International Journal of Social Science and Human Research

ISSN (print): 2644-0679, ISSN (online): 2644-0695

Volume 09 Issue 01 January 2026

DOI: 10.47191/ijsshr/v9-i1-61, Impact factor- 8.007

Page No: 500-504

The Role of The United Nations in Sudan's Economic Governance Amid the Ongoing Conflict.

Ndey Marie Joof
Universities Indonesia

ABSTRACT: Sudan has historically struggled with political instability and economic mismanagement, which is further exacerbated by internal conflict and external interventions. This paper examines the United Nations (UN) role in Sudan's economic governance amid the ongoing conflict, determining whether its initiatives foster long-term resilience or reinforce structural dependency through the lens of Dependency Theory. The paper explores the impact of United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Sudan's economic environment. The analysis adopts a qualitative method, utilizing secondary sources from academic literature. The findings indicate that, while United Nations initiatives provide immediate relief and institutional support, they often establish structural dependency, weakening Sudan's long-term economic sovereignty. The interventions typically impose externally designed governance models that prioritize macroeconomic discipline over inclusive development and long-term institutional capacity-building. Consequently, the paper argues that to promote resilience and reduce structural vulnerability, there should be a reassessment of international intervention strategies.

KEYWORDS: United Nations, Sudan, Economic Governance, Structural Dependency, Dependency Theory, International Political Economy.

I. INTRODUCTION

International Institutions have played a key role in shaping the political and economic landscapes of conflict-affected nations. In the case of Sudan, the United Nations (UN) has had a considerable impact on Sudan's economic governance through numerous agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These organizations had influenced fiscal policies, macroeconomic reforms, and development program activities in Sudan, intending to stabilize the economy and meet urgent needs (UNDP, 2023). However, the long-term implications of these interventions are still disputed despite being framed as necessary for recovery and reform.

Sudan's economic trajectory has been marked by recurring conflict, economic mismanagement, external debt burdens, and dependency on foreign aid. Sudan has been a recipient of various UN-led interventions aimed at fostering peace and institutional reforms since the onset of the conflict. However, a pattern of structural dependency is projected because of the growing reliance on foreign aid, donor-imposed conditions, and externally designed governance models. The paper examines whether United Nations interventions in Sudan's economic dependency promote long-term development or generate economic reliance.

The paper adopts the Dependency Theory as its theoretical framework, as it provides an appropriate framework for investigating how international initiatives can perpetuate reliance on external actors rather than encouraging self-sufficiency (Frank 1967). The theory, developed by Cardoso and Faletto (1979), emphasizes the structural imbalances caused by asymmetric interactions between developed and developing countries. In the context of Sudan, it raises the question of whether external actors are promoting meaningful development or simply increasing Sudan's dependency on international institutions and resources.

Whether the United Nations' involvement in Sudan's economic administration promotes long-term resilience or increases dependency, international interventions in conflict-affected states are frequently presented as mechanisms for stabilization. However, historical and contemporary perspectives on economic governance indicate that external players may prioritize their own strategic interests above those of the recipient country. Sudan's relationship with the United Nations Development Programme and International Monetary Fund mirrors a global trend in which interventions are intended to ease urgent economic and social crises but may also limit the country's autonomy in policymaking and long-term development initiatives (Frank, 1967).

This paper adopts a qualitative research technique, employing a deductive case study of Sudan to investigate the consequences of UN-led economic governance. It investigates how structural constraints, uneven power dynamics, and donor-driven policy frameworks influence Sudan's economic landscape. Thus, the research question underlying this paper is: Why has the United Nations taken an active involvement in Sudan's economic governance amid the ongoing conflict, and do its interventions foster long-term resilience or reinforce economic vulnerabilities?

This study contributes to debates in International Political Economy (IPE) concerning the role of international organizations in conflict-affected nations by focusing on economic governance. In addition to providing insights for creating more equitable, sovereign-centered approaches to economic change in developing nations, it emphasizes the necessity of rigorously evaluating the long-term effects of external governance models.

The paper is organized as follows: presents a review of relevant literature, followed by the theoretical framework and methodology. The discussion section analyses key aspects of Sudan's experience, including structural dependence and asymmetrical power. Finally, the conclusion summarizes findings, assesses the theoretical contribution of the study, and offers suggestions for future research.

The role of the United Nations (UN) in economic governance has received extensive attention in conflict-affected countries, notably in Africa. Previous research has highlighted the UN's dual role in supporting economic stability, but disagreements continue over whether these interventions contribute to long-term resilience or establish structural dependency. Studies on United Nations peacekeeping and economic governance highlight the impact of institutions, for instance, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on national economies (Mkandawire, 2010).

There are essentially two major schools of thought in the academic community that dominate the discussion about the role of international organizations in conflict-affected nations on economic governance. The first school of thought is Liberal Institutionalism.

A. Liberal Institutionalism

According to liberal institutions, organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and United Nations are crucial for advancing economic recovery, governance reform, and peacebuilding (UNDP, 2023). They assert that by offering the financial support, policy frameworks, and technical know-how required for stabilization and development, these organizations close vital gaps in fragile states.

B. Dependency Theory

In contrast, dependency theory-based critical scholars contest this optimistic viewpoint. They argue that international interventions frequently perpetuate historical trends of inequality between the global North and South. Rather than promoting development, these interventions serve to preserve the structural reliance of peripheral nations on external actors and also provide short-term stability; they frequently create economic vulnerabilities by imposing fiscal policies that limit state sovereignty (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979; Frank, 1967).

According to this perspective, externally imposed economic governance models benefit powerful donor nations and financial institutions at the price of recipient countries' economic autonomy. These interventions, while stabilizing in the short term, tend to create long-term vulnerabilities by locking nations into cycles of debt, austerity, and foreign supervision (Amin, 1976; Dos Santos, 1970).

While liberal theorists argue that collaborating with international institutions provides access to expertise and global financial resources, dependency theorists underline that such engagement frequently occurs in the context of asymmetric power relations. Donor governments heavily influence decision-making within institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, restricting recipient countries' control over the direction and content of transformation.

According to Ahmed and Elbashir (2023), the United Nations Development Programme's economic reforms in Sudan are mostly based on neoliberal economic theories. Although these programs aim to improve Sudan's economy, they frequently undercut social contracts and local economic traditions by prioritizing market liberalization ahead of inclusive growth.

A critical examination of International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programs in Sudan is also presented by Yousif (2024), who critiques the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs in Sudan, the austerity measures imposed as loan conditions, which have exacerbated economic vulnerability, diminished state capacity, and fuelled broad civil unrest. His findings highlight how underprivileged groups bear a disproportionate amount of the costs associated with such policies.

Although previous research provides insightful criticism of foreign interventions, there is a lack of in-depth, theory-driven research that applies Dependency Theory to the specific case of Sudan's economic governance. Additionally, the majority of research tends to focus more on descriptive narratives than on providing explanatory frameworks that connect Sudan's experience to larger global processes.

This study fills these gaps by applying Cardoso and Faletto's Dependency Theory to examine the United Nations' economic interventions in Sudan, contributing to a more systemic understanding of how international governance models affect economic sovereignty and resilience in conflict-affected countries.

This paper provides a more thorough understanding of Sudan's dependency dynamics by analysing its economic governance. It adds to the existing International Political Economy research by explaining how dependency endures and changes in modern post-conflict environments. Furthermore, the study offers important insights for policymakers who seek to create measures that encourage genuine resilience and national ownership rather than perpetuating external reliance.

II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK (DEPENDENCY THEORY)

Dependency Theory, developed by Cardoso and Faletto (1979), serves as the paper's analytical lens, providing a critical viewpoint on the economic relationships between developing and industrialized countries. This framework emphasizes the interaction between external forces and domestic political dynamics in perpetuating underdevelopment, unlike earlier interpretations of dependency.

Dependency Theory posits that to further their own strategic and financial objectives, developed nations and international organizations establish and preserve economic dependence in the Global South by influencing governance structures and acquiring resources (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). This theoretical framework highlights issues regarding whether international interventions promote sustainable development or create cycles of reliance on external assistance, making it particularly important when examining Sudan's experience with UN-led economic governance and humanitarian aid.

This paper evaluates the UN-led economic governance in Sudan using two fundamental variables from dependency theory.

A. Structural Dependence

Structural Dependence, which refers to the systemic reliance of developing countries on external sources for capital, expertise, and institutional frameworks. In the case of Sudan, it focuses on how Sudan's economic trajectory is shaped by its reliance on World Bank loan conditionalities, International Monetary Fund structural changes, and UNDP-led economic programs. Although the goal of these interventions is to stabilize the economy, they may hinder Sudan's capacity to establish autonomous fiscal policies and indigenous industries, hence sustaining its dependence on foreign financial institutions (World Bank, 2022). These interventions frequently come with conditions such as macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization, and public sector reform that reduce the ability of the government to develop autonomous fiscal and industrial policies.

B. Asymmetrical Power Relations

Asymmetrical power relations examine how dominating states' interests are frequently reflected in international institutions' decision-making procedures rather than the requirements of recipient countries. External donors frequently dictate economic governance initiatives in Sudan by enforcing policy frameworks that put fiscal consolidation ahead of long-term economic growth (Mkandawire, 2010). Sudan finds itself in asymmetrical relationships with donor institutions that dominate decision-making processes. These power imbalances are evident in loan negotiations, structural adjustment programs, and technical assistance packages, where local input is often symbolic.

This paper critically evaluates the extent to which the United Nations role in economic governance contributes to or hinders Sudan's capacity for self-directed development by applying these two fundamental variables.

While Dependency Theory offers a relevant critique of global economic imbalances, it has limits. Some researchers contend that it gives an absolute vision of international relations, implying that poor countries have little control over their own economic prospects (Mkandawire, 2010). Others argue that globalization and international collaborations can, in some situations, provide critical resources and technological experience that aid in long-term economic development (UNDP, 2023). This paper recognizes these counterarguments but contends that Sudan's economic governance is still heavily influenced by external influences, prompting a thorough analysis of whether UN-led interventions foster self-sufficiency or perpetuate structural dependency.

Using Dependency Theory as a theoretical framework, this study aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the United Nations' role in Sudan, questioning whether its interventions serve as a foundation for long-term development or as mechanisms that maintain economic and humanitarian reliance on external actors. The findings will contribute to broader arguments on the efficacy of international governance in post-conflict circumstances, as well as the long-term effects of foreign intervention on national economic sovereignty.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes a qualitative research methodology with a deductive case study approach, focusing on the United Nations' (UN) role in Sudan's economic governance amid the ongoing conflict. A case study technique is ideal because it allows for a thorough examination of Sudan as a single case, revealing how dependency theory explains the strategic objectives driving UN interventions. The research will utilize document analysis to examine how UN economic actions serve the interests of dominant states.

The paper employs secondary data sources to provide a complete review of the UN's economic governance in Sudan. Secondary Sources include academic literature, policy documents from the UNDP, IMF, and reports from international organizations and NGOs. The data obtained will be managed by grouping it based on the categorization of dependency theory variables: Structural Dependence and Asymmetrical Power Relations. This categorization can organize secondary data that are diverse and complex to make them easier to manage, find, and analyse. Grouping data into categories relevant to the variables of dependency theory will make easy access to pattern identification, trends, and relationships between United Nations interventions in Sudan's ongoing conflict.

The triangulation method will be used to analyse the data, ensuring that the results are cross-validated across several sources (Bryman, 2012, p. 47). This method ensures a rigorous and critical examination of the dynamics between UN interventions and Sudan's economic sovereignty.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Structural Dependency and Economic Governance

The economic recovery of Sudan amid the conflict has become increasingly dependent on international institutions' financial and policy initiatives. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), alongside other organizations, has been instrumental in developing fiscal frameworks and initiating governance changes. However, these changes are usually tied to conditions set by international creditors, mainly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Yousif, 2024). Macroeconomic reform, market liberalization, public enterprise privatization, and austerity measures are frequently examples of these conditionalities. Although these policies are meant to encourage investment and stability, they usually limit Sudan's fiscal autonomy and its capacity to give context-specific development priority (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

The loss of economic sovereignty is one major consequence of this structural dependency. Due to Sudan's continuous reliance on external assistance, donor goals frequently override domestic agendas when making economic decisions (Abdalla, 2023). Ownership and self-direction are undermined when national development objectives are altered to appease donor preferences. Economic recovery becomes reliant on ongoing foreign assistance rather than being sustained internally as a result of the repeated adoption of externally devised stabilization schemes.

Furthermore, there are real societal costs associated with these conditionalities. Social safety nets are undermined, and vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by austerity policies, such as cuts to public sector subsidies and pay (Yousif, 2024). The legitimacy of the Sudanese state has been further undermined by the removal of governmental services in public infrastructure, healthcare, and education, especially in remote regions that have already been impoverished by past discrimination. This strengthens dependency by undermining recovery efforts' sustainability and resilience (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

B. Asymmetrical Power and Policy Autonomy

Another key aspect of Sudan's dependency is the uneven connection between foreign donors and recipient countries. The IMF, UNDP, and World Bank operate under a global governance system in which donor governments and influential actors wield disproportionate authority over decision-making (Elhaj, 2024). Sudanese stakeholders frequently have little negotiating power in this arrangement and are forced to follow externally imposed economic plans (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

In actuality, investors employ pre-existing policy frameworks that prioritize fiscal liberalization and consolidation to set development agendas. According to Ahmed and Elbashir (2023), local consultation procedures are frequently merely nominal, with limited space for real bargaining or the inclusion of different viewpoints. This disparity discourages indigenous knowledge systems and locally driven solutions, undermines state accountability to the populace, and diminishes the credibility of economic initiatives.

This disparity also shows up in the way these programs are evaluated. In addition to providing funding, external donors evaluate the results of implementation using measures that are frequently unrelated to regional developmental priorities. These hierarchical accountability frameworks erode the horizontal connections required for inclusive national governance and strengthen vertical dependence (Escobar, 1995).

These processes limit the autonomy of policy over time. The limited scope imposed by external actors prevents Sudanese authorities from autonomously establishing and guiding development plans. The development of long-term state capacity is impeded, and a governing culture that prioritizes external conformity above national responsiveness is ingrained.

Additionally, regional integration initiatives and South-South cooperation have the ability to diversify Sudan's development alliances and lessen its reliance on frameworks headed by the West (Mkandawire, 2010). However, to improve state efficacy and foster accountability, such measures necessitate domestic reforms.

In conclusion, changing international standards and rearranging national governance procedures are essential to striking a balance between the need for economic sovereignty. To guarantee that foreign interventions empower rather than control local development processes, a stronger focus on cooperation, openness, and adaptability is required.

The analysis shows that although the UN's intervention in Sudan is essential for stabilization and immediate relief, it frequently results in structural economic dependency and little policy autonomy. Asymmetrical power relations, fragmented institutional development, and the conditions associated with external help are all consistent with the main criticisms of dependency theory (Amin, 1976; Dos Santos, 1970; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

Reforms are required in Sudan as well as in the framework of global development governance in order to change this trajectory. International partners need to support endogenous development planning, encourage real policy discourse, and make investments in capacity building. Sudan will get closer to sustainable development based on political sovereignty and national priorities with such changes.

V. CONCLUSION

Using the dependency theory developed by Cardoso and Faletto (1979), this study has critically examined the role of the UN in Sudan's economic governance amid the ongoing conflict. The findings draw attention to a fundamental paradox: although foreign interventions have been essential in resolving urgent crises and stabilizing Sudan's economy, they have also strengthened reliance structures that threaten long-term sovereignty and self-sustaining growth.

The analysis indicates that Sudan's dependence on externally designed policy frameworks such as structural adjustment programs and donor-imposed fiscal reforms has curtailed its budgetary and policy independence, compelling it to implement economic reforms that are dictated by external parties and frequently bypass regional objectives and situations. These externally driven governance models often prioritize macroeconomic discipline and liberalization over inclusive development and long-term institutional capacity-building. As a result, national economic planning has become subordinated to donor agendas, diminishing policy autonomy and deepening Sudan's vulnerability.

This study theoretically supports the applicability of Dependency Theory in comprehending how global economic governance operates within asymmetrical power structures. International interventions often reproduce dependency by embedding countries like Sudan in systems of external control and accountability rather than simply facilitating economic recovery.

Dependency Theory does have several drawbacks; though it provides a strong critique of foreign dominance, it may downplay recipient nations' agency and the possibility of engaging in strategic dialogue with external parties. The case of Sudan indicates that although external interventions have resulted in dependency, there are also opportunities for agency, relationship restructuring, and rebalancing.

The analysis suggests the need for a paradigm shift in how international organizations engage with conflict-affected and developing states from a policy perspective. Prioritizing capacity-building, empowering national ownership, and moving toward more adaptable and context-sensitive forms of aid are all imperative for international organizations and UN agencies. For its part, Sudan needs to make investments in bolstering its own institutions, expanding its range of development alliances, especially through South-South collaboration, and reclaiming more authority over its political and economic destiny.

Future research could expand this analysis by conducting fieldwork-based case studies to analyse local perceptions of UN initiatives in Sudan. Comparative studies of conflict-affected nations could provide broader insights into whether current international governance mechanisms encourage resilience or perpetuate global disparities. In conclusion, a critical reassessment is needed to ensure that external assistance transitions from perpetuating dependency to supporting absolute sovereignty and suitable development.

REFERENCES

1) Abdalla, M. (2023). Donor influence and national planning in Sudan: The cost of conditionality. Sudan Journal of Economic Studies, 15(2), 112–130.
2) Ahmed, A., & Elbashir, H. (2023). UNDP economic reforms and neoliberal governance in Sudan. Journal of Development Policy Studies, 12(1), 45–62.
3) Amin, S. (1976). Unequal development: An essay on the social formations of peripheral capitalism. Monthly Review Press.
4) Bryman, A. (2012). Social research methods (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
5) Cardoso, F. H., & Faletto, E. (1979). Dependency and development in Latin America. University of California Press.
6) Dos Santos, T. (1970). The structure of dependence. The American Economic Review, 60(2), 231–236.
7) Elhaj, M. (2024). Donor conditionalities and state autonomy in Sudan: Rethinking international governance. Sudan Journal of Political Economy, 9(2), 77–96.
8) Escobar, A. (1995). Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World. Princeton University Press.
9) Frank, A. G. (1967). Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical studies of Chile and Brazil. Monthly Review Press.
10) Mkandawire, T. (2010). Running while others walk: Knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development. Africa Development, 35(4), 1–36.
11) United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Sudan crisis response plan. https://www.undp.org
12) World Bank. (2022). Sudan economic monitoring report: Challenges and opportunities. https://www.worldbank.org
13) Yousif, A. (2024). Structural adjustment and economic vulnerability in Sudan. African Economic Review, 18(1), 33–55.