and technology; as well as data and institutions" (Morton et al., 2017, p. 5).

Sustaining Peace: The preamble of the UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282, defines sustaining peace as "activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development" (Mahmoud & Ó Súilleabháin, 2016, Para 2). According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), resolutions A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 reviewed the UN peacebuilding architecture and redefined peacebuilding to include activities "aiming to prevent the outbreak, the recurrence or the continuation of armed conflict since both sustaining peace and peacebuilding are ultimately intended to reduce the risk of lapse or relapse into violent conflict" (Rosenthal, 2017, Para 8). According to the Secretary General Report, the new concept of sustaining peace is "a comprehensive approach across the peace continuum" (DCAF, 2018, p.1) that "spans across the three pillars of UN engagement—peace and security, development, and human rights—in addition to humanitarian action" (Connolly & Powers, 2018, Para 2).

Assumptions

The first assumption in this study was that the 2030 Agenda of the SDGs is considered as a "normative agenda for sustainability" because the 17 SDGs "specify what a more desirable future should look like" (Schneider et al., 2019, p. 1594). In view of the normative dimensions of my research (Parkhurst, 2017), the study was conducted to provide data that will assist development practitioners in the fragile Darfur to build trust among the multi-stakeholders to achieve peace and sustainable development (UN, 2015).

Second assumption was that the SDGs are neutrally worded and subject to individual organization's subjective interpretation of the goals. Post-conflict state-building literature shows that different organizations use various definitions of fragility depending on the nature of their operation. This study assumed the current basic understandings and meanings of the terms MDGs, SDGs and sustaining peace as reflected in the Partnership Data for Sustainable Development Goals (PD4SDG) database, which is "an online platform aimed at improving transparency of work being carried out by multi-stakeholder partnerships" (Egelston et al., 2019, p. 5511).

The third assumption was that SDG-16 on transition to good governance, peace and security is "fundamentally political and will require a qualitative measurement tool capable of providing rigorous political analysis" (Bolaji-Adio, 2015, p. i). Hence, qualitative research design and methodology as well as complexity theory and systems thinking perspective were suitable to address the research purpose and answer the research questions in this study. According to the OECD and the UNSDG, the

implementation of the SDGs and associated targets required "whole-of-government approaches… and strengthened co-ordination" (OECD, 2016b, p. 3).

Fourth, I assumed that about 10 key informant interviews with elite officials with most extensive knowledge about their organizations operations in Darfur selected through referrals and support of the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and the UNCT in Sudan that coordinates the SDGs implementation in Darfur, would yield rich information to reach saturation and address the research purpose and central research question (Creswell, 2013). The intent of this study was not to generalize from the sample but to explore the phenomenon of interest by purposively selecting information rich cases (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Scope and Delimitations

This study was an exploratory case study to explore how the UNCT member development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 on building the resilience of local governance structures in Darfur affect their collaboration in the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder platform to achieve the SDGs. The research sample and target population for this study was composed of the development organizations involved in the implementation of SDG-16 under the platform of the UNCT and leadership of the UNRC in Darfur (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). To gain insights into the actors' views on SDG-16, the study concentrated on the development organizations participating in the UNCT to offer collective support to the Sudan's Darfur Region in addressing key SDG priorities and gaps within the Common Minimum Standards for Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

developed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

The study is therefore limited to the officials of those development organizations involved in the implementation of SDG-16 under the UNCT-context to restore peace and achieve sustainable development in Darfur. This is to enable exploration of empirical events as narrated by those officials on behalf of their organizations. Due to the volatile situation in Darfur, the officials of those organizations involved in the SDGs policy implementation were limited to those identified from a series of referrals, support and cooperation from the Office of the RC in Sudan and from relevant members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Darfur. The RC in Sudan is the leader of the UNCT, a meta-governance platform that coordinates the peacebuilding and SDGs policy implementation activities in Darfur.

Limitations

One potential limitation of this qualitative exploratory case study research in a fragile territory like the Sudan's Darfur Region was lack of access to stakeholders owing to time, insecurity, or geography, which might compromise methodological integrity. According to Bush and Duggan (2013), the methodological limitations may be logistical inability to reach all affected population for interview (Brewer, 2016). Goetschel and Pfluger (2014) have also observed that while conducting research on a fragile territory like Darfur, the interaction with the study participants can pose ethical challenge with handling of data and communication of results (Brewer, 2016).

To minimize the ethical issues above, I observed and abided by the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules governing interactions with participants. I used the IRB's criteria for inclusion surrounding data collection through interviews to exclude at-risk or vulnerable populations from key informant interviews with the elites of the organizations' implementing the SDGs in Darfur (Shivayogi, 2013). The elites of the organizations' involved in executing the SDGs policy in Darfur do not fall into the IRB's category of studies with sensitive topics and vulnerable populations.

Also, to minimize the potential ethical issue of informed consent that span from handling of data to communication of results, I designed an interview guide based on ethical considerations that no harm or damage should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research (Jong & Jung, 2015). I made sure that the study participants sign an IRB-approved consent form to ensure each subject had an understanding of the research and its risks, afforded them anonymity, confidentiality and protection (Dattalo, 2010; Largent et al., 2012).

Furthermore, due to the volatility in Darfur, I sought an early consultation with the IRB to conduct the key informant interviews through asynchronous email interview method as the researcher and interviewer located outside Darfur, Sudan (Hawkins, 2018). In any case, asynchronous email interview method has become ideal with the COVID-19 pandemic situation since the IRB provided general guidance on research protocols to make provisions for interviewing remotely by email, Skype, Zoom, or other means.

Moreover, as a major limitation of any qualitative research that includes interviewing is the lack of scientific rigor in data collection and analysis resulting in

potential biases and reactivity (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018). I followed Patton's (2002) suggestion of adhering to the tenets of scholarly writing to help ensure bias-free reporting to increase confidence in my study. I also employed a systematic approach of utilizing multiple sources of information (i.e. triangulation to reduce biases and ensure validity in each stage of the research process; see Denzin, 2012; Schwarzenegger, 2017).

Significance of the Study

SDG-16 as a part of 2030 Agenda and strategic framework for transition from fragility to sustainable development has attracted academic attention on the key sources of fragility and the differences in perceptions of the SDGs role in building the resilience of local governance systems (Interpeace, 2016; INTRAC, 2018). UNDP recently launched a lessons-learned study to encourage researchers to conduct case studies on particular challenges of fragile states and publish recommendations to accelerate the SDGs implementation (Nygård, 2017; UNDP, 2016b). This study used Sudan's Darfur Region as an exploratory case study to enhance insights on the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on designing a multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation in Darfur.

Also, this case study research will not only contribute to the academic debates on the causes of limited progress of SDGs implementation in fragile settings like Sudan's Darfur Region but also the study will be a contribution to the United Nations urgent call for research that can be published as a report in 2021 to accelerate efforts towards achieving the SDGs during the 10 years "Decade of Action" left to accomplish the vision set in the 2030 Agenda to create a future where nobody is left behind (Assa, 2020, Para

1). Further, this study aligns with the decision of the international development community to take stock of the "myriad of individual projects" to achieve the SDG goals and to facilitate the development of a "theory of change for moving from fragility to resilience" (Ingram, & Papoulidis, 2017a: Para 10).

According Fayomi et al. (2018), the essence of research on the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda of the SDGs is to assist "decision-making process of the policy makers at various cadre of the managerial leadership of the SDGs" and contribute to the development of innovative pathways to accelerate the attainment of peace and sustainable development in fragile settings (Fayomi et al., 2018, p. 7). From the foregoing, this research is significant because it will contribute towards the acceleration of the SDGs achievement in Darfur by exploring the views of the various sustainability organizations in the UNCT-context where there is an ongoing debate on multi-stakeholder partnerships as the ideal collective effort for the SDGs realization.

Summary

Prior research on the limited progress of SDG-16 as a strategic framework to achieve stability, peace and long-term development in fragile states focused on the factors driving fragility in a conflict-affected setting like the Sudan's Darfur Region. None of the studies explored the different visions and interests of development actors as a barrier to collective multi-stakeholder action to achieve SDG-16 on building transparent and efficient institutions in a fragile context like Darfur. In this Chapter 1, I provided an overview of the problem to be addressed, the purpose of the inquiry, the central research question, the theoretical framework for the study, and the nature of the study. I also

defined the key terms, along with assumptions, scope and delimitations, and an analysis

of the potential limitations of the study. In Chapter 2, I examine the extent of knowledge

on the subject matter in order to establish the gap in literature and through the lenses of

complexity theory and systems thinking perspective determined the appropriate research

methods that guided the investigation of the research problem to answer the research

question.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The UN member states adopted SDG-16 as part of Agenda 2030 and as a strategic framework to inform policy for transitioning fragile regions out of instability towards peace and sustainable development (UNDP, 2018). Sequel to the adoption of Agenda 2030, many fragile and conflict affected countries including the Sudan's Darfur Region have embraced SDG-16 as a critical driver for realizing all the other SDGs in order to attain sustained economic growth, social development, and environmental protection. In 2016, the Government of Sudan designed a 5-year country strategic plan and adopted SDG-16 as part of the country strategic framework to move the Darfur Region to stability, peace and sustainable development (UNCT, 2017). The international development community in Darfur simultaneously launched the "Integrated Peacebuilding and Development Project" to transition Darfur towards peace and sustainable development (UNDP-Sudan, 2018).

Notwithstanding, despite the coordinated SDG-16 programs between the Sudan Government and the international development community in Darfur, limited progress was made to achieve stability, peace, and long-term development. According to a report by UNDP (2018), the situation in Darfur has remained fragile and the combined effects of poverty, instability, lack of infrastructure, and conflict have continued to have serious consequences on human development and human rights resulting in ineffective rule of law institutions. In addition, political freedom has continued to be curtailed resulting in a

massive flow of refugees and asylum seekers to Europe and East Africa and a huge number of IDPs within Sudan and at its borders.

The slow pace of SDG-16 policy to achieve the goals of poverty eradication, peace, and sustainable development in Darfur has generated international policy debate and considerable academic studies have attempted to investigate the reasons for the limited progress. Literature revealed that those prior academic studies on the factors accounting for the limited success of SDG-16 as a strategic framework for transitioning from fragility to stability, peace, and long-term development focused mostly on the factors driving fragility in the Sudan's Darfur Region. None explored what effect the views of the various development organizations working within the UNCT under the leadership of the UN RC to realize the SDGs have on their collective efforts to design a multi-stakeholder platform to achieve SDG-16 targets on building resilient, efficient, and transparent state institutions in Darfur. According to Osieyo (2017), although the SDG initiatives were predicated on improved coordination aimed to ensure the most effective way of implementing 2030 Agenda, there has been little discussion on how the visions and interests of the various development organizations operationalizing the SDGs affect collective action.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in fragile Sudan's Darfur Region through exploring how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs. The central research question was: How do the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-

stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region? According to Bianchi (2019), understanding the SDG-16 perceptions of those development organizations can build trust, consensus, and leadership of the multi-stakeholders to collaboratively deliver on various international agreements on the 'New Way of Working', Grand Bargain, and Agenda 2030 of the SDGs. This study contributes to the achievement of the SDGs in Darfur by providing guideposts to inform policy makers redesigning the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform for the development organizations to collaboratively implement the SDGs and transition Darfur out of fragility towards peace and long-term development. According to Wuelser and Pohl (2016) and Weber (2017), research on sustainable development should be guided by scientific understanding of concrete societal problem situations and how societal actors became aware of the problem and acted upon it.

In this chapter, I explored the relationships between politics, sustainability, and sustainable development based on complexity theory and systems thinking (Chughtai & Blanchet, 2017; Grohs et al., 2018). According to Scoones (2016), politics was central to the adoption of the SDGs as to what the goals and agreements mean, who should benefit, and where responsibilities should lie. I also evaluated scholarly resources on the challenges of using SDG-16 as a strategic framework for eradicating poverty and to realize peace and sustainable development as a background to understanding the contributions of this study to the policy debate on the limited success of development organizations collective efforts to transition Darfur from fragility to resilience.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review on the transition from fragility to the SDGs in Darfur was conducted using Academic Search Complete, Political Science Complete, Dissertations and PROQUEST to identify the existing body of research that investigated the reasons for the limited progress in achieving the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. Also, Walden Dissertations published within the last 3 years related to my topic on the SDGs implementation in fragile contexts were particularly used as a source to locate relevant resources. I further used Google Scholar and other databases, especially EBSCO and SAGE Journals, to find other relevant articles using filters, such as *fragility, conflict-afflicted, Darfur, peacebuilding, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustaining peace,* and *sustainability, resilience* or *stability.* The literature search resulted in over 100 peer-reviewed articles, books and journals that were used to determine the most relevant studies and literature sources for this qualitative exploratory case study exploring SDGs implementation in fragile Sudan's Darfur Region.

Historical Background to Darfur Conflict and Fragility

Setting the Context to the Darfur Conflict and Fragility Classification

Darfur is the Western Region of the Republic of Sudan, a land-locked area with an estimated landmass of about 493,180 km2. The UN calculated that about 7.5million people might be living in the five states of Darfur (i.e. Central Darfur with Zalingei as its capital, East Darfur with El Daein as its capital, North Darfur with El-Fasher as its capital, South Darfur with Nyala as its capital, and West Darfur with El-Geneina as its capital). Those are the five federal states established as the basic administrative structure

in Darfur following a Referendum in 2016 (UNDP-Sudan, 2018). Some scholars have cautioned that it would be difficult to assess the exact population of Darfur due to high rates of migration to neighboring countries and Western Europe as a result of frequent conflicts (Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith, 2018) and due to Darfur's location along Sudan's international borders with Central African Republic (CAR) in the South-West, Chad in the West, Libya in the North, and South Sudan in the South (Jaspars et al., 2018).

Some analysts have argued that Darfur was prone to intermittent conflicts due to its geography and history of its incorporation into Sudan in 1917 by the British Empire from being a mighty sultanate (Wahutu, 2018). According to the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (IPTI, 2018), since Darfur was integrated into greater Sudan, the region has been largely marginalized by the powers in Sudan's capital, Khartoum and more than one-third of Darfur population that were "Fur, a non-Arab sedentary ethnic group, and other significant non-Arab ethnic groups including the agriculturalist Masalit and the agro-pastoralist Zaghawa, have turned to commerce as pastoralist livelihoods have led to considerable displacement among the Fur population" (IPTI, 2018, p. 2).

The other root causes of the Darfur conflict as pointed out by Smith (2017) include the struggle over control of an environment that could no longer support all the people living in the Darfur Region as a result of severe water and food shortages due to displacement caused by climatic changes (Mirumachi et al., 2019). Bromwich (2015) explained that Darfur is situated in the Sahelian region in western Sudan with the majority residing mostly in southern Darfur because of the extremely dry conditions in the north, where "the isohyets for the region decreased from 800mm in the south to

50mm or less in the north" (Bromwich, 2018, p. 378). Louhaichi et al. (2016) argued that long-term climatic changes stretched governance arrangements in Darfur coupled with the social and economic consequences of poor government policy and agricultural practices that triggered the conflict in Darfur.

Waheed (2016) explained that the 2003 rebellion started with the emergence of two reactionary forces namely Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in the wake of the large scale economic marginalization of the Darfur population by the Sudan Government. Waheed stated that rather than addressing the economic, environmental and social issues of the Darfur groups being represented by the SLA/M and JEM, the Sudan Government used offensive measures to repress the groups with an Arab militia (known as the Janjaweed) that violently attacked villages throughout the Darfur Region. According to Waheed (2016), the Sudan Government's direct state violence in the Darfur Region resulted in a massive humanitarian catastrophe and the death of an estimated 400,000 people and about 2.5 million people internally displaced within Sudan while quite a huge number fled to Chad, a neighboring country to the West of Sudan.

In 2006, the Government of Sudan (GoS) and one of Darfur's rebel groups, a breakaway faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) headed by Minni Minawi signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) aimed at ending the conflict in Darfur. Based on the DPA, in 2008, the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) deployed the UN-AU Assistance Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) that included about 26,000 soldiers within the UNAMID to stabilize the territory, and provide humanitarian and bilateral aid

to safeguard the well-being of civilians, ensure the security of relief workers, and promote recovery and development in Darfur. However, after signing the DPA and deploying the UNAMID fighting continued in Darfur with more displacements of people.

In 2011, a second Darfur peace deal brokered by Qatar, also known as the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) was signed. The hallmark of the DDPD was its associated Darfur Development Strategy (DDS), the agreed framework to guide development efforts in Darfur (AfDB-Sudan Country Office, 2016). According to Elzarov (2015), the DDS required UNAMID to design a community stabilization and violence reduction program entitled "community-based labor intensive projects (CLIPs) to deliver youth empowerment and job creation solutions to youth in Darfur" (p.1). Notwithstanding the advances that were made by the DDPD and its associated DDS, a report by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) listed the Sudan's Darfur Region among "top 20 fragile states … caught in a 'fragility trap', over the past 30 years" (Stevens, Wang & Ismail 2020, p. 9). Stevens et al. (2020) explained that the "weak legitimacy and corrupt practices" of the government in the Sudan's Darfur Region prevented a "fair distribution of resources and delivery of services" that adversely affected the state authority and capacity to transition the Darfur Region out of the economic and environmental threats (Stevens et al., 2020, p. 9).

The fact is that after implementing the DDPD and the DDS by the Government of Sudan in close coordination with the UNAMID, the Sudan's Darfur Region remained fragile. According to Hutchinson (2017), after almost five years into the DDPD and DDS implementation and by 2015 Darfur has remained extremely fragile as other protracted

conflicts sharing the same root cause as the Darfur crisis, i.e. "the Government of Sudan's political and economic marginalization of its periphery" (Hutchinson, 2017, p. 19). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 2018 report stated that despite the DDPD, DDS and SDGs policy implementation, the conflict in Darfur has continued and exacerbated instability, lack of infrastructure, hindered human development, and the rule of law institutions have become ineffective making human rights abuses rife.

Fragility Classification

The International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI, 2016) reported that even though the DDPD and the associated DDS was signed and implemented in Darfur, the conflict re-escalated since 2014 with continued displacement of the civilian population. The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2015) estimated that "some 450,000 persons were displaced in 2014 and another 100,000 in January 2015 alone, adding to some two million long-term internally displaced persons (IDPs) since fighting erupted in 2003" (ICG, 2015, p.1). According to De Waal (2015), the generalized insecurity in the midst of the DDPD and DDS peacebuilding efforts in Darfur "created permanent political unsettlement" (Castro, 2018, pp.163-164) resulting in Darfur's classification as a fragile territory. According to Fund for Peace, Sudan's Darfur Region scored high on all "12 different political, social and economic indicators" of fragility, "especially on 'Massive Movement of Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons', 'Vengeance-seeking Group Grievance', 'Security Apparatus', 'Rise of Factionalized Elites' and 'Intervention of External Actors' (between 9.8 and 10 points out of 10)" (Jumbert, 2014, p. 288).

In view of the above, in 2016 the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) listed Sudan's Darfur Region among 19 African states in its 'Harmonized List of Fragile Situations'. In the report, the AfDB (2018) stated that those fragile states were characterized "… by widespread poverty, frequent conflict, poor governance, weak administrative capacity, high perceptions of corruption, and challenging climates for doing business" (AfDB, 2018, p. 9). A joint report of the United Nations and the World Bank recognized fragility as one of the big obstacles to reaching the SDGs by 2030 and urged the international development community in Darfur to make "addressing fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) a strategic priority to achieve the twin SDG goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity, in particular SDG Goal 16 for peace, justice and strong institutions" (World Bank, 2019, p. 2). The World Bank estimated that more than two billion people now live in countries where development outcomes were affected by FCV, and projected that by 2030 almost 50 percent of the global poor will live in fragile contexts including the Darfur Region (World Bank, 2019).

Transition from MDGs and Peacemaking to the SDGs

The Sudan's Darfur Region was ranked one of the world's "most fragile states" (Stevens et al., 2020, p. 1**)** and among the "top six countries on the index" of all fragile states in sub-Saharan Africa (BBC News, 2014, June 26, Para 1**)**. It was against this background that in 2016, the Government of Sudan designed a 5-year country strategic plan and adopted the SDG-16 as part of Agenda 2030 of the SDGs to inform her policy for moving the Darfur Region out of fragility in order to achieve peace and sustainable development. With the overthrow of the 30-year regime of President Omar al-Bashir and

the establishment of an interim transitional government in Sudan in August 2019, the

international development community and scholar-practitioners have argued that the

Sudan Government should recommit to the SDGs as the optimal policy tool for the

successful transition of the Darfur Region from fragility to peace and sustainable

development (Stevens et al., 2020). According to Luna and Montaño (2017) as well as

Vandemoortele (2018), the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) General

Assembly on September 28, 2015 was built on the spirit and foundation of the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to continue the worldwide commitment and

international efforts to achieve sustainable peace, long-term development and the

eradication of poverty. Although the world leaders that adopted the MDGs had a dream

of a world order where food security would be guaranteed for humanity and a globe

where people would earn not less than $1.25 a day, Ani (2016) noted that by the time the

MDGs ended in 2015, the traditional and contemporary patterns of multi-dimensional

conflicts in Africa inhibited the realization of the MDGs as many places of conflicts,

including Darfur Region remained impoverished (Kumar & Roy, 2018).

Sudan's country assessment report of 2015 on the status of the MDGs stated that

even though there was general progress in some goals and challenges in many goals,

poverty remained high in the Darfur Region. The United Nations Economic Commission

for Africa (UNECA, 2015) estimated that the poverty rate in Sudan was more than 90%,

an indication that more than 90% of the population lived on less than one-dollar-a-day.

The UNECA reported that the combined rural survival deprivation index for different

states in Sudan showed that the highest level of poverty was found in the rural areas including the northern Darfur States. Mashamoun (2019) argued that the situation of widespread incidents of poverty that resulted from the implementation of the MDGs in Sudan's Darfur Region triggered strong competition among the people for survival and provoked internal displacement that caused conflicts and fragility in Darfur.

Critics of the MDGs like Miklian and Schouten (2019) argued that the MDGs did not succeed to achieve peace, security and political stability in the Sudan's Darfur Region because conflict and fragility did not feature within the MDGs even though a third of the world's poorest live in countries experiencing ongoing conflict and are deemed fragile by international standards. Other critics including Bolay et al. (2019) and Klopp and Petretta (2017) also argued that the MDGs not only ignored the structural causes of poverty, such as social exclusion, local customs and rituals but also became irrelevant in the context of specific regions in a country. In addition, Kamruzzaman (2016) contended that the implementation of MDGs in the Darfur Region of Sudan was technocratic with a top-down approach that disregarded the voices of the poor and the marginalized in the process of designing sustainable development programs. According to Oldekop et al. (2016), the gap in the MDGs of not incorporating the conditions of conflict and fragility in its policy framework was an important justification for including them within the SDGs, especially SDG-16, which aims are to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (UN System SDGS Action Database, 2018).

At the end of the MDGs lifecycle in 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations (UN) and the global civil society adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under paragraph 54 of the United Nations Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015 entitled "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs were considered the successor to the MDGs with a set of 17 aspirational global goals and 169 targets. The list of the 17 goals includes: 1-Poverty; 2-Hunger & Nutrition; 3-Health & Well-being; 4-Education & Learning; 5-Gender & Empowerment; 6-Water & Sanitation; 7-Energy; 8-Growth & Decent Work; 9-Infrastructure & Innovation; 10-Inequality; 11-Urban areas; 12-Sustainable consumption & production; 13-Climate Change; 14-Oceans & Seas; 15-Ecosystems & Biodiversity; 16-Peace & Justice; 17-Global Partnership (Koch & Ahmad, 2018; United Nations, 2015).

Huelshoff (2017) and Noguera and Vargas (2017) pointed out that the most significant difference between the MDGs and the SDGs is that the latter underscored that peace was a prerequisite to achieve sustainable development. This means that to achieve the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development in Darfur, local and international development actors must coordinate and plan their work in the Sudan's Darfur Region within the framework of the SDGs. At the 2018 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) conference on sustainable development in New York, Transparency International (2018) underlined how important it was to include civil society organizations in the SDGs policy implementation in the Sudan's Darfur Region in order to address corruption, eradicate poverty and ensure peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

In this regard, academics and practitioners recommended that using the SDGs as a policy tool to transition Darfur out of fragility required taking stock of the changing nature of fragility and exploring how resilience thinking can strengthen public policy to enable Darfur's transformation towards the SDG goals of peace and sustainable development (Kabasubabo & Van Sluijs, 2018; Muddathir, 2018).

Other experts have argued that the SDGs' most significant departure from previous approaches to sustainable development was that all the goals were linked into a system that required trade-offs and interdependencies (Adams, 2017; Le Blanc, 2015). According to Hansson et al. (2019), the global community that proposed the 17 SDGs made significant efforts "to create the SDG goals and targets as integrated and indivisible wholes that balanced the three dimensions of sustainable development in order to maximize synergies and manage trade-offs in the implementation of the SDGs" (Hansson et al., 2019, p. 9). Hansson et al. (2019) contended that that the SDGs needed integration "in order to maximize synergies and manage trade-offs in the implementation of the SDGs. This is because the SDGs were intended to serve as a common frame of reference for governments and organizations operating in fragile states in their efforts to achieve stability, end poverty, realize peace and sustainable development (Kjaerulf et al., 2016).

This means that using the SDGs as a policy tool to move Darfur from fragility to resilience will entail complexity and systems thinking perspectives, also known as the whole of society approaches (Miola & Schiltz, 2019; Risse, 2019). Brosché and Höglund (2016) and McEntee-Atalianis (2017) have pointed out that an important addition to the catalogue of the SDGs objectives that distinguished them from the MDGs was the goal

on accountable and inclusive institutions (SDG-16). According to Mcloughlin and Idris (2016), state fragility, conflict, violence and political instability have become the key challenges facing the international community and research should focus on how to improve the linkages between the often separate efforts of donors and multi-lateral organizations in three domains: "providing humanitarian services, promoting development, and building stability and peace… sometimes known as improving coherence across the 'Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding Nexus', or HDP Nexus" (Dalrymple, 2019). Obrecht (2017) has noted that exploring the effect of development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 on designing an integrated multi-stakeholder platform for SDGs implementation in Darfur will help development practitioners and policy makers to *c*larify priorities and decision-making processes in their collective efforts to achieve the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Theoretical Framework

In this qualitative exploratory case study, complexity theory and systems thinking perspective by Fowler (2008), Teisman and Klijn (2008) will be used as a theoretical framework "through which the literature and data in the study will be viewed" (Collins & Stockton, 2018, p. 1). Also, complexity theory and systems thinking will be used to organize and present the final report in this study (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, complexity theory and systems thinking will frame the theoretical foundations for this exploratory case study on public policy intervention in a fragile setting and will be used to explore the dynamics of complex interactive networks (Turner & Baker, 2019). That

is, how different development actors interact and collaborate locally in Sudan's Darfur Region to achieve collective goals and contribute to policy outcomes envisioned in SDG-16 on building transparent and efficient institutions.

According to Turner and Baker (2020), complexity and systems thinking are key aspects to consider when evaluating the coordination and collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation to achieve stability, peace, and long-term development in a fragile setting like the Sudan's Darfur Region. Also, some scholars have conceptualized state fragility and failure as a wicked problem because of their "complex, ill-defined and interdependent nature" (Carment & Samy, 2019, p. 333) and recommended the application of complexity theory and systems thinking approach to investigate such "wicked problems" since their properties are emergent and not predictable (Turner et al., 2019, p. 4).

Complexity theory and systems thinking perspective is therefore considered ideal for this study because of the intricacies inherent in the implementation of SDG-16 in fragile contexts where the complexity of the relationships between the SDGs and the differences in resources and development capabilities exacerbate the ability of the development actors to achieve the goals and targets. In view of the above, complexity and systems thinking approach is required to explore SDG-16 implementation from multiple perspectives, including analyzing the inter-linkages between the SDGs, prioritizing the goals and evaluating the essential transformations of Agenda 2030 of the SDGs in a fragile territory like the Sudan's Darfur Region

Complexity Theory and Systems Thinking Perspective

Teisman and Klijn (2008) introduced the main characteristics of complexity theory based on the concept of nonlinear activity and self-organizing capacities (El-Ghalayini, 2017) and how it might be used to understand and inform design and intervention in public policy and public management field (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018). Simultaneously, Fowler (2008) presented complexity theory as a part of systems thinking with practical relevance and applications for the development field (Verkoren, 2008). The focus of complexity theory and systems thinking is on understanding the patterns of interaction between system elements at different levels and times (Eppel, 2017; Gear, Eppel & Koziol-Mclain, 2018; Mercure et al., 2016). The perspective focuses on interdependence among policymakers to pursue more pragmatic solutions based on increasing the freedom of local actors to learn and adapt to environmental signals to achieve policy outcomes (Cairney & Geyer, 2017; Moldavska &Welo, 2019).

With these principles in mind, complexity theory and systems thinking perspective will be used in this study to explore how the development organizations implementing SDG-16 in Darfur interact as multi-stakeholders to build transparent and efficient institutions to eradicate poverty and achieve peace and sustainable development (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018). In September 2015 when the UN member states adopted the SDGs, they specifically invited the international development community to create "an integrated, holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to facilitate better conversation and cooperation between the agencies" and organizations involved in implementing the SDGs (Reynolds et al, 2017, p. 677). Thus, *c*omplexity theory and systems thinking perspective

is considered an appropriate theoretical framework for this study on transition from fragility to sustainable development in Darfur, Sudan because it can be used to identify whether synergies or trade☐offs are the most frequent SDG interactions among the development actors as multi-stakeholders (Adams, 2016 and 2017). The perspective is also considered appropriate for this study because, according to Wuelser and Pohl (2016), research on sustainable development is mostly related to real-world challenges and the perspective can go beyond deterministic frameworks by "adopting a probabilistic, integrative, inclusive and adaptive approach that can support" fragility to resilience research (Peter & Swilling, 2014, p.1594).

Moreover, complexity theory and systems thinking perspective is considered relevant to this study because research on sustainable development requires researchers to go beyond disciplinary boundaries to make "transdisciplinarity possible within the peace and conflict field" (Hendrick, 2009, p. 4). According to Agramont et al. (2019), Dorado-Banacloche (2020), Gray and Purdy (2018), transdisciplinarity is an important concept in the use of complexity theory and systems thinking perspective because it emphasizes the importance of collaboration between social actors in the framework of the SDGs. Also, it has been noted that development organizations usually resort to multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) as a platform to develop the capability to address complex issues and problems that cannot be handled by a single organization. Thus, complexity theory and systems thinking perspective will be used in this study to illuminate the different visions and interests of the UNCT member development organizations that impact collective multi-stakeholder action to achieve SDG-16 targets in Darfur.

Root Causes and Multiple Dimensions of Fragility

State Fragility and Poverty Eradication

The limited success made by the Government of Sudan and the international development community in Darfur in using SDG-16 as a strategic framework for building the resilience of fragile state structures and for achieving peace and sustainable development in the fragile Darfur Region has generated international policy debate. Some researchers have tried to explain the limited progress in using the SDGs as a policy to transition the Sudan's Darfur Region from fragility to resilience by focusing on the remote and proximate causes of fragility. According to Dombrowski (2018), fragility has been at the core of most human suffering as well as poverty and a major hurdle to the SDGs realization in fragile contexts including Darfur. According to a study by Shepherd and team (2018 and 2019), the nexus between fragility and extreme poverty has become central to the discourse on international development since the 'High-level Panel on the Post- 2015 Development Agenda' estimated that more than half of the world's extreme poor were living in countries afflicted with conflict and violence.

In view of the above and following the findings of an earlier study by Shepherd and his team of researchers (2018 and 2019), pointed out that the shortcoming of the studies that emphasized the root causes of fragility as the explanation for the limited success of the SDGs as a policy for reducing poverty and achieving peace and sustaining development in Darfur was that those studies only singled out the obstacles that truly perpetuated poverty amid fragile conditions rather than exploring a common strategy among the development community to reverse the pernicious trends of fragility and

accelerate progress across the range of SDG targets Darfur. According to Morton et al. (2017), the interconnection between the SDG goals that were adopted to address the world's shared challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice as well as their universality, requires system wide strategic planning and a multi-stakeholder platform to help with their implementation. Morton et al. (2017) underscored the need for systems thinking to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions into policy and actions to deliver the vision of Agenda 2030 of the SDGs.

Dombrowski (2018) has also argued that those studies that tried to explain the limited success of the SDGs policy to transition the Darfur to resilience by singling out the root causes of fragility have underscored the need for more studies on the efforts of the international development community and governments in Darfur to collaboratively deliver more official development assistance (ODA) to that fragile state and region in order to address fragility properly and to achieve the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs. According to Dalrymple (2019), there was consensus among policymakers and development practitioners that the focus of research should be on exploring longer-term development responses in fragile contexts, and on more joined-up approaches to strengthen greater coherence between development, crisis, and peace agendas to enable progress in achieving the SDG goal to "leave no one behind" (Para 1).

Root Causes of Fragility

Carment et al. (2015) in their study found that majority of research on state fragility that focused on the causes of fragility and its consequences might not

appropriately address the problems of SDGs as a policy to transition a fragile state like Darfur to peace and sustainment development (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017). Bexell and Jönsson (2017) argued that the researchers that investigated the root causes of fragility failed to account for the limited success of SDG-16 in transitioning Darfur to sustainable development because the SDGs documents neglected to address "how power relations and historical circumstances affected current degrees of responsibility" (Bexell et al., p. 26). Young (2017) explored the causes of Darfur's fragility and based on an earlier research by Ali (2014), traced them to the political economy of Darfur, a vast territory with limited and unexplored natural resources, poor infrastructure, and lack of major development projects. Young (2017) argued that identifying Darfur's economic and human development needs should be the first step to finding ways to alleviate poverty and achieve peace and sustainable development in Darfur.

Another school of thought traced the root cause of Darfur fragility to long-term climatic changes that overstretched and weakened governance arrangements (Mirumachi et al., 2019). This school of thought argued that Darfur fragility was the social and economic consequences of poor long-term government policy, agricultural practice and rangeland management that triggered the conflict. Castro (2018), for his part, traced the cause of Darfur's fragility to historical incorporation into greater Sudan and argued that Darfur fragility was rooted in the region's transformation from a powerful Sultanate to a "remote, impoverished periphery that was accelerated and deepened by colonial and post-colonial rule" (Castro, 2018, p. 169). Other studies have also traced the causes of state fragility in Africa in general and Darfur in particular to the legacy of colonialism that led

to failed institutions that accounted for the causes and consequences of poverty (Kodila-Tedika & Simplice, 2016). According to Wahutu (2018), Darfur was prone to intermittent conflicts and fragility due to its history of its incorporation into Sudan in 1917 by the British Empire from being a mighty sultanate. To transition Darfur out of fragility, those schools of thought underscored the important role of research to explore alternative development policy to the SDGs policy to take into account the roots of the complex development problems that underpin natural resource conflicts in Darfur (Fisher, Bavinck & Amsalu, 2018, p. 28).

In a study of SDG-16, former UNDP Administrator Helen Clark stated that to achieve the SDGs in fragile Darfur, research on peace and sustainable development should focus on what the international development community should be able to do to lift the Darfur federal states and communities out of "conflict-fragility-poverty trap" (Durbin, 2018, Para 9). In line with the research efforts to go beyond the root causes of fragility to gain deeper understanding of the reasons for the limited progress in using the SDGs as a policy for transition from fragility to stability, peace and sustainable development, the United Nations and the World Bank Group have launched a joint effort entitled the "'Humanitarian-Development-Peace Initiative (HDPI)' to work together across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence" (Price, 2017, Para 1). According to Price (2017), the HDPI initiative was based on growing recognition that humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts should be complementary to respond to volatile situations in Darfur and around the world.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed has launched a high-level meeting on Darfur's transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustainable development in September 2018. The high-level meeting urged UNCT member development organizations to support research on the transition of Darfur to peace and sustainable development that will examine strategies for achieving four SDG priority goals namely, "rule of law, durable solutions for IDPs, immediate service delivery for IDPs, and human rights" (UNAMID, 2018, Para 3).

Multiple Dimensions of Fragility

In 2016, the *OECD* listed Sudan's Darfur Region among 15 extremely fragile contexts based on a 'multidimensional fragility framework' built on five dimensions of fragility (i.e., violence, justice, institutions, economic foundations and resilience; Bosetti et al., 2016; OECD*,* 2018). Ingram and Papoulidis (2017a) explained that the 'OECD multidimensional fragility framework' encompassed a "whole-of-society" breadth of fragility from conflict and disasters to destitution and high rates of hunger, illiteracy, and maternal and infant mortality. Some scholars have however, criticized the OECD multidimensional fragility framework arguing that it charted a universal understanding of fragility but failed to recognize the specific challenges of fragile and conflict-affected states like Darfur due to access to basic services (Grainger et al., 2017*).* According to Michel (2018), the multiple dimensions of fragility have made the development organizations operating in fragile settings like Darfur to measure fragility in different ways such that while some approached fragility from a security perspective, others viewed fragility from divergent perspectives of development problems.

Other studies on peace and sustainable development in fragile settings have criticized the OECD 'multidimensional fragility framework' for measuring only environmental fragility as a distinct dimension in its framework whereas "climate change has also been driving fragility across all other dimensions" (Roberts, 2018, Para 11). According to a study by Smith (2017), Darfur fragility was influenced by a multitude of variables that included both political activism and global environmental issues. Hence, both Dombrowski (2018) and Michel (2018) argued that the differences in the measurements of fragility dimensions have impeded collaboration among development organizations in their efforts to properly address fragility and achieve the SDG goals of peace and sustainable development in Darfur. This underscores the need for further research using the complexity theory and systems thinking perspective to provide information to practitioners and scholars to facilitate insight into the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 that impact designing an integrated multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the realization of the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development in Darfur.

Challenges of SDGs as Policy for Transition to Peace and Sustainable Development

To differentiate the SDGs from the MDGs before it, the 2030 Agenda requires a whole-of-government approach among development actors operating in very difficult crisis-affected and fragile situations to build resilient systems that can trigger fundamental changes in politics and society to achieve peace, prosperity, and environmental sustainability (United Nations, 2015). However, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) that was set up to carry out regular Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

of the SDGs implementation concluded at its meeting in 2019 that the SDGs have made limited progress to overcome fragility, extreme poverty and vulnerability traps and has ensnared over 1.5 billion of the world's citizens. According to the Sudan VNR report compiled by Muddathir (2018), in the Darfur Region, the implementation of SDG-16 as a strategic framework has been slow to advance the pace of transition of Darfur out of conflict and fragility to realize the SDG goals of stability, poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development. This has instigated debates among academics and scholar-practitioners on the factors that contributed to the limited success of using the SDG-16 as strategic framework to transition Darfur from fragility to resilience (Martens, 2019).

In attempting to explain the reasons for the SDGs policy's limited success, some scholars have argued that the 17 SDG goals and 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda were not only too vast but also have unrealistic expectations that could be impossible-to-reach targets (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018). Others have also argued that the high numbers of the SDG goals, targets and supporting actions generated a controversy among governments and development organizations in deciding which goals to prioritize in order to achieve the common vision (Morton et al., 2017). According to Bexell and Jönsson (2017), the scope of the 2030 Agenda has seriously undermined the transformational spirit of the SDGs that the UNCT member development organizations in Darfur have made limited progress in adopting a more holistic and a whole-of-government approach to achieve peace and sustainable development.

Lack of Synergy and Chasm among Development Actors

One leading argument for the limited success of the SDGs as a policy to transition Darfur from fragility to stability is the lack of synergy among development organizations in their efforts to assist the war-torn country to achieve the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development (Malunga & Holcombe, 2017). This school of thought championed by Tschudin and Trithart (2018) argued that the implementation of the SDGs in fragile contexts was dominated by a wide array of international development organizations with diverse interests and mandates which were not aligned with local realities due to the chasm between domestic and international understandings and approaches to peacebuilding and sustainable development. Those scholars argued that local ownership of peacebuilding efforts was needed in order to build sustainability of local governance institutions in Darfur.

For their part, Assal (2016) and Schneider et al. (2019) posited that the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in peacebuilding and sustainable development was valorized in countries witnessing protracted conflicts but in Darfur the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs put strong emphasis on national-level implementation with vague obligations for the CSOs and NGOs whereas the success of the SDGs was predicated on improved implementation coordination between the public and non-public actors (Beisheim & Simon, 2016 and 2018). This school of thought therefore, called for a renewed involvement of the CSOs and NGOs in peacebuilding and SDG-16 implementation in the efforts to transition Darfur out of fragility to realize poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development in Darfur.

Competing Theoretical Approaches to Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development

Some scholars have further argued that the SDGs policy has been slow to advance the pace of transition of the Sudan's Darfur Region out of fragility because the goals and targets were neutrally worded and priority setting depended on individual organization's subjective persuasion about the goals (Brolan et al., 2017). As a result, Malunga and Holcombe (2017) contended that the SDGs have made limited progress in Darfur because each development organization participating in the implementation designed their intervention programs and policy support to the local governance institutions in Darfur based their specific mandates, world views, experiences, tools, models, and frameworks of development theory and practice (Tallberg et al., 2018).

Other studies argued that the SDGs have made limited progress to transition Darfur out of fragility because the contemporary peacebuilding approach adopted by the implementing UNCT member development organizations was based on a liberal peace thesis that applied a standardized liberal social model that was insensitive to local contexts (Leib, 2016). This school of thought represented by De Coning (2018), Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP, 2017), International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS, 2017), and Kabasubabo & Van Sluijs (2018) proposed that development organizations in Darfur should recommit to using the principles of the 'New Deal', especially local ownership to guide efforts to achieve the SDGs.

On the other hand, Castro (2018) contended that the SDGs made limited progress as a policy to transition Darfur to peace and sustainable development because Darfur was one of the world's most illiberal settings, where peacebuilding processes were being

supplanted by state-centric, authoritarian responses to internal armed conflicts that were dominated by elite priorities of the international donors often ending up as their enablers (Heathershaw & Owen, 2019; Lewis et al., 2018). According to Brosig (2017), the peacebuilding processes in an illiberal setting like Darfur, was a sort of political marketplace based on domestic rent-seeking peacebuilding perspective, where the post-conflict regimes running the reconstruction process distributed the benefits of the post-war reconstruction to loyal insiders and allies. Castro (2018) argued therefore, that the SDGs policy has made limited progress to achieve peace and sustainable development in Darfur because the people were not given sufficient opportunity to participate in the economic recovery projects. This school of thought argued that for the SDG-16 strategic framework to be successful for transformation to resilience, issues of injustice for the poorest and most marginalized groups in Darfur must be incorporated into the SDGs development action and policy (Fisher et al., 2018).

The third school of thought that has emerged to explain the limited success of the SDGs as policy to transition fragile Darfur to peace and development is known as the integrated and balanced approach to development, social and solidarity economy (SSE) (UN-DESA, 2018). According to the SSE approach, social economy enterprises and organizations have the capacity to facilitate the achievement of the SDGs if the development organizations operating in fragile contexts including Darfur, have been able to translate social economy enterprises at the community levels into "drivers for achieving the localized SDGs in an inclusive, productive and sustainable economy for all citizens" (UNRISD, 2018, p. 1). The SSE approach argued that to achieve the goals of

the SDGs in Darfur, the development organizations operating in Darfur must train the social economy enterprises in the competencies for sustainability that are essential in achieving the SDGs (Quiroz-Niño & Murga-Menoyo, 2017). Hence, Grunfeld and Elhafiz (2019) proposed that for the SDGs to be achieved, "WAREFUR International Organization (WIO), consisting of Darfuri refugees living in various diaspora communities, together with members living in urban and rural areas of Darfur (including IDPs)" should participate in the reconstruction of Darfur, using the principles of shared ownership of certain assets through cooperative structures and other aspects of the SSE to reduce vulnerabilities and increase resilience (Grunfeld et al., 2019, p. 1). Wall and Hedlund (2016) and Robinson (2018) stated that a major limitation of the SSE approach is that it was based on an old discourse on the challenges of "localization that was used to refer to a range of phenomena from outsourcing aid to local partners, to increasing support for locally-driven initiatives" (Robinson, 2018, p. 4). According to Robinson (2018), the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 has brought up a new discourse to strengthen joined-up approaches to SDGs programming and financing, together with joint analysis and planning at the international level for achieving greater coherence and collective outcomes of the SDG-16 implementation in fragile Darfur (Dalrymple, 2019).

As the adoption of the SDGs as a policy for eradicating poverty and to achieve peace and sustainable development calls on the world community to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (Florini & Pauli, 2018), my study will fill a gap in literature by exploring the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on the

coordination and collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate planning and delivery of assistance in fragile contexts to achieve the SDGs using Darfur as a case study. The relevance of my study is that it will contribute to strengthening local governance structures in the Sudan's Darfur Region through providing guideposts to policy makers' addressing the multi-stakeholder governance challenges to operationalize SDG-16 as a framework to end poverty and achieve peace and sustainable development.

According to Zachary (2018), investigating the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of the SDG-16 on the collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation will foster the realization of the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace, justice, and strong institutions in Darfur. Also, Bianchi (2019) has noted that understanding the perceptions of those organizations of the SDG-16 strategic framework can aid in building trust, consensus, and leadership, and can address conflict management and performance governance in cross☐sector collaboration when policies on sustainability issues are designed and implemented in Darfur.

Summary and Conclusion

The limited progress made by the Government of Sudan and the UNCT member development organizations in Darfur in using SDG-16 as a strategic framework to accelerate the SDGs implementation to transition conflict affected Sudan's Darfur Region out of fragility to achieve stability, eradicate poverty and build resilient local governance institutions have attracted considerable academic attention. However, literature review revealed that previous studies revolved around the key sources of fragility in conflict-

affected societies and the competing theoretical approaches in building the resilience of the local governance systems to achieve the SDGs. There is a paucity of research on the impact of the different visions and interests of development organizations on their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs in Darfur.

This study focused specifically on how the perceptions of SDG-16 by the Sudan's UNCT member development organizations' impact their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs in Darfur. It addressed the research question by exploring the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of the SDG-16 on the coordination and collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation to foster the realization of the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace, justice, and strong institutions in Darfur. In the next Chapter three, I outlined the methods that were employed in this study to carry out this qualitative exploratory case study to explore how the various Sudan's UNCT member development organizations perceptions of the SDG-16 on building transparent and efficient institutions in Darfur affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders working together in the UNCT in Sudan to operationalize the SDGs to achieve the goals of poverty eradication, peace and sustainable development in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The adoption by the Government of Sudan of SDG-16, a part of Agenda 2030 of the SDGs as a strategic framework to transition the Darfur Region from fragility to resilience, has made limited progress in achieving the SDG goals of poverty eradication, peace, and sustainable development. Prior studies that investigated the reasons for the limited progress focused on the factors driving fragility in Darfur but none explored the effect of different visions and interests of the development organizations implementing SDG-16 on their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs in Darfur. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to understand how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 on building transparent and efficient institutions in Darfur affect collaboration of those organizations working together in the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation in fragile Sudan's Darfur Region.

In Chapters 1 and 2 of this study, I reviewed, analyzed, and presented literature on prior studies that investigated the reasons for the limited progress made by the Sudan Government in using SDG-16 as a strategic framework to transition the Darfur Region from fragility to peace and sustainable development. This was done to demonstrate the breadth and depth of work conducted to understand the causes of fragility in the Darfur Region and to further understanding about how the different visions and interests of development actors affect collective multi-stakeholder action to achieve the SDGs in a fragile context.

The synthesis from the previous scholarly work was intended to achieve the aim of this study, which is to contribute to the policy debate on the factors responsible for the limited progress of SDG-16 as a strategic framework for transitioning a fragile state to the SDG goals of peace and sustainable development in Darfur. The review of the prior studies was also to inform the research design and methodology of this qualitative exploratory case study. The research question in this study will be best addressed using an explorative case study approach since it is not possible to use previously validated hypotheses due to lack of prior literature on the topic. According to Mills et al. (2010) and Saunders et al. (2019), an explorative case study is used to gather preliminary information to clarify the exact nature of the research problem and to enable investigation into the phenomena of interest.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodological procedures that were used in this study. The chapter begins with an overview of the method of inquiry, including a discussion of the methodology and rationale for adopting the research approach. The chapter also provides a description of the study setting, the target population, and sampling design. Additionally, the chapter reviews how the study participants' ethical protection was be ensured as well as the procedures for the verification of findings. Further, the chapter describes and justifies the choice and use of data collection instruments, methods, and data analysis procedures that were undertaken. Moreover, the chapter addresses the role of the researcher in the research process, the trustworthiness of the research results, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative exploratory case study design was the most appropriate research design and methodology to investigate and explore in depth the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on the collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation in Darfur. An exploratory case study design was the preferred approach for this study because, according to Ridder (2017), this design can enable a researcher to narrow down and analyze the phenomena of interest within the boundaries of a specific environment and organizations to adequately address the research problem and answer the central research question (RQ) in this study: How do the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region?

Zainal (2007) also stressed that an exploratory case study research can be used to understand the impacts of a specific experiential phenomenon like how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect collaboration among multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in Darfur. This is because an exploratory research question is the only viable method to elicit implicit and explicit data from desk review of documents and elite interviews with officials of the development organizations in Darfur as key respondents (Shoaib & Mujtaba, 2016 & 2018). Thus, documents analysis was utilized to carry out a desk review of transcripts of original survey data of development organizations involved in the SDGs implementation on the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group websites. This is to discover differences in the individual

organization's subjective persuasion about SDG-16 and subsequently finding themes and

developing categories to understand the different perceptions of SDG-16 by the

development organizations implementing the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur. The document

analysis included desk review of concept notes, existing strategies and plans of the

UNCT member SDGs implementing organizations in Darfur. I did this to discover the

thematic structure, link the identified themes to SDG-16 perceptions where appropriate,

and analyze the co-occurrence of SDG-related topics in the documents to address the

central research question: How do the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-

16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile

Sudan's Darfur Region?

The documents analysis was complemented by elite interviews with officials of

those development organizations to understand how the organizations different visions

affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders. Upon the adoption of the 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development, the United Nations established review mechanisms such as

the High-Level Political Forum and the Global Partnership for Effective Development

Co-operation to gauge progress to build collaborative multi-stakeholder platforms around

the SDGs implementation. Thus, the following interview questions drawn from the

templates of key questions outlined by the High-Level Political Forum and the Global

Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation elicited answers to further address

the central research question: How do the development organizations' perceptions of

SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the

fragile Sudan's Darfur Region? According to the High-Level Political Forum and the

Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, the interview questions should answer key research questions around collaboration of the development organizations to implement the SDGs to understand:

1. What assumptions do different organizations have about the existing progress of the SDGs implementation?

2. How do the development organizations negotiate their varying interests to ensure at the very least mutually agreeable points of action?

3. What does win-win look like and what are the trades-offs for reaching a win-win outcome?

4. Assuming progress can be an incentive that induces further collaboration, how do the development organizations create a collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation?

Yin (2011 and 2014) has also explained that a qualitative exploratory case study design is used when there is a need for a holistic understanding of a process and program. This study, therefore, used the Sudan's Darfur Region as a single case study to examine how the development organizations involved in the SDGs implementation in fragile and conflict-affected contexts perceive SDG-16 on building transparent and efficient institutions and the impact of their perceptions on the collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation in Darfur. Also, Yin (2014) stated that an exploratory case study approach is used to explore contemporary events within a real-life context when there exists no strong theory to base the inquiry and the research design needs to be flexible. For this study, a case study approach enabled me to conduct an in-

depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of the SDGs as a real life policy for transition from fragility to peace and sustainable development in Darfur. In addition, Creswell and Creswell (2015) stated that exploratory case studies are useful when multiple perspectives are required and to allow the researcher to explore empirical events as narrated by the study participants themselves (Yin, 2011). Hence, this exploratory case study enabled me to gather data on the SDG-16 perceptions of the development organizations involved in the SDGs implementation in Darfur.

Furthermore, according to O'Sullivan et al. (2017), a key strength of the qualitative exploratory case study approach is its ability to provide detailed information for a contemporary administrator, who needs trustworthy data to gain a deeper understanding of how the perceptions of the SDG-16 by the development organizations in Darfur affect designing an integrated multi-stakeholder platform to build the resilience of local governance institutions. Kumar, Kumar and Vivekadhish (2016) have noted that the SDGs were designed to strengthen the convergence of the international development agenda that were "fragmented and disjointed" prior to the adoption of 2030 Agenda of the SDGs (p. 1; Egelston et al., 2019). Thus, this qualitative exploratory case study will provide information that will aid policy makers' addressing the multi-stakeholder governance challenges in Darfur to build trust, consensus and leadership of the development organizations in the Sudan-UNCT to deliver on the SDG goals.

Moreover, an exploratory case study design can also enable a contemporary administrator to investigate the reasons for the SDG-16 as a policy achieved only modest

success and to explore what can be done differently to realize the SDG goals of lasting peace and sustainable development in Darfur (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Yin (2014) pointed out that using an exploratory case study approach can enable a researcher to focus on the subjective meaning that respondents attribute to their unique experiences to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon within its context and in this case study, as narrated by the officials of the development organizations participating in the implementation of the SDGs in Darfur.

According to Saunders et al. (2019), an exploratory case study approach can enable a researcher to gather preliminary information to understand what and how a particular event took place to help define the problem, validate the importance of the study and ensure reliability. Overall, a qualitative exploratory case study approach was adopted for this study to help me as the researcher to select the: "1) Setting for the research (i.e., case study location), (2) Events—on what the participants will be interviewed, (3) Actors—interview participants, and (4) Processes—how the actors were be interviewed, i.e. individual or group" (Saja et al., 2020, p.14).

The Role of the Researcher

According to Bahrami et al. (2016) and Denzin and Lincoln (2012), a researcher in a qualitative study is considered the instrument of data collection and the most important tool in the "art of interpretation" of data (Given, 2008, p.766). Since the role of the researcher is to collect valid and reliable data to answer the overarching research question for the study and as the researcher in this study, I was the data collector and analyst with "a personal history that situates me as an enquirer" (Creswell, 2014, p.51)

though from the outside as an objective viewer (Merriam, 2009). Being the only researcher in this study, I was responsible for selecting participants, preparing interview questions, conducting interviews, analyzing the data, and drawing the conclusions along with recommendations. As suggested by Bahrami et al. (2016), the description of the role of the researcher must include acknowledging biases, beliefs, and values of the researcher that can have an impact on the interpretation of the study findings. According to Cypress (2017), viewing data from the researcher's personal lens is a form of research bias that should be mitigated with bracketing, i.e. the process of identifying the unresolvable bias that exists in the study. I used bracketing to reduce researcher bias by writing interview notes during the data collection and analysis stages.

Also, as the researcher, I have a relationship with my research topic and according to Yin (2017), researchers conducting case studies should have a good understanding of the subject before embarking on the research, which can make them vulnerable to bias because of preconceptions. Researcher bias in the form of preconceptions can cause selective observation, selective recording of information, and biased data interpretation (Cypress, 2017). Therefore, it is important that as a researcher I must identify biases and remain ethical before and during the study (Yin, 2016). I have over 10 years' United Nations work experience in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and in providing humanitarian assistance to war-torn countries and post-conflict states. As those experiences provided me insights on the consequences of armed conflicts and their impacts on human and economic development, I am passionate about finding solutions to end conflicts and mitigate their negative impacts on sustainable development. In view of my emotional

attachment to the topic of study and to manage bias and remain critical, I have chosen the Sudan's Darfur Region as a case study because it is outside my current duty station.

As suggested by Yin (2017), to mitigate bias, a researcher should be aware of his preconceptions while Cypress (2017) proposed that the researcher should practice critical self-reflection about his preconceptions that may taint the conclusions of the study. In addition, Cypress postulated that reflexivity could improve the rigor of qualitative research by reducing the researcher bias and increasing the researcher's subjectivity. Therefore, I further mitigated potential bias by maintaining awareness of my preconceptions, being open to evidence against my preconceptions, and using other sources of data to validate the analysis and conclusions. I adopted Marshall and Rossman's (2016) compiled list of strategies that a researcher can follow to avoid bias in interpretation, including member checking by sharing the initial analysis with the participants for verification (Birt et al., 2016).

Moreover, Bahrami et al. (2016) have pointed out that in the role of the researcher as an instrument in semi-structured qualitative interviews, the unique researcher attributes like personality have the potential to influence the collection of empirical materials. According to Brahmi and team (2016), the actual experiences and skills of the researcher, his ability to communicate and ask the right questions are some of the most important factors that can validate data. In order to mitigate impact of the researcher personality, Bahrami et al. (2016) suggested that the role of a researcher during semi-structured interviews should be to create an ambiance for effective communication through asking the right questions. To this effect, I used interview protocol based on the process of

interview protocol refinement introduced by Castillo-Montoya (2016) to help me as a qualitative researcher to create validity and reliability in the research findings.

Methodology

A qualitative exploratory case study design was used in this study to explore the effect of development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 on the collaboration of multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation. According Gaus (2017), Shoaib and Mujtaba (2016 and 2018), the selection of a qualitative exploratory case study approach entails the use of data gathering tools and techniques of interviews, observation, and document analysis as the most common sources of qualitative data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. In line with this tradition, this study applied a combination of documents analysis, key informant interviews and content analyses of reports, official documents and evaluations to collect and analyze data from the development organizations that are involved in the implementation of the SDGs in the Darfur Region of Sudan. In the first stage of the study documents analysis was used to examine the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 through desk reviews of open-source documents on the United Nations (UN) established web-sites, including reports, concept notes, existing strategies and plans of the UNCT member SDGs implementing organizations in Darfur. The documents analysis entailed a desk review of transcripts of original survey data of development organizations involved in the SDGs implementation in the Sudan's Darfur Region on the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group websites (IAEG-SDGs). This was done to discover differences in the individual organization's subjective persuasion about SDG-16

and subsequently finding themes and developing categories. The documents analysis also

entailed reading the Reference Guide for mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development created by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to understand

the different perceptions of SDG-16. The other documents analyzed included reading a

large number of transcripts of a recent study by the United Nations Development

Program (UNDP) in Sudan to understand how the differing interpretations of SDG-16 by

development organizations impeded collaboration to implement the SDGs (UNDP,

Sudan, 2018). The idea here is to discover the thematic structure, link the identified

themes to SDG-16 perceptions where appropriate, and analyze the co-occurrence of

SDG-related topics in the documents.

The documents analysis was complemented by elite interviews with officials of

the development organizations as a second stage of the study. This was done to

understand how the organizations different visions affect their collaboration as multi-

stakeholders to implement the SDGs. The key informant/elite interviews with the

development organizations officials with most extensive knowledge about their

organization's operations elicited information on how their organizations' perceptions of

SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs to realize

peace and development in Darfur. The interview questions were derived from a template

of key questions for reviewing the SDGs implementation outlined by the United Nations

High-Level Political Forum and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-

operation to understand how differing organizational cultures impede collaboration to

implement the SDGs. According to the IRB, site permission was not required to conduct

asynchronous e-mail interviews with about 10 key UN personnel since I used snowball sampling techniques that entail referrals to recruit respondents. I first emailed the informed consent form separately to those UN officials and requested the participants to review the informed consent document electronically and email a response with the words, "I consent" indicating that they wished to move forward with the interviews.

According to Alnaim (2018), Friedensen, McCrae and Kimball (2017), data collection methods of documents analysis, key informant interviews and content analyses of reports, official documents and evaluations can aid a better understanding of the phenomena of interest and have proven significantly useful to scientific researchers whose objective is to improve collaboration among organizations working together to collaboratively achieve the SDGs in a fragile context like Darfur, Sudan.

Participant Selection /Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study is the elite officials with most extensive knowledge about their organizations operations and SDGs implementation in Darfur selected through referrals and support of the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team in Sudan that coordinates the peacebuilding and SDGs implementation activities in Darfur. The participants were purposively selected using snowball technique (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018) together with "maximum variation of the samples for the purpose of documenting unique or diverse variations within the purposive sample population" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 536). According to Atkinson and Flint (2001), snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method that uses referrals to reach the number of participants required for a study. It involves identifying

participants who can help recommend other participants who are knowledgeable about

the phenomenon and are best suited for research in a fragile context. To ensure maximum

variation of the samples, the respondents being asked for referrals (snowball sampling)

were requested to suggest officials of the development organizations with specific

characteristics (i.e., UN personnel working in the UN specialized agencies, funds and

programs with knowledge in the three key SDGs thematic areas of political, humanitarian

and development that required collaboration among the multi-stakeholders in the UNCT

in the Darfur Region). According to Patton (2015), through maximum variation of the

samples by specifying the characteristics to be possessed by the participants, the study

was able to discover central themes, core elements, and shared dimensions that cut across

a diverse sample while at the same time documenting unique variations.

In pursuing this exploratory case study research, I selected the study participants

from a series of referrals, support and cooperation from the Office of the RC in Sudan

and from relevant members of the United Nations Country Team in Darfur. The

participants for this study are six key UN personnel in the field, country experts and other

relevant interlocutors who have served in their respective organizations in Darfur for at

least 3 years. The officials of those organizations were identified by referrals from the

UNCT members who had expressed interests in my research topic during interviews I

had conducted as part of Advanced Qualitative Research course at Walden University.

Those UN personnel expressed willingness to share their knowledge, experiences,

perceptions and thoughts about their organizations mandate and practices in the SDGs

implementation in Darfur. The recruitment of participants for this exploratory case study

research was through an official request for participation in the study sent via e-mail to the identified UN personnel that provided an overview of the principal aspect of the study, including the study problem, purpose, justification for participation, detailed requirements, and expectations (Saja et al., 2020; Schoch, 2016).

I also conducted the interviews asynchronously to accommodate the respondents who were unavailable for a face-to-face interview due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the volatile nature of the Sudan's Darfur Region, and to save cost. The utilization of asynchronous e-mail in research and data collection has gained prominence over the last decade since it is a cost-effective and prudent method for contacting participants (Saunders et al., 2019; Seidman, 2013). I first made email contacts with the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Sudan that coordinates the implementation of the SDGs and peacebuilding activities in Darfur and with other relevant members of the United Nations Country Team in Darfur, described my project and asked them to help me identify contact persons and officials with the most extensive knowledge about their organization's involvement in the implementation of the SDGs in Darfur. According to Patton (2015), it is imperative to provide the information needed to illuminate and understand the research problem and present clarity about the phenomenon of interest.

Sample Size

The population for this qualitative exploratory case study is about six officials from the development organizations involved in the implementation of the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. A smaller sample size is recommended for qualitative studies to

ensure that the researcher can focus on the participants' personal experiences (Silverman, 2011). According to Patton (2015), a smaller sample size is recommended for a qualitative study based on the nature of the phenomenon of interest and what the researcher intends to find taking into consideration "the research question, the theoretical position and analytic framework adopted" for the study (Saunders et al., 2018, p.1893). The intent of this exploratory case study is not to generalize from the sample to a population, but to explore and gather preliminary information that will help define the phenomena of interest (Maxwell, 2013). Silvermann (2011) posited that a smaller sample size is recommended since the experiences of qualitative researchers have demonstrated that only very little additional information relevant to a study is obtained after interviewing about 10 participants.

The participants for this study were limited to six key UN personnel chosen from the five thematic clusters in the in the UNCT based on the UN Security Council resolution 2429 on 'Whole-of-UN' Agenda that increased the number of UN Agencies, Funds and Programs (AFPs) implementing SDG-16 in Darfur to just 10 organizations, i.e. UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, FAO, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Habitat plus the AU-UN (UNAMID) peacebuilding mission in Darfur (Forti & Connolly, 2019; Riek, 2017). Also, the sample size for this study is justified because the six UN personnel involved in the key informant interviews are people who have informed perspectives on the impact of their organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 on designing a multi-stakeholder platform to achieve peace and sustainable development in Darfur. According to Lavrakas (2008), key informants are "chosen because they are believed to have the

most knowledge of the subject matter" (p. 40). Furthermore, key informant or "elites" interviews can help us understand how a group is thinking about a situation, and can help us make sense, from their vantage point, the trajectory of a set of events" (Commuri, 2017, p. 5).

Mason (2010) argued that saturation is achieved in qualitative studies when interviewing additional participants will not yield any new information that will be useful to the study. In this study saturation was reached when the development organizations' understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 have been identified from conducting key informant interviews of the six officials of those organizations working to achieve the SDGs in Darfur. Based on recent UNDP experience of deploying an integrated policy support missions of five personnel teams to provide high-level expertise to the UNCTs implementing the SDGs in fragile contexts (UNDESA, 2019), I believe that the sample size of six officials of the development organizations implementing the SDGs in Darfur is sufficient to provide the data required for this study within the constraints of time and available resources.

Recruitment of Participants

According to Patton (2015) as well as Rubin and Rubin (2012), the initial step in the sampling process is establishing the criterion sampling, which refers to participants' selection choice based on established specifications to minimize bias in identifying the study population to be sampled (Siddaway et al., 2019). The process for the recruitment of participants for this study was through an official request for participation sent via e-mail that provided an overview of the principal aspect of the study, including the study

problem, purpose, and justification for participation, detailed requirements, and
expectations (Garg, 2016; Schick-Makaroff et al., 2016).

Seidman (2013) opined that the utilization of e-mail in research and data
collection has gained prominence over the last decade since it is a cost-effective and
prudent method for contacting participants. For this study, I first made email contacts
with the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Sudan that coordinates the
implementation of the SDGs and peacebuilding activities in Darfur and with other
relevant members of the United Nations Country Team in Darfur, described my project
and asked them to help me identify contact persons and officials with the most extensive
knowledge about their organizations involvement in the implementation of the SDGs in
Darfur (Nygård, 2017; UNDP, 2016b).

Data Collection Methods

As recommended by Rau et al. (2017), this exploratory case study entailed
analyzing a broad range of primary and secondary source documents to examine the
practices of key policy-makers toward attaining sustainability in Darfur and to investigate
how different visions and interests of development organizations affect collective multi-
stakeholder action to achieve the targets of SDG-16. The data collection methods for this
study were based on an extensive desk review of open-source materials, official
documents and evaluation reports on the SDGs implementation by the development
organizations in Darfur that are in the public domain. This was combined with semi-
structured key informant interviews with six key UNCT personnel, national actors,

country experts and other relevant interlocutors working with the development organizations implementing the SDGs in Darfur.

According to Ebneyamini and Sadeghi- Moghadam (2018), the use of multiple data sources in an exploratory case study research is an important strategy for gaining insights from various perspectives to enable the qualitative researcher to address the research problem and the central research question with greater accuracy. Also, Johnson et al. (2017) have argued that a combination of exploratory interviews with key informants and documents review is a suitable method to generate preliminary information on policy issues as they occurred within the natural context and facilitate exploration of the whole system rather than individual influences on a project involving multiple stakeholders like the SDGs implementation. In this study, I placed emphasis on ensuring that the data collected was appropriate to address the research purpose and central research question, gain insights from different sources, and strengthen the rigor and integrity of the inquiry.

During the first step of desk review of the study I examined open-source documents on the United Nations (UN) established web-sites to inform the implementation of the SDGs and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDGs Indicator Framework, various reports of the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on the SDGs and the Sudan's National Voluntary Reviews (VNRs) on the progress of the SDGs. I also extended the documents review to the reports, concept notes, existing strategies and plans prepared by the Sudan UNCT member organizations involved in the SDGs implementation in Darfur. In the second step of the data collection

method, I conducted key informant/elite interviews with the target population, the elite officials with most extensive knowledge about their organization's operations in Darfur. According to Lavrakas (2008), key informant interviews are used to supplement findings from other sources and to provide researchers with data for understanding participants' experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). As recommended by Adhabi and Anozie (2017), to obtain information to ensure positive social change, I prepared an interview guide "to elicit relevant answers, which are meaningful and useful in understanding the interviewee's perspective" (Patton, 2015, p. 471). According to Creswell (2017), the interview guide is used to ensure that the interviews are related to the research questions.

I constructed the interview guide with a set of interview questions based on the literature review and documents analysis to set the research question into context and provide evidence of the visions and interests of the development organizations on SDG-16 as a strategic framework for transition from fragility to peace and sustainable development in Darfur (see the interview guide at Appendix).

The interview participants were given the choice of either email interview, telephone interview or a hybrid of email and telephone interviews due to separate geographical locations between the interviewees and the interviewer (Bell et al., 2016; Nandi & Platt, 2017). Due to the volatility and fragile nature of Darfur as well as the COVID-19 pandemic situation, face-to-face interviewing was ruled out. Rather, I conducted asynchronous email interviews with the participants since the IRB made provisions for interviewing remotely by email, Skype, Zoom or other means. According

to Nandi and Platt (2017), asynchronous email interviewing method allows the study participants time to reflect on and express the events in their own words, enables them to be in control of both the pacing and time frame of their responses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis process in qualitative research design involves preparing and organizing data, reducing the data into themes through coding, and representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion to identify patterns (Aspers & Corte, 2019). As an exploratory case study requires thorough evaluation, interpretation, and investigation of the social phenomena, central to my data analysis plan was a four-stage extensive desk review process using the methods of qualitative content analysis and inductive thematic coding of data (Vaismoradi, Turune & Bonda, 2019) informed by an understanding of complexity theory and systems thinking perspective. The first stage of the desk review involved preparing journals on all aspects of the data to be collected from documents review, key informant interviews and field notes. I organized information collected from documents review in a way to build a preliminary coding frame that I further developed as I conducted the key informant interviews.

The second stage of data analysis entailed organizing the information collected in a manner that permitted storage. All hard copies were stored in well labeled files while typed out-scripts and transcripts of key informant interviews were exported into Dedoose software package to allow me to keep the data rooted in the participants' language and ready for the next stage of the analysis. According to Braun and Clarke, (2019), the use of a qualitative software packages like Dedoose helps to increase the transparency of the

research outcomes. Also, Braun et al. (2019) explained that a software package like Dedoose can facilitate managing data and ideas, querying data, modeling data visually and reporting research outcomes.

The third phase of the data analysis involved reading extensively through the entire data set and closely studying the texts and literature related to the themes in the data to get an overview of the themes that emerged to present preliminary information about the big picture. According to Nowell et al. (2017), this helped me to get an understanding of the level of completeness of information required per objective and to identify any information gap that can be immediately addressed through follow-up interviews and review of additional documents.

As an exploratory case study research, Gupta (2018) proposed that the fourth phase of the data analysis process should be undertaking inductive thematic coding as per the sequence of activities recommended by Attride-Stirling (2001; Jagnoor et al., 2018). That is, organizing and reading through data, coding data, generating themes, interrelating themes, and interpreting the themes (Tseng & Yeh, 2018). According to Jackson and Bazeley (2019), at this stage all data generated from documents review and key informant interviews should be transformed into themes using Dedoose software to enable patterns to emerge from the data as the basis for reporting results under each research question.

Finally, I applied complexity theory and systems thinking perspective to the identified themes to interpret the networks of different views and ideas of the development organizations working in Darfur to achieve SDGs. Based on the themes, the

study presented preliminary information that will help a better understanding of how the perceptions of those development organizations of the SDGs policy impact their efforts to design a multi-stakeholder platform to build the resilience of the local governance institutions to achieve peace and sustainable development in Darfur, Sudan.

As part of the analysis process and per the recommendation of Forero et al. (2018) and Loubere (2017), I created an audit trail to ensure that the steps are verifiable throughout the research process and the identified patterns formed the basis for triangulation from literature as a means of ensuring trustworthiness and reducing bias.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This study used the trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability) to ensure the rigor of the findings and the genuineness of this qualitative enquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). According to Golafshani (2003) and Patton (2002), trustworthiness is used in qualitative research as the process of enhancing the integrity of research findings and ensuring that the study is well-planned and rigorously executed from its initial conception, design, and analysis up to final publication.

Transferability

Cope (2014) explained that transferability in qualitative research is related to the generalizability of findings (i.e., demonstrating that the findings can be applied to other settings or groups). According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), a qualitative study is adjudged to have met this criterion if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences. Although

case studies are generally not transferrable in any larger sense, I followed the guidance of Guba and Lincoln (1989) to provide research participants' responses to the interview questions in their own words, to enable other researchers replicate the findings.

Dependability

According to Polit and Beck (2012), dependability refers to the reliability of the data over comparable conditions. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that the issue of dependability should be to determine whether the process of the study was consistent and reasonably stable over time and across researchers. Miles et al. (1994) suggested that for a researcher to guarantee dependability, it is important to maintain an audit trail. I employed triangulation to ensure dependability by using multiple methods for data collection, i.e. triangulating interview recordings with my handwritten notes, key literature and other documents.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the level at which the results of the research can be corroborated by others. According to Polit and Beck (2012), confirmability is comparable to objectivity and is concerned with a researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represented the participants' responses and not the researcher's viewpoints. I demonstrated confirmability by describing how conclusions and interpretations are established by providing affluent quotes from the participants to represent each emerging theme. Also, according to Korstjens et al. (2018), I used audit trail to establish confirmability and made reflexivity an integral part of my study to ensure the transparency and quality of the research findings and conclusions.

Credibility

Credibility is ensuring that the data that is used in qualitative research is accurate and reflects the views of the participants, who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results of a particular study. In this sense, credibility in qualitative research involves accepting the perceptions and meanings that participants ascribe to social phenomena without alteration (Bradshaw, Atkinson, & Doody, 2017; Daher et al., 2017). I used "member checking to establish credibility, by returning interview transcripts and preliminary findings in the form of initial report "to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences" (Birt et al., 2016, p.1802).

Ethical Procedures

According to Dudovskiy (2018), ethical procedures are among the most important parts of any dissertation research involving human subjects, especially the ethical concerns of informed consent, beneficence- do not harm, respect for anonymity and confidentiality, and respect for privacy (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Given the importance of ethics in conducting qualitative research, my first step was to seek Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before making initial contacts with the research participants.

For informed consent, I adopted the semistructured interview protocol introduced by Castillo-Montoya (2016). My interview protocol included efforts to "obtain the permission of the participating individuals through… informed consent to let them know that the interview will be entirely private and confidential, and that their names will not be linked to anything they will say" (Jong & Jung, 2015, p. 36). According to Manti and

Licari, (2018), a researcher should share important information with the participants

before starting the interview process using a script that should contain details about the

researcher, the purpose of the study, the researcher's contact information, the university,

and the signing of the informed consent (Franz et al., 2019).

The most important step I took to protect the participants was to obtain voluntary

consent after explaining the details of my research project (Mallia, 2018a; Ripley et al.,

2018). I emailed the informed consent form and requested the participants to review the

informed consent document electronically and email a response indicating that they

consent or do not consent as per the required procedure (Mumford, 2018; Othman &

Hamid, 2018). According to Biros (2018), the informed consent form is to ensure that the

participants understood the potential risks, goals, and benefits of being involved in the

study before conducting the research (Mallia, 2018b; Manti & Licari, 2018).

At the end of each interview, I ensured that both the participants and the

researcher were debriefed by talking about the interview process itself and the impact of

the interview. According to McMahon and Winch (2018), a systematic debriefing should

be conducted at the end of each interview as a counterpart to the informed consent stage

(McNallie, 2017) to ensure the participants will not be left emotionally harmed or

traumatized from the interview (Reid et al., 2018).

Further, based on Creswell (2013) guidance, I preserved the confidentiality of the

participants by using numbers as interview identifiers, advising participants not to give

their full names and to sign the consent forms using their initials only. According to

Abdalla et al. (2018), the other strategies I adopted to protect the participants'

confidentiality included referring to the participants as P1, P2, P3, and P4 for each

participant, and Org 1 and Org 2 for each organization in order to establish credibility,

which is an important factor in gaining a subject's trust and confidence. As a security

measure, I saved all data in a locked file case that can be accessed only with a key. For

purposes of organization and confidentiality of the interview data, I stored the transcripts

of the interviews in my computer and also keep an extra copy in a binder. To ensure that

I am the only individual who has access to the data, I saved the binder that contains the

research data in a locked file case and secured my computer with a passcode known only

to me.

In accordance with Walden University requirements, I will store the interview

files for at least 5 years after completion of the study and afterwards, I will use a paper

shredder to discard the data kept in the binder and completely delete the transcripts of the

interviews (Mamonov & Benbunan-Fich, 2018; Pescheny et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2018).

I also maintained the highest level of objectivity in discussions and analyses throughout

the research and acknowledged the works of other authors that I used in any part of the

dissertation-based APA 7 referencing system (Dudovskiy, 2020).

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology and research methods that I employed

to conduct the study, a qualitative exploratory case study approach as well as a detailed

explanation of the rationale for choosing the exploratory case study design. Also, this

chapter describes the study population in addition to a description of the research

participants as well as an explanation of how the participants were selected, data

collection procedures and tools that were used in the study. The data collected using

documents review and key informant interviews were managed and analyzed with the aid

of Dedoose qualitative software package. The chapter further included illustration of the

trustworthiness criteria —credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

and a description of how ethical issues in the study were handled.

In the following Chapter 4, I articulate the results derived from the inquiries and

presented the data collection process and the data analysis process in more detail. The

next chapter presents the validations of the data collection process and the data analysis

procedure and presents a comprehensive analysis of the collected data and provides the

basis for the final and concluding chapter of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in Sudan's Darfur Region through exploring how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders. The development organizations usually collaborate within the context of the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation and achieve the 2030 Agenda to "leave no-one behind." To achieve the study purpose, the central research question that guided the research was: How do the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region?

Based on the UN High-Level Political Forum and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation's template of key questions for examining the collaboration of UN organizations implementing the SDGs, the following four key questions were used to further answer the central research question:

1. What assumptions do the development organizations have about the SDGs?

2. How do the development organizations negotiate their varying interests to ensure mutually agreeable points of action?

3. What does win-win look like and what are the trades-offs for reaching a win-win outcome?

4. How do the development organizations create a collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation?

This chapter discusses the purpose of the study and the research questions, the research setting, participants' demographics, data collection, and analysis procedures. The chapter further presents the main themes that emerged from documents analysis and responses to the semi-structured key informant email interviews with six UN officials.

Setting

The UN 2030 Agenda emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for achieving the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda therefore tasked the UN organizations to adopt a collaborative, "whole-of-society," and "whole-of-government" approach to implement the SDGs using UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform. However, at the time of this study, most UN personnel of the various UN organizations in the Sudan's Darfur Region had adopted a silo-approach to implementing the SDGs rather than working collaboratively together to operationalize the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda calls for the UN system organizations to work collaboratively with the other development organizations and actors co-sharing resources, expertise, and responsibilities to accelerate the achievement of the 169 targets of the 17 SDG goals.

The semistructured key informant email interviews for this study were conducted from April1 to May 10, 2021 following approval by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) number 03-17-21-0747488. The participants who were selected through snowball purposive sampling techniques were teleworking from their various homes across the globe and the UNCT has not met in one physical space in over a year due to Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to note that owing to the emergence of the Covid19 pandemic and bearing in mind that the UN personnel were teleworking during

the interviews, the responses of some participants might have been influenced by the silo-approach to implementing the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Demographics

Document research that entailed desk review of SDGs official documents was followed up with key informant semistructured interviews with six key experts and senior members of different UN organizations working within the UNCT in Sudan to implement the SDGs as shown in Table 1 below. Most of the UN personnel interviewed were organizational representatives and regularly attended the UNCT meetings that used to be organized every month since 2015 when the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UNCT is a platform for about 10 UN organizations to interact and to be aware of the government initiatives for the SDGs implementation in Sudan. Representatives of those UN organizations also regularly participated in the UN High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs.

I also ensured that the respondents met established screening criteria to reduce the possibility of bias developing in the sample. As a result, I established a core qualifying criterion that, irrespective of interviewees' referrals, required that a respondent had to be a senior member of their organization, currently be in a leadership role, and have a minimum of 3 years' experience working under the SDGs program to be included in the sample. Bearing this in mind, a quota of one to two respondents were sought from each of the five SDG clusters equating to six respondents in total.

I further used snowball purposive sampling technique to choose the interviewees from UN personnel who attended the UNCT and UN High-Level Political Stakeholder

Forums to identify critical experts aware of plans and progress on the SDGs implementation in the Sudan's Darfur Region. Moreover, most of the UN officials that participated in the interviews were purposively selected to include representatives of the UN organizations with central role in the SDGs implementation connecting themes in five thematic clusters or SDGs sectors covering the issues of environment and climate resilience; governance, and peacebuilding; health and safety; inclusive social and economic development; and poverty eradication.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Participant	Organization	Years of SDGs Service	SDGs Thematic Cluster
P1	Org 1	5	Environment and Climate Resilience (SDGs 4, 5, 10) Group A: Agriculture, livestock and fisheries , Energy and the environment
P2	Org 3	3	Governance and Peace-building (SDGs 2, 3, 16) Group B: Local government, infrastructure and peace-building
P3	Org 5	3	Health and Safety (SDGs 6, 11) Group C: Public health engineering, Health and nutrition
P4	Org 7	5	Inclusive Social and Economic Development (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16)Group D: Education, gender, Local government, infrastructure and peace-building)
P5	Org 8	4	Inclusive Social and Economic Development (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16) Group D: Education, gender, Local government, infrastructure and peace-building)
P6	Org 9	6	Poverty Eradication (SDGs 1, 8, 9, 10, 12) Group F: Industries and employment

Data Collection Process

After receiving the Walden University IRB approval number 03-17-21-0747488

for this study, I used a combination of documents analysis and key informant interviews

to collect data from the UN organizations involved in the implementation of the SDGs in

the Sudan's Darfur Region. In the first stage of the study, I used purposive document

sampling and maximum variation of the samples (Palinkas et al., 2015) to select

documents containing rich information (Patton, 2015) on how the UN organizations'

perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders. The desk reviews

of documents, such as the transcripts of original survey data of the UN organizations on

the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group websites, the Reference Guide for

mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development created by the United

Nations Development Group (UNDG), and the transcripts of a recent study by the United

Nations Development Program (UNDP) were useful.

I also used other UN documents, such as reports of the 2018, 2019 and 2020 UN

High-Level Political Forums as well as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of SDGs

implementation progress to acquire preliminary information about how different

understandings and differing interpretations of SDG-16 by the UN organizations

exacerbated their ability to collaborate as multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs

implementation. The documents I explored provided an in-depth understanding of the

co-occurrence of SDG-related topics and the thematic structure linking the identified

themes to the SDG-16 perceptions.

The documents analysis was complemented by semistructured key informant elite interviews with six key experts and senior members of the different UN organizations with central role in the SDGs implementation connecting themes, such as poverty, gender, health and safety, climate resilience, peacebuilding and inclusive economic development. I adopted nonprobability purposive 'snowball' sampling methods and maximum variation of the samples to generate respondents from each of the five thematic clusters designed by the UN organizations mandated by the UN Security Council resolution 2429 on 'Whole-of-UN' Agenda to implement the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Although 30 interviewees were invited for the asynchronous email interviews, saturation was reached after six participants returned their questionnaires. Adding more participants to the study did not result in additional perspectives and information generated from the documents analysis. Based on the redundancy, I ceased collecting additional questionnaires. Despite this, for a qualitative case study, Creswell (1998) recommended 5–25 participants while Morse (1994) suggested at least six but ultimately, the required number of participants should depend on when saturation was reached (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Additionally, Mason's (2010) survey of 2533 qualitative studies found that small sample sizes were standard in studies using qualitative methods. I, therefore, consider the current sample adequate for meeting the study objectives.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data involved an extensive desk review process using the methods of qualitative content analysis and inductive thematic coding of data to organize

information collected from the documents review and key informant interviews to build a preliminary coding frame. To sort the data, I carried out a line-by-line systematic in-depth review of the transcripts of the data from the original survey of the UN organizations by UNDP and the questionnaires from the key informants' interviews. Given that the interview questions were mainly organized around themes, the coding was straightforward, and I easily identified the common themes. To understand the most common themes emerging from the data, and their prevalence among the sample, I documented and quantified the number of respondents who raised particular themes/codes. This enabled me to get a clearer picture of the pervasiveness of dominant issues relating to how the differences in the individual UN organization's perceptions of SDG-16 exacerbated their ability to collaborate as multi-stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs implementation. Finally, I used Dedoose software for coding all the data from documents review and key informant interviews to report results under the central research question. Figure 1 shows top words from Dedoose Word Cloud, Table 2 is the transcription code book linking the identified theme, and Table 3 shows the frequency of themes among study participants.

Figure 1

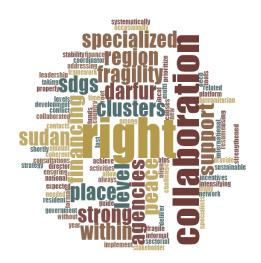*Dedoose Word Cloud Showing Top Words From the Word Frequency Query*

Table 2

Transcription Code Book with Thematic Structure Linking the Identified Themes

Transcription	Sentence by sentence Coding	Code
Q1: What assumptions do the development organizations have about the SDGs?		
A1: The UN system is tasked with implementing the SDGs in a collaborative manner, yet consists of many different organizations and acts in a governance landscape that is often characterized as fragmented. A silo-approach that focuses on specific sectoral interests … not every UN system organization has similar perceptions on target inter-linkages. UN system organizations focusing on finance, technology or industrial development are less integrated in the UNCT, and do not present a collaborative SDGs implementation strategy.	UN system organizations SDGs interpretations were fragmented based on organizational mandates and functions	FRAGMENTED UNDERSTANDING
A2: In the Sudan's Darfur Region my organization … is currently implementing activities related to SDGs 5, 6, 12, and 13…. A central assumption is that other agencies and organizations in the UNCT will draw on my organization's expertise whenever their activities relate to our mandate. Currently that is not the case, i.e. other agencies and organizations rely on own staff for thematic issues. The same holds for my organization that also use own staff to cover areas that fall under the mandates of other agencies and organizations.	The SDG goals and targets are too vast, unrealistic expectations, and 'impossible-to-reach' ambitious plan	TOO VAST UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH AMBITIOUS PLAN
A3: Although the SDGs were adopted as 'integrated and indivisible' goals and targets in practice the implementation platforms of the SDGs lacks integrating frameworks for supporting a more coordinated approach for operationalizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	There is a lack of integrating frameworks to support a more collaborative approach for the SDGs implementation	LACK OF INTEGRATING FRAMEWORKS
Q2: How do the development organizations negotiate their varying interests to ensure mutually agreeable points of action?		
A1: There are many informal contacts at all levels and occasionally collaboration at the sectoral level among specialized UN Agencies that collaborated within their clusters. Formal consultations are taking place at the country director level and have been intensifying over the last year…. Collaboration is expected to resume within the clusters of the specialized UN Agencies and Funds (AFPs) shortly on activities related to SDGs 5, 6, 12, and 13.	Loose SDGs coordination mechanism and lack of a strong UN Resident Coordinator leadership	LOOSE COORDINATION WEAK LEADERSHIP
A2: Ensuring the right amount of finance, using the right tools, at the right time, with the right incentives, to deliver peace and stability in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region has always been a challenge…. the OECD, and the other financing specialists should support a strengthened and strong UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator to implement the new financing strategy, the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) in the Sudan's Darfur Region.	A prerequisite to achieve the SDGs is spending a vast amounts of finance on conflict prevention and peacebuilding	STRONG LEADERSHIP TO MOBILIZE FINANCE
A3: To achieve the SDGs strong leadership is needed to	There is an absence of an	ABSENCE OF

Transcription	Sentence by sentence Coding	Code
prioritize addressing the root causes of fragility more properly because there can be no sustainable development without peace. And there is a no coherent framework for the multi-stakeholder platform in place that would allow the national government to systematically provide support, align and guide collaboration.	overarching multi-stakeholder governance structure to provide guidance and support collaboration	OVERARCHING GOVERNANCE
Q3: What does win-win look like and what are the trades-offs for reaching a win-win outcome?		
A1: There is no government involvement in creating collaboration opportunities for all UN system organizations that is required to facilitate the trade-offs and the sacrifices people have to make to be in a partnership.	Lack of government involvement in designing policy accelerators to drive trade-offs among the UN organizations	LACK OF NATIONAL OWNERRSHIP
A2: Besides the official SDG indicators, local ownership is central because experience shows that interventions without local ownership are not sustainable.	There is no policy coherence in national development plans and the 2030 Agenda in goals prioritization	LACK OF COHERENT POLICY
A3: The collaboration of the UN organizations in the Sudan's Darfur Region is only at the level of the UN-established web-sites that inform the implementation of the SDGs and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group's Indicator Frameworks. There is need for the organizations to work across sectors to overcome silos and build broad coalitions around the 2030 Agenda to achieve the SDGs	Organizations must work across sectors to build broad collaboration to achieve the SDGs	NO BROAD COLLABORATION
Q4: How do the development organizations create a collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation?		
A1: SDGs are so neutrally worded that priority setting depends on individual organization's subjective persuasion about the goals. In the Sudan's Darfur Region, even though the development organizations and governments have undertaken prodigious efforts to achieve the SDGs, they measure multiple dimensions of fragility in different ways. Some approach fragility from a security perspective. Some view it as a development problem. Hence, differing organizational cultures impede collaboration.	The SDGs are so neutrally worded that priority setting depends on individual organization's subjective persuasion about the goals	DIFFERING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES
A2: The goals and targets of the SDGs are universal and designed to be integrated and indivisible like 'one-size fits all' solution to peace and development and failed to recognize the specific challenges of fragile and conflict-affected states like the Sudan's Darfur Region, particularly in terms of access to basic services. This makes a fragile state like the Sudan's Darfur Region less likely to achieve the SDGs than fully operational states.	The 2030 Agenda as a 'one-size fits all' solution to peace and development is less likely to achieve the SDGs in a fragile and conflict-affected Sudan's Darfur Region	ONE-SIZE FITS ALL SOLUTION
A3: There has been limited progress on achieving peace and sustainable development in the Sudan's Darfur Region because differing interpretations of SDG-16 by development organizations impeded collaboration to implement the SDGs	Limited progress achieved in implementing the SDGs due to differing interpretations by the UN system organizations	DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS

Table 3

Frequency of Meaning Themes Among Study Participants (N=6)

Themes	Participants/Total
Fragmented understanding of the SDGs	6
Too vast, unrealistic expectations, and 'impossible-to-reach' ambitious plan	5
Lack of integrating frameworks for collaboration	5
Loose coordination and weak leadership	5
A strong UNCT leadership mobilizing vast amounts of finance to achieve SDGs	6
Absence of overarching multi-stakeholder governance	6
Lack of strong national ownership of the SDGs implementation process	5
Lack of integrated and coherent policy action	5
Build broad collaboration around the SDGs	5
Differing organizational cultures impede collaboration	6
'One-size fits all' solution less likely to achieve the SDGs	5
Differing interpretations impede collaboration	6

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative studies entails accurate documentation of the data collection processes and the analysis procedures that led to any conclusion. The importance of trustworthiness is to ensure that research findings have integrity and accuracy. This is because ensuring integrity in the research process enables the study findings to have the needed effect on the problem and command the respect of those who will review the research.

As stated in Chapter 3, to ensure trustworthiness meant that the study findings must be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. Those steps for ensuring trustworthiness were employed to support the results and findings from this study. I made efforts to adhere to the qualitative interview protocol, kept track of the questions, and

maintained uniformity in the data collection and analysis processes to nullify researcher's bias.

Credibility

Credibility is the most important aspect of determining data trustworthiness and interpretation to ensure that a qualitative research is accurate and reflects the views of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure credibility, I triangulated participants' asynchronous email interview responses with the data from documentation analysis to find areas of convergence and reconcile any points of divergence. I also undertook member checking by emailing the preliminary findings in the form of initial report to the participants to ensure accuracy and that it resonated with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016).

Transferability

This qualitative study used the Sudan's Darfur Region as a case study but I applied substantial description of the study findings to demonstrate their applicability to other fragile and conflict-affected settings in any future research. I also followed the guidance of Guba and Lincoln (1989) and provided research participants' responses to the interview questions in their own words to enable other researchers to replicate the findings. Further, through member checking, I ensured that the results would have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and that readers can associate the results with their own experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the reliability of the data over comparable conditions (i.e., the extent to which people can depend on the research findings to solve practical problems; Polit & Beck, 2012). To guarantee dependability of this study, I maintained an audit trail and kept a detailed account of every step in the data collection and analysis processes (Miles et al., 1994). I also ensured dependability of the study by utilizing multiple methods for data collection (i.e., data triangulation of the email interview transcripts with my handwritten notes, key literature and other documents).

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research entailed the objectivity and accuracy of data used in the analysis and study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As recommended by Korstjens et al. (2018), I used audit trail to establish confirmability. I provided affluent quotes from the participants and documents analysis to represent each theme that emerged and described how conclusions and interpretations were established. More importantly, my use of asynchronous email interviews and documents analysis enhanced the data quality and data accuracy as well as increased transparency of the research processes (Amri, Angelakis, & Logan, 2021). I further provided a detailed rationale for my choice of methodology and research design for this study.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to understand how the UN organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as a multi-

stakeholders working together to accelerate the SDGs implementation in fragile Sudan's Darfur Region. Hence, the central research question (RQ) in this study revolves around how the UN organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 exacerbated their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region. Multiple themes emerged from the data analysis process but in the findings I focused on four themes that are critical to gain a deeper understanding of how the UN organizations different visions and interpretation of SDG-16 impeded their collaboration as multi-stakeholders and limited their ability to implement the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Those themes that were germane to addressing the central research question are:

1. Fragmented understanding of the SDGs based on each organization's mandate and functional role,

2. Absence of overarching multi-stakeholder governance, i.e. lack of streamlined implementation mechanisms and a lack of strong leadership of multi-stakeholder partnerships. That is, loose SDGs coordination mechanism under the UNCT and lack of a strong UN Resident Coordinator leadership,

3. Lack of strong national ownership of the SDGs implementation process, and

4. 'One-size fits all' solution less likely to achieve the SDGs.

Fragmented Understanding of the SDGs

The first theme that emerged from the documents review and key informant interviews was that the SDGs understandings and interpretations among the UN organizations were fragmented based on organizational mandates and functions. For

example, in the transcripts of the data from the original surveys of the UN system

organizations by UNDP and on the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group

websites reported that:

> The UN system is tasked with implementing the SDGs in a collaborative manner,
>
> yet consists of many different organizations and acts in a governance landscape
>
> that is often characterized as fragmented. A silo-approach that focuses on specific
>
> sectoral interests … not every UN system organization has similar perceptions on
>
> target interlinkages. UN system organizations focusing on finance, technology or
>
> industrial development are less integrated in the UNCT, and do not present a
>
> collaborative SDGs implementation strategy.

A total of six interviewees referred to the SDGs as "too vast and too broad" that

they have become "unrealistic expectations and impossible-to-reach targets". The

participants further stated that the wordings of the SDGs were unclear and so neutral that

priority setting depended on individual organization's subjective persuasion about the

goals. To this effect, the participants pointed out that their organizations usually pick the

goals that align with those best suited to their organizational goals and tended to pursue

the goals separately, within siloes, even though the SDGs are inherently interlinked. For

example, one participant stated that:

> In the Sudan's Darfur Region my organization … is currently implementing
>
> activities related to SDGs 5, 6, 12, and 13…. A central assumption is that other
>
> agencies and organizations in the UNCT will draw on my organization's expertise
>
> whenever their activities relate to our mandate. Currently that is not the case, i.e.

other agencies and organizations rely on own staff for thematic issues. The same

holds for my organization that also use own staff to cover areas that fall under the

mandates of other agencies and organizations.

Absence of Overarching Multi-stakeholder Governance

The results from the documents analysis of the survey data and the key informant

interviews also highlighted the distinct lack of streamlined implementation mechanisms

and weak leadership of the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder partnership. That is, the SDGs

implementation was loosely coordinated under the UNCT platform and lacked a strong

UN Resident Coordinator leadership. The documents reviewed revealed as do the

interviewees who were unable to provide specific collaboration examples where their

organizations had worked together with multiple entities from the other UN organizations

and other stakeholders to solve a critical public policy problem. Although the

interviewees understood that the SDGs implementation strategy envisages multi-

stakeholder partnerships in the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) between key actors in the

2030 Agenda, the respondents lack distinct knowledge of multi-stakeholder partnerships

in operation in the Sudan's Darfur Region. For example, a respondent wrote:

> There are many informal contacts at all levels and occasionally collaboration at
>
> the sectorial level among specialized UN Agencies that collaborated within their
>
> clusters. Formal consultations are taking place at the country director level and
>
> have been intensifying over the last year…. Collaboration is expected to resume
>
> within the clusters of the specialized UN Agencies and Funds (AFPs) shortly on
>
> activities related to SDGs 5, 6, 12, and 13.

Based on an analysis of survey transcripts, institutions documents and respondents' perceptions, the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder platform lacked strong leadership to systematically support, align, and supervise the multi-stakeholder activities including mobilizing vast amounts of finance, a prerequisite to achieve the SDGs. Hence, most of the participants stated that funding for development is a central issue in the Sudan's Darfur Region because the SDGs agenda requires vast amounts of finance in accordance with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Others reiterated the point that as a fragile region, the Sudan's Darfur Region would need more money to be spent on conflict prevention and peacebuilding before the SDGs could be achieved. For example, the transcripts of the original surveys by the UNDP under financing for stability in the Sudan's Darfur Region stated that:

> Ensuring the right amount of finance, using the right tools, at the right time, with the right incentives, to deliver peace and stability in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region has always been a challenge…. the OECD, and the other financing specialists should support a strengthened and strong UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator to implement the new financing strategy, the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Lack of Strong National Ownership

The analysis of the documents, transcripts of the surveys and respondents' perceptions pointed to the lack of strong national ownership of the SDGs implementation process. The interviewees stated that in their experiences working under the UNCT to

implement the SDGs, there was no policy coherence in national development plans whereas the 2030 Agenda emphasizes strong national ownership as a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs by 2030. The participants pointed out that most development organizations in the Sudan's Darfur Region were supporting the Government of Sudan to mainstream the SDGs into their national plans, policies, and budgets and to identify options for accessing finance. However, the respondents generally believed that the government should initiate and play a critical role in encouraging and promoting collaboration in the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder partnership platform in the country. For example, most off the respondents stated that "besides the official SDG indicators, local ownership is central because experience shows that interventions without local ownership are not sustainable."

Most interviewees also believed that as the government is answerable to the UN to fulfill the Sudan's SDG commitments, the government should steer the process of achieving the SDGs. This should include the government being involved in creating collaboration opportunities for all UN organizations when and where required to facilitate "designing policy accelerators to drive trade-offs among the UN organizations beyond the level of the UN-established web-sites that inform the implementation of the SDGs and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group's Indicator Frameworks." As one of the participants puts it, "There is no government involvement in creating collaboration opportunities for all UN system organizations that is required to facilitate the trade-offs and the sacrifices people have to make to be in a partnership."

'One-size fits all' Solution less likely to achieve the SDGs

One more theme that resonated with most of the respondents that was also identified by the transcripts of the surveys, journals and other documents reviewed was that the 2030 Agenda is a 'one-size fits all' solution to peace and development that was less likely to achieve the SDGs in a fragile and conflict-affected setting like the Sudan's Darfur Region. For example, a statement that cut across most of the respondents is that:

> The goals and targets of the SDGs are universal and designed to be integrated and indivisible like 'one-size fits all' solution to peace and development. The SDGs failed to recognize the specific challenges of fragile and conflict-affected states like the Sudan's Darfur Region, particularly in terms of access to basic services. This makes *a* fragile state like the Sudan's Darfur Region less likely to achieve the SDGs than fully operational states.

Although the interviewees were critical of what they viewed as universal application and neutral wording of the SDGs targets, most interviewees pointed out that the UN organizations and other development organizations in the Sudan's Darfur Region should "prioritize addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility that is at the core of most human suffering and poverty and a major hurdle to the SDGs implementation." However, most of the interviewees stated that the:

> SDGs were so neutrally worded that priority setting depends on individual organization's subjective persuasion about the goals. In the Sudan's Darfur Region, even though the development organizations and governments have undertaken prodigious efforts to achieve the SDGs, they measure multiple

dimensions of fragility in different ways. Some approach fragility from a security

perspective. Some view it as a development problem.

In view of what the interviewees referred to as "differing interpretations of SDG-16",

most of the interviewees corroborated the findings of the UNDP's survey that "there has

been limited progress on achieving peace and sustainable development in the Sudan's

Darfur Region because differing interpretations of SDG-16 by development organizations

impeded collaboration to implement the SDGs".

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study is to understand how the

UN organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as a multi-

stakeholders working together to accelerate the SDGs implementation in fragile Sudan's

Darfur Region. The study was based on data collected through documents review and key

informant semi-structured asynchronous email interviews with six participants. The

analysis of data showed that differing interpretations of SDG-16 by the UN organizations

working under the auspices of the UNCT in the Sudan's Darfur Region impeded

collaboration to implement the SDGs and limited progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda to

"leave no-one behind".

In this chapter, I presented the research findings and the themes from the analysis

of the documents review and the elite semi-structured email interviews I conducted with

six key experts and senior members of different UN organizations working within the

UNCT in the Sudan's Darfur Region to implement the SDGs. From the document

analysis and key informant interviews of the six UN officials, the themes that emerged

from the data analysis that addressed the central research question include: Fragmented

understanding of the SDGs based on each organization's mandate and functional role;

Absence of overarching multi-stakeholder governance, i.e. lack of streamlined

implementation mechanisms and a lack of strong leadership of multi-stakeholder

partnerships, or loose SDGs coordination mechanism under the UNCT and lack of a

strong UN Resident Coordinator leadership; Lack of strong national ownership of the

SDGs implementation process; and 'One-size fits all' solution less likely to achieve the

SDGs.

Through the identified themes, the central research question of "How do the

development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-

stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region" was

adequately answered. In the next chapter, I will present a discussion of the study's

findings, limitations of the study, the implications for public policy and positive social

change as well as make some recommendations for future research on this topic and

provide a conclusion to this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations endorsed Agenda 2030 on SDGs as an internationally agreed policy to, among other things, transition fragile regions out of instability, eradicate poverty, and realize peace and long-term development (United Nations, 2015). At its 2017 meeting, the UN High-Level Political Forum reported that many countries in complex situations like the Sudan's Darfur Region have adopted SDG-16 as a long-term and comprehensive policy to achieve the SDG goals of poverty eradication, sustaining peace, and sustainable development (Martínez-Solimán & Fernández-Taranco, 2017). After a 5-year program evaluation, the UNDP found that the Sudan's Darfur Region had made limited progress on achieving the SDGs because differing interpretations of SDG-16 by the development organizations impeded collaboration to implement the SDGs (UNDP, Sudan, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region through exploring how the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs. According to the UNDG (2017), a multi-stakeholder platform was needed to implement the SDGs due to the broad spectrum of the thematic areas that encapsulated the goals. Also, the vast set of expertise and operational presence in the UNCTs was designed as a multi-stakeholder platform to bring close partnership between key development actors at country levels to accelerate the SDGs implementation (Beisheim & Simon, 2018).

This study used a combination of documents analysis and key informant interviews to collect data from the UN organizations working within the UNCT to collaboratively implement the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. I used purposive document sampling and maximum variation to select documents containing rich and diverse information on how the UN system organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs. I then complemented the reviews of documents with semistructured key informant elite interviews of six key experts and senior members of the different UN organizations with central roles in the SDGs implementation in the Sudan's Darfur Region. This study sample that comprised of six UN personnel (N=06) with lived experience of SDGs implementation in the Sudan's Darfur Region were selected through snowball purposive sampling techniques. The asynchronous email interviews were conducted from April 1 to May 10, 2021.

This study filled an existing gap in the literature on the reasons for the limited progress in achieving the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. The study extends prior studies that focused on the factors driving fragility by adding to the "discussion of how to address the other barrier to multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs implementation" (Osieyo, 2017, Para.4). That is, the study examined how the "different visions and interests" of the UN organizations and other actors affected their collaboration as multi-stakeholder partners for the SDGs implementation (Valencia et al., 2019, p.4). Chapter 5 discusses the new research findings and insights that will underline the significance of the study. It will be concluded by the application to theory, the stakeholder implications, and the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

To explore how the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs, I conducted reviews of documents from the UN organizations working together under the UNCT platform to accelerate the achievement of the SDG goals in the Sudan's Darfur Region. I also recruited and interviewed six key experts and senior members of the different UN organizations with central role in the SDGs implementation in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region. I conducted this qualitative exploratory case study to answer the central research questions: How do the development organizations' perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders implementing the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region? Bexell and Jönsson (2017) have pointed out that policy texts are often open to multiple interpretations, shaped the construction of worldviews and perceptions of problems and solutions by multiple stakeholders involved in the SDGs implementation.

Complexity theory and systems thinking perspective by Fowler (2008), and Teisman and Klijn (2008) served as the theoretical framework that I used to interpret the findings of this study. According to Filho (2020), complexity theory combined with systems thinking explains how "multiple perspectives exacerbate the ability of the development actors" to collaborate as multi-stakeholders working together "analyzing and prioritizing the SDG goals to achieve the essential transformations" envisioned in Agenda 2030 of the SDGs in a fragile territory like the Sudan's Darfur Region (Fu et al., 2020, p. 839). I will now present the themes and interpret the results to address the four key questions that were used to answer the central research question in the next section.

Theme 1: Fragmented Understanding of the SDGs

The first question posed to the informants was: What assumptions do the development organizations have about the SDGs? An all-encompassing view from the documents analysis and key informant interviews indicates that the 17 SDG goals and 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda are too vast and too broad that the UN organizations have too little awareness of the interconnectedness and collaboration required to implement the SDGs. Also, some of the development organizations perceive the SDGs as "too many goals… unrealistic expectations and impossible-to-reach targets" (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018, p.1). The study findings, therefore, highlight that the broad scope of the SDG goals, the complexity of their interconnectedness, and the various multi-stakeholders' collaborative actions that must be taken is yet to be fully grasped by UN organizations in general. This lack of awareness of the detail of the whole-of-society collaboration approach required to implement the SDGs has become an impediment for the UN organizations who should be the agents of the transformative change called for in the 2030 Agenda of the SDGs.

The findings further show that the lack of awareness of the interconnectedness of the SDGs and the whole-of-society collaborative approach required for the SDGs implementation has resulted in the UN organizations 'cherry-picking' the SDG goals aligning with their organizational goals. Hence, the UN organizations tend to pursue the implementation of the SDG goals separately, within siloes even though the UN General Assembly tasked them with implementing the SDGs in a collaborative manner. This lack of whole-of-society approach acted as an inertia for UN organizations to better align their

working together collaboratively within the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation. This issue is not specific to the fragile contexts like the Sudan's Darfur Region and has been documented in recent research (i.e., Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). However, this finding is unique to this study because previous research has not pointed out that the different perceptions of the SDG-16 by the UN organizations is problematic as it hinders whole-of-society collaborative approach to the SDGs implementation, which is a prerequisite for achieving the 2030 Agenda for peace and sustainable development.

Theme 2: Loose Coordination and Ineffective Leadership

The second question I asked informants to address was: How do the development organizations negotiate their varying interests to ensure mutually agreeable points of action? The findings suggest an absence of an overarching multi-stakeholder governance structure that is well-functioning to effectively deal with different challenges of the SDGs implementation, especially to provide guidance and support collaboration around the SDG goals and their targets. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes working across sectors to achieve the SDGs because the SDGs targets cannot be addressed in silos—"whole of society" approaches are needed for the success of one SDG depends on the success of others (United Nations, 2015). According to Kuenkel (2019), to form and maintain a multi-stakeholder governance structure like the UNCT requires an integrated coordination mechanism and an effective leadership to skillfully facilitate collaboration to show results and mobilize resources needed by smaller organizations to participate in multi-stakeholder partnership. Hence, the findings indicate that the UN organizations in

the Sudan's Darfur Region are aware of the need to build broad coalitions around the SDGs to support a more collaborative approach for operationalizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the findings pointed out that the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance platform has a loose SDGs coordination mechanism and lacks an effective UN Resident Coordinator leadership.

Similarly, an earlier research by Nunes et al. (2016) found that despite the UN adoption of the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs, a framework for operationalizing them in an integrated fashion has been lacking. This is because according to Nunes and team, the UNCT and its leadership has not been able to set up a framework with particular objectives, measures and indicators that cut across the SDG sectors/clusters to support an integrated approach to implementing the three dimensions of sustainable development underpinning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The findings also show that although the 2030 Agenda emphasizes that delivering the SDGs requires the mobilization of vast amounts of finance in accordance with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018), funding for peace and sustainable development has remained a central issue in the Sudan's Darfur Region. The study further found that different UN organizations, especially the small ones are apprehensive of power capture within the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance structure (Donders et al., 2019). Hence, the findings suggest a strengthened and effective UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator empowered to mobilize vast amounts of finance using the new financing strategy, the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) to mitigate "trust deficits affecting the balance required between

partnership goals and organizational goals for multi-stakeholder partnerships" in the

Sudan's Darfur Region (Banerjee, Murphy, & Walsh, 2020, p.2).   This points to the

uniqueness of this study from previous research because it reflected interviewees'

apprehension on how the different perceptions of SDG-16 hinder collaboration to achieve

the SDGs. That is, they raised the need for an integrated multi-stakeholder governance

structure and an effective leadership that can be made more accountable to maintain a

high level of trust and accountability within the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance

platform.

Theme 3: Lack of Strong National Ownership of the SDGs Implementation Process

Third, I asked: What does win-win look like and what are the trades-offs for

reaching a win-win outcome? The findings from both the documents analysis and the key

informant interviews make apparent that the UN organizations felt that the national

government must play a vital role in the SDGs implementation. However, there is a lack

of government involvement in designing policy accelerators and creating collaboration

opportunities to drive trade-offs among the UN organizations to reach a win-win

outcome. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes strong national ownership as a prerequisite for

achieving the SDGs. It also enjoins governments to commit to set their own national

targets, guided by the Agenda's global level of ambition and reflecting their particular

context and priorities (United Nations, 2015). According to Horan (2019), for SDG-16 to

succeed as a policy for transitioning from fragility to long-term development, national

governments need strategies to design policies and plans in an integrated manner,

aligning with the SDGs. Also, the national governments should play "the orchestrator's

critical role (the 'interlocuter')" of the UN organizations working in a multi-stakeholder governance platform to collaboratively implement the SDGs (Banerjee et al., 2020, p.11).

The findings also indicate that the success of the SDGs implementation further requires policy coherence between national development plans and the 2030 Agenda in goals prioritization. This requires national governments overhauling the multi-stakeholder governance platform for the development organizations to work across sectors to build broad collaboration to achieve the SDGs. It also requires the national governments to not only orchestrate collaboration among the UN organizations but also coordination between government departments and levels, both horizontally and vertically so that any spillovers and trade-offs are handled effectively (Sachs et al., 2019). Previous research has noted that what was missing in the SDGs implementation was a clear indication of how different UN organizations could enter into collaborative arrangements within and across sectors, arrange for resources, and deliver priorities (Banerjee et al., 2020). However, what makes this study unique is that the findings show that due to the different perceptions of SDG-16 targets and inter-linkages, the UN organizations have adopted silo-approach to the SDGs implementation focusing on specific sectorial interests that impede collaboration. For example, the interviews corroborate the survey findings that the UN organizations focusing on finance, technology or industrial development are less integrated in the UNCT, and do not present a collaborative SDGs implementation strategy (Peek, 2019).

Theme 4: 'One-size Fits All' Solution Less Likely to Achieve the SDGs

Last, I sought deeper insight into the question: How do the development organizations create a collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation? The study findings make it apparent that the SDGs were designed to be universal leaving no room for adaption to the varying contexts of different countries or finding a balance between one-size-fits all solutions and adaptation to specific country characteristics. Hence, the interviewees and documents reviewed reveal that the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs failed to recognize the specific challenges of fragile and conflict-affected states like the Sudan's Darfur Region, particularly in terms of access to basic services (Grainger et al., 2017). They pointed out that such a 'one-size fits all' solution to peace and development is less likely to achieve the SDGs in a fragile state like the Sudan's Darfur Region than fully operational states (Dombrowski, 2018). The findings also reiterate the point that the Sudan's Darfur Region like other fragile states and regions need more money to be spent on conflict prevention and peacebuilding before the SDGs can be achieved.

The findings also suggest that the SDGs were "so neutrally worded that priority setting depended on individual organization's subjective persuasion about the goals" (Brolan et al, 2017, p.1). Hence, while a few UN organizations considered it a priority to address the root causes of conflict and fragility in Darfur because "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development" (Clark, 2017, p.2). Some have been prioritizing early warning and prevention of fragility arguing that the UN organizations in Darfur must strive harder to better understand,

anticipate and respond to both the drivers and consequences of fragility. Still the others contended that the SDGs could be achieved if the UN organizations should focus their work on resolving the development problems in Darfur. Hence, the study found that the differing organizational cultures and interpretations of SDG-16 by the UN organizations impeded collaboration to implement the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. This can account for the limited progress made by the UN organizations on achieving the SDG goals of peace and sustainable development in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Limitations of the Study

This exploratory case study is limited to the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region and involved only participants working as officials of the UN organizations collaborating as multi-stakeholders under the UNCT. The UNCT is a meta-governance platform that coordinates the peacebuilding and SDGs policy implementation activities in the Sudan's Darfur Region. In this regard, while the methodology and design used for this study can be replicated to study similar problems in other settings, the results emanating from this study may not be generalizable to other fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Another limitation was that in addition to the volatile situation in the Sudan's Darfur Region, this study took place during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and most of the participants were teleworking in silos from various locations across the globe. I had to conduct the interviews remotely through asynchronous email interview method as both the researcher and the interviewees were located outside the Sudan's Darfur Region. However, to mitigate potential research biases, the participants were limited to those UN personnel identified from a series of referrals, support and cooperation from the

Office of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) in Sudan and from relevant members of the

UNCT in the Sudan's Darfur Region. The RC is the leader of the UNCT that coordinates

the UN organizations peacebuilding and SDGs policy implementation activities in Sudan.

Finally, the limited sample size although not a major factor also posed some

limitations due to the limited range of data I gathered and investigated. However, having

a representative sample was not a target for this study even though I made great effort to

ensure that the sample used in this study were identified as key experts and senior

members of the different UN organizations that are aware of plans and progress on the

SDGs implementation in the Sudan's Darfur Region. I was also conscious of potential

research biases which could affect this findings and I addressed the limitation through

peer review and member checking by the respondents.

Recommendations for future Research

The purpose of this study was to extend the body of knowledge concerning the

key sources of fragility and the differences in perceptions of the SDGs role in

transitioning fragile states to peace and sustainable development. This case study research

filled a gap in knowledge concerning the reasons for the limited progress of SDG-16 as a

policy to achieve SDG goals of stability, peace and long-term development in a fragile

and conflict-affected setting like the Sudan's Darfur Region. The data from this study

will help future researchers to conduct other case studies on particular challenges of

fragile states to contribute to the United Nations call for more research that can inform

efforts towards achieving the SDGs during the 10 years "Decade of Action" left to

accomplish the vision set in the 2030 Agenda to create a future where nobody is left

behind (Assa, 2020, Para 1). Future researchers could further explore each of the "myriad of individual projects" undertaken by the United Nations to achieve the SDGs in conflict-affected settings to contribute to the development of a "theory of change" (Ingram, & Papoulidis, 2017a: Para 10) and to facilitate designing "innovative pathways" to accelerate the attainment of peace and sustainable development in fragile settings (Fayomi et al., 2018, p. 7).

Another recommendation is that other researchers should explore the use of different methodologies and theoretical frameworks to further examine some of the challenges of how the different perceptions of SDG-16 by development actors, especially amongst the UN organizations working under the UNCT has become a barrier to collaborative multi-stakeholder action to achieve the SDGs in fragile contexts. The qualitative exploratory case study design used in this current study was useful to gather preliminary information to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and uniqueness of the SDGs as a real life policy for transition from fragility to peace and sustainable development within the boundaries of a specific environment and development organizations in the Sudan's Darfur Region.

Finally, future researchers should replicate this study in a different fragile setting or another conflict-affected state to provide detailed information on the complexity and uniqueness of the SDGs as a real-life policy for transition from fragility to the SDGs. This is to inform decision-making process of contemporary administrators and policy makers at various cadre of the managerial leadership of the SDGs on the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda to achieve sustainable development and leave no-

one behind. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has recently launched a lessons-learned study to encourage researchers to conduct case studies on particular challenges of fragile states and publish recommendations to inform policy that can accelerate the SDGs implementation (UNDP, 2016b).

Implications for Positive Social Change

After over 5 years of adopting the SDG-16 as a strategic policy for transition from fragility to sustaining peace and sustainable development, the UN organizations working collaboratively under the UNCT have made limited progress in achieving the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution A/RES/70/224 on the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the importance multi-stakeholder partnerships (i.e. "voluntary and collaborative relationships between various" UN organizations as a prerequisite to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs; UNGA, 2016, Para 2). However, the findings from documentary research and semi-structured key informant interviews show that the effectiveness of the multi-stakeholder collaboration required to achieve the SDGs was impeded by a fragmented understanding of the SDG goals by the different UN organizations involved in implementing the SDGs. Also, the findings show that the UN organizations and actors involved in the SDGs implementation have "different visions and interests" (Valencia et al., 2019, p.4) and they tend to focus on the SDG goals and targets that are directly relevant to their respective areas of work (Beisheim & Simon, 2016 and 2018). According to Osieyo (2017), to ensure the most effective way of improved SDGs implementation, there is a need for this type of exploratory case study to provide information to policy makers on how to address the

major barrier to collaborative multi-stakeholder action, i.e. the self-interest that informs the perceptions of SDG-16 by the various UN organizations.

The relevant documents and interviews further identified the absence of an overarching multi-stakeholder governance structure, the need for a more effective leadership of the UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance structure and lack of strong national government ownership of the SDGs implementation as major impediments to collaboration between the various UN organizations to achieve to SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. Similar to other studies by Banerjee et al. (2020), the findings point to the fact that to form and maintain an integrated multi-stakeholder governance structure requires an effective leadership to facilitate collaboration among the various UN organizations to show results. The leadership should also be strengthened and empowered with the right skills to mobilize resources, especially finance for the smaller organizations that may lack the resources needed to participate in multi-sectoral partnerships like the UNCT. Although empirical research on how stakeholders perceive participating in multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs implementation is uncommon, these findings will provide guideposts to policy makers of the need for awareness campaigns and training programs for future generation of UN Resident Coordinators that will be leaders of the UNCTs. According to Otto et al.(2019), awareness can act as a prerequisite for policy acceptance and can create pressure on policymakers to implement specific policies to overcome multi-stakeholder collaboration challenges.

For the field of public policy and administration, I hope this study will assist decision-making process of the policy makers at various cadre of the managerial

leadership of the existing UNCT meta-governance structure in the Sudan's Darfur Region that is rather weak and fragmented. This is with a view to contribute to designing an innovative multi-stakeholder governance platform in particular regarding local ownership to scale up success and accelerate the transition of the Sudan's Darfur Region from fragility towards the attainment of the SDG goals of peace and sustainable development.

Conclusion

With the United Nations' adoption of Agenda 2030 on the SDGs, many countries in complex situations including the Government of Sudan (GoS) embraced SDG-16 as a strategic long-term and comprehensive policy to transition the Darfur Region out of fragility towards peace and sustainable development. After over 5 years of adopting the policy, the program evaluation by the UNDP in Sudan found that limited progress has been made on achieving peace and sustainable development in the Darfur Region because differing interpretations of SDG-16 by the UN organizations impeded collaboration to implement the SDGs (UNDP, Sudan, 2018). However, the expectation enshrined in the 2030 Agenda on the SDGs is that a whole-of-society approach is required where the UN organizations and other development actors can participate in collaborative work under the UN Country Team (UNCT) as a multi-stakeholder governance platform to achieve the SDGs in such a complex setting. The aim of this qualitative exploratory case study, therefore, was to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the fragile Sudan's Darfur Region through exploring how the development organizations perceptions of SDG-16 affect their collaboration as multi-stakeholders to implement the SDGs. Understanding the SDG-16 perceptions of those development organizations is crucial to policy makers in

building trust, consensus, and leadership to collaboratively deliver on the SDG goals of peace and sustainable development in the Sudan's Darfur Region (Bianchi, 2019).

Complexity theory and systems thinking perspective by Fowler (2008), and Teisman and Klijn (2008) was used as the theoretical lens to explore how multiple perspectives of SDG-16 by the UN organizations impacted their collaboration as multi-stakeholders in the SDGs implementation. In addition to understanding the patterns of interaction and relationships between the UN organizations in delivering the transformative change envisioned in the Agenda 2030 of the SDGs in a complex and fragile territory like the Sudan's Darfur Region. This study has three broad conclusions. First, there is still a significant fragmentation of understandings and interpretations of SDG-16 among the UN organizations based on organizational mandates and functions in the Sudan's Darfur Region. The low level of awareness of the whole-of-society approach that is required to achieve the SDGs negatively affected how the UN organizations envisioned SDG-16, often identifying and championing those goals and targets that fit well with their organizational objectives. Second, there was also a lack of an integrated streamlined UNCT as a multi-stakeholder governance structure and an ineffective leadership galvanizing different UN organizations to collaborate to implement the SDGs in the Sudan's Darfur Region. Third, there is still a lack of strong national ownership of the SDGs implementation process. The Government of Sudan (GoS) lacks the capacity and resources to play any significant role either as an interlocutor or an orchestrator among the UN organizations working within the UNCT to implement the SDGs.

Based on this study's findings in the Sudan's Darfur Region, I recommended some solutions to inform policy-makers efforts towards achieving the SDGs during the 10 years "Decade of Action" left to accomplish the vision set in the 2030 Agenda. More importantly, there is a need for awareness campaigns and training programs for future generation of UN Resident Coordinators that will be leaders of the UNCTs. This is for a more effective leadership of the UNCT empowered with the right skills to mobilize resources and facilitate collaboration among the various UN organizations to show results. This study also provides information to assist decision-making process of the policy makers at various cadre of the SDGs managerial leadership to design an innovative multi-stakeholder governance platform to scale-up local ownership of the SDGs implementation process in the Sudan's Darfur Region. However, time will be a litmus test of whether or not these recommendations will help policy-makers design and maintain an effective multi-stakeholder governance platform. Future studies could further explore the feasibility and challenges of such an approach.

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Appendix: Interview Protocols

Participant #	Date/Time	Location/Mode of Interview (FtF, Phone or Email)

Key Informant (Elite) Interview on Transition from Fragility to the SDGs in Darfur, Sudan
Introductory Statement: My name is Anthony Nweke, a Walden PhD student and I would like to conduct qualitative e-mail interview with you about your experiences participating in your organization's collaboration with other organizations in the UNCT as multi-stakeholders working together to achieve the SDGs in a fragile setting like the Sudan's Darfur Region. The purpose of this study research is to examine how development organizations working under the auspices of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) can create a collaborative multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate the SDGs implementation and achieve the 2030 Agenda to "leave no-one behind". The qualitative e-mail interviewing, which should take you less than an hour, is entirely private and confidential, and your name will not be linked to anything you write. All written responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for this dissertation research project and I will ensure that any information I include in the dissertation does not identify you as the respondent.

Interview Questions	Notes
1. What is the role of your	

organization in the implementation of the SDGs?	
2. How does your organization define success of achieving the SDGs, i.e. what are the indicators of the program success?	
3. What assumption(s) does your organization working under the UN Country Teams (UNCT) as a multi-stakeholder platform have about the SDGs implementation?	
4. The implementation strategy for the SDGs envisages multi-stakeholder partnerships, i.e. voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties as in the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) designed to bring close partnership between key actors in the 2030 Agenda implementation. What formal and informal consultations does your	

organization undertake with the other organizations, governments and non-governmental groups in the prioritization of the SDG goals?	
5. How has your organization cooperated with other UN system organizations to achieve collaboration and synergies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs? In this regard, has your organization launched or intend to launch any joint programs or projects in collaboration with other UN entities? Are there any results or lessons you would like to highlight that might help improve the design and impact of such efforts as well as any impediments encountered in those joint efforts?	
6. How has your organization engaged with stakeholder groups like the	

different clusters in the UNCT, in supporting SDGs implementation at the country and regional levels? What does win-win look like and what are the trades-offs for reaching a win-win outcome?	
7. Please indicate one or two endeavor or initiatives you suggest that the UN system organizations under the UNCT could undertake together to support the implementation of the SDGs between now and 2030.	
8. Is there any other information you would like to share, including annual reports of your organization and any impact assessment or evaluation reports on the SDGs implementation? If yes, please use the space in the second column and attach the document(s) or web site link. Please also use this space to	

| provide any other information, comments or remarks you deem necessary. | |

Concluding/Closing Statement: Thank you for participating in this qualitative e-mail interviewing. I'll finalize a 1-2 page summary of the major findings from the information you and others have given me in about one week. I'll be happy to send you a copy to review at that time, if you are interested.