

HUMAN SECURITY AND GRASSROOTS PEACE-BUILDING IN GAZA: LOCALIZING RESILIENCE IN PROTRACTED URBAN CONFLICT

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Abstract

This study examined the role of human security and grassroots peacebuilding in fostering resilience within the protracted urban conflict in Gaza. The study was motivated by the persistent failure of state-centric peacebuilding approaches to address the multidimensional insecurities faced by civilians. The main objective was to explore how people-centered strategies, particularly community-led initiatives, contribute to sustainable peace in a context of prolonged violence and institutional fragility. The study adopted a qualitative case study approach, relying on secondary data sources, including academic literature, reports from non-governmental organizations, and United Nations publications. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to human security challenges, grassroots peacebuilding practices, and localized resilience mechanisms. The study was anchored on Human Security Theory and Peacebuilding Theory to explain the relationship between civilian well-being and conflict transformation. The findings revealed that human security in Gaza was severely compromised, with civilians facing threats such as violence, economic deprivation, and limited access to basic services. Despite these challenges, grassroots initiatives played a critical role in sustaining resilience by providing essential services, fostering social cohesion, and supporting vulnerable populations. The study further found that localized resilience was largely driven by community solidarity and informal support systems, while state-centric approaches remained limited in addressing everyday realities. The study concluded that sustainable peace in Gaza required a shift toward inclusive, people-centered peacebuilding frameworks that integrate human security, grassroots participation, and broader structural reforms.

Keywords: Gaza, human security, grassroots peacebuilding, resilience, urban conflict

Introduction

The Gaza Strip represents one of the most complex and enduring cases of protracted urban conflict in contemporary international relations. Recurrent cycles of violence, blockade conditions, and political fragmentation have created a persistent state of insecurity, where civilians bear the brunt of conflict dynamics (United Nations, 2024). Traditional approaches to peacebuilding in such contexts have largely focused on high-level negotiations and state-centric interventions. However,

these approaches have often failed to produce sustainable outcomes, particularly in environments characterized by asymmetrical warfare and weak governance structures.

In response to these limitations, recent scholarship has shifted attention toward human security and grassroots peacebuilding as alternative frameworks for understanding and addressing conflict. Human security, as conceptualized by UNDP (1994), emphasizes the protection of individuals from threats such as violence, poverty, and displacement. This perspective broadens the scope of security beyond military concerns to include social, economic, and political dimensions.

Similarly, grassroots peacebuilding focuses on the role of local actors in fostering resilience and social cohesion. As Lederach (1997) argues, sustainable peace requires engagement at multiple levels of society, particularly at the community level where the impacts of conflict are most directly experienced. In Gaza, where formal governance structures are constrained, community-based initiatives have emerged as critical mechanisms for coping with insecurity and sustaining daily life. This study explores how human security and grassroots peacebuilding intersect in Gaza, examining their potential to provide practical and sustainable pathways for resilience in protracted conflict settings.

Statement of the Problem

The protracted conflict in Gaza has generated a persistent humanitarian and security crisis, raising critical concerns about the effectiveness of existing peacebuilding approaches. Despite numerous international interventions and diplomatic efforts, the situation remains characterized by recurring violence, economic deprivation, and severe restrictions on civilian life. Traditional peacebuilding strategies have largely been state-centric, focusing on high-level negotiations and political agreements, yet these approaches have yielded limited success in addressing the everyday realities of insecurity faced by civilians.

Scholars such as Mac Ginty (2014) argue that top-down peacebuilding models often fail to capture the complexity of local conflict dynamics, particularly in environments where state authority is weak or contested. Similarly, Kaldor (2013) emphasizes that contemporary conflicts, especially in urban settings like Gaza, disproportionately affect civilians and require approaches that go beyond conventional security frameworks. These perspectives suggest that the neglect of local agency and grassroots initiatives has significantly constrained the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.

Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that human security concerns such as access to livelihoods, safety, and basic services are central to sustainable peace, yet they remain inadequately addressed in policy and academic discourse. Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the lack of a comprehensive and people-centered approach to peacebuilding in Gaza that integrates human security and grassroots resilience into existing frameworks, in order to enhance sustainable peace outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective: To examine the role of human security and grassroots peacebuilding in enhancing resilience and sustainable peace in Gaza.

Specific Objective: the objective of the research is:

1. To analyze how grassroots initiatives contribute to civilian resilience in Gaza.
2. To evaluate the relevance of human security frameworks in strengthening people-centered peacebuilding approaches.

Conceptual review

Human Security

The concept of human security represents a paradigmatic shift from traditional state-centric notions of security to a people-centered framework that prioritizes the protection and well-being of individuals. First articulated in the UNDP (1994) Human Development Report, human security encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. This broadened perspective recognizes that threats to human survival are not limited to military violence but also include poverty, displacement, and governance failures.

From a contemporary standpoint, Nye (2021) conceptualizes human security within the broader context of global interdependence, arguing that non-traditional threats such as economic instability and weak governance structures are increasingly central to security discourse. Similarly, Kaldor (2013) links human security to the dynamics of “new wars,” where civilians are the primary victims, and violence is embedded within social and economic systems rather than confined to battlefields.

In the context of Gaza, human security is severely compromised across multiple levels. Civilians face persistent threats from armed conflict, restricted access to basic services, and economic deprivation resulting from prolonged blockade conditions. As Roy (2016) argues, Gaza represents a case of “de-development,” where systemic constraints undermine both individual and collective well-being. Critically, the human security framework provides a normative and analytical lens for this study, emphasizing that sustainable peace must prioritize the protection, dignity, and livelihoods of civilians. It shifts the focus from territorial security to human-centered resilience, making it particularly relevant for analyzing peacebuilding in Gaza.

Grassroots Peacebuilding

Grassroots peacebuilding refers to locally driven initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion within conflict-affected communities. Unlike traditional top-down approaches that rely on state actors and formal negotiations, grassroots peacebuilding emphasizes the agency of local communities in shaping peace processes. Lederach (1997) is a leading proponent of this approach, arguing that sustainable peace requires engagement across all levels of society, particularly at the grassroots where conflict is most deeply experienced.

Building on this foundation, Mac Ginty (2014) introduces the concept of “everyday peace,” which highlights how ordinary individuals develop informal practices to manage conflict and maintain stability. These practices include community mediation, informal conflict resolution mechanisms, and social networks that foster cooperation despite ongoing violence. This perspective challenges the assumption that peacebuilding must be externally driven, instead emphasizing the importance of local knowledge and adaptive strategies.

Furthermore, Paffenholz (2015) provides empirical support for the effectiveness of inclusive and grassroots-oriented peace processes, demonstrating that the involvement of civil society actors

enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of peace agreements. In contexts such as Gaza, where formal governance structures are constrained, grassroots initiatives often fill critical gaps by providing social services, facilitating dialogue, and supporting vulnerable populations. From an analytical perspective, grassroots peacebuilding highlights the limitations of state-centric models and underscores the importance of local agency in conflict transformation. It suggests that durable peace is not solely the product of elite agreements but emerges through continuous, localized processes of interaction and resilience, making it central to this study's framework.

Resilience in Urban Conflict

Resilience in conflict settings refers to the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to adapt to, withstand, and recover from the adverse effects of violence and instability. In the context of urban conflict, resilience is particularly complex due to high population density, infrastructural vulnerabilities, and the intensification of humanitarian challenges. Kaldor (2013) argues that modern conflicts increasingly take place in urban environments, where the distinction between combatants and civilians is blurred, thereby placing greater pressure on communities to develop adaptive coping mechanisms.

From a socio-political perspective, Chandler (2014) conceptualizes resilience as a form of governance, where communities are expected to manage risks and adapt to crises in the absence of strong state support. While this perspective highlights the agency of local actors, it also raises concerns about the shifting of responsibility from the state to individuals and communities.

Similarly, Barber (2013) emphasizes the role of cities and local governance structures in fostering resilience, arguing that urban communities often develop innovative solutions to address challenges such as insecurity, resource scarcity, and social fragmentation. In Gaza, resilience is manifested through strong social networks, informal economies, and community-based support systems that enable survival under conditions of prolonged conflict (Roy, 2016). However, resilience should not be romanticized. As scholars note, the ability to adapt does not eliminate vulnerability but rather reflects coping under constraint. Therefore, resilience in Gaza must be understood as both a survival mechanism and a limitation, highlighting the need for structural interventions that address the root causes of insecurity.

Literature Review

The literature on Gaza has historically been dominated by analyses of war, blockade, humanitarian emergency, and great-power diplomacy. Much of this scholarship has treated Gaza primarily as a site of recurring crisis shaped by occupation, siege, armed confrontation, and geopolitical contestation. More recent work, however, has begun to move beyond macro-level conflict narratives to examine how ordinary people, local associations, and community networks sustain life under prolonged violence. This newer body of literature is especially important because it shifts the analytical focus from the state and armed actors to human security, everyday survival, and localized peace practices. Recent academic and policy studies argue that Gaza's reality cannot be fully understood through military and diplomatic lenses alone; it must also be analyzed through the lived experiences of civilians navigating insecurity, deprivation, displacement, and institutional collapse (Beidollahkhani, 2025).

A foundational contribution to this discussion comes from Sara Roy, whose work on Gaza's political economy described the enclave not simply as poor or underdeveloped, but as subject to

“de-development,” meaning the systematic erosion of the economic and institutional bases necessary for normal social reproduction. Roy’s argument remains highly relevant because current analyses continue to show that war and blockade have weakened livelihoods, service delivery, and social infrastructure in ways that deeply affect how people secure food, shelter, education, and health. More recent UNDP reporting confirms that the war has devastated Gaza’s social and economic foundations, sharply increasing multidimensional poverty and unemployment while degrading education, health, and municipal services. In this sense, the literature increasingly connects Roy’s earlier insights to a contemporary human security framework, showing that insecurity in Gaza is not only physical but also economic, social, and institutional (Amnesty International, 2025).

Recent literature has also expanded the discussion of resilience, though not without critique. On one hand, a number of studies and humanitarian reports describe how Gazans have developed adaptive coping mechanisms through kinship networks, informal economies, neighborhood solidarity, and improvised community support. UNDP’s 2024 programming update, for example, documents support to local civil society organizations, one-stop citizen service centers, emergency employment, legal aid, and psychosocial support, all of which point to community-based efforts to maintain a minimum degree of functioning amid institutional collapse. Likewise, the ICRC’s Gaza Resilience Programme frames resilience as an urban systems issue, emphasizing how infrastructure, service access, and community capacity are intertwined in conflict settings. These studies suggest that resilience in Gaza is relational and collective, not merely individual (UNDPa, 2025).

On the other hand, a newer critical literature warns against romanticizing resilience. A 2025 reflective essay by Gazan Palestinian scholars argues that the language of resilience can become burdensome when it obscures grief, exhaustion, fragmentation, and the responsibility of external actors to stop ongoing violence. This critique is important because some policy discourses risk presenting resilience as proof that communities can indefinitely absorb destruction. Rather than rejecting resilience altogether, the literature now urges a more careful use of the term: resilience should refer to adaptive capacity under constraint, not to an assumption that communities can or should endure limitless violence. This debate is especially relevant for people-centered peacebuilding, since it underscores that community strength must not become a substitute for rights, protection, and political accountability.

Another major strand of the literature focuses on the role of civil society and local organizations in sustaining everyday life. Amnesty International’s 2024 reporting and other humanitarian assessments describe the severe degradation of formal governance and service systems in Gaza, where local associations, medical workers, relief volunteers, and neighborhood initiatives often step in to fill critical gaps. UNDP’s September 2024 Gaza programmatic update similarly shows that local CSOs were supported to deliver legal aid, psychosocial assistance, and community services, even while operating under extreme constraint. This body of work suggests that civil society in Gaza does not operate merely as an advocacy actor; it functions as a survival infrastructure, mediating access to aid, social services, and community support in the absence of reliable public institutions (UNDPb, 2024).

The literature on grassroots peacebuilding offers a useful framework for understanding these local practices. Lederach’s classic work remains influential in arguing that sustainable peace depends on engagement across all levels of society, especially at the grassroots. More recent scholarship by

Mac Ginty develops this insight through the idea of “everyday peace,” referring to the ordinary practices through which people reduce tension, maintain coexistence, and protect social life despite conflict. A 2025 discussion of grassroots peacebuilding approaches in Israel-Palestine reinforces this line of argument by suggesting that, in the face of ineffective high-level diplomacy and militarized humanitarianism, grassroots initiatives offer alternative spaces for trust-building and social repair. Applied to Gaza, this perspective helps explain why local peacebuilding may matter even where formal negotiations remain stalled or absent.

At the same time, the literature is clear that grassroots peacebuilding in Gaza faces serious structural constraints. These include siege conditions, repeated destruction of infrastructure, restricted movement, fragmented authority, donor dependency, and the political militarization of public space. Ground Truth Solutions’ 2024 community-based assessments show that many Gazans prioritize ending the war and returning home over conventional aid narratives, while also emphasizing mutual support and local solidarity. Such findings reveal both the strength of local agency and the limits placed upon it. Community-led coping and peace-supporting practices can help people survive, but they cannot by themselves resolve the structural conditions of blockade, violence, and political exclusion that drive insecurity (Beidollahkhani, 2025).

The literature also increasingly situates Gaza within the broader framework of humanitarian governance. This concept refers to the way humanitarian actors, local institutions, international agencies, and affected communities together shape how life is managed under crisis. UN OCHA and UNRWA situation reports show that humanitarian access, aid distribution, food security, and shelter arrangements are not merely technical issues; they are also political and spatial questions conditioned by military control, restricted movement, and institutional breakdown. UNRWA’s 2026 reporting, for instance, notes that high levels of food insecurity remain despite some fragile improvements, while access to land, infrastructure, and public facilities remains heavily constrained. This literature underscores that humanitarian governance in Gaza is deeply entangled with conflict dynamics, making it impossible to separate relief from politics.

Recent academic work has further widened the conversation by linking Gaza’s humanitarian collapse to peacebuilding theory. A 2025 article, *From Rubble to Renewal*, argues that conventional peacekeeping and top-down frameworks are inadequate for Gaza because they are too bureaucratic and insufficiently grounded in local agency. The article proposes a framework centered on collective action and political renewal from below, suggesting that peacebuilding must create conditions for new local political spaces rather than merely restoring old institutional forms. Although this is a normative and interpretive intervention, it contributes to a growing literature that seeks to reimagine peacebuilding in Gaza as something rooted in social reconstruction, dignity, and agency rather than only in ceasefire diplomacy (UNDP/PAPP. 2024).

Other recent studies extend this point by connecting Gaza’s destruction to broader debates on development, sustainability, and urban recovery. A 2025 sustainability-focused article argues that the war has produced deep environmental, social, and economic disruption that directly affects resilience and well-being. Another article in *Public Humanities* describes Gaza as a precedent-setting case of structural violence undermining sustainable development. These studies are important because they show that peacebuilding in Gaza cannot be reduced to stopping armed violence alone. Any people-centered peace agenda must also address infrastructure, debris, housing, environment, livelihoods, and psychosocial recovery. In other words, human security and reconstruction are inseparable.

The literature also reveals a tension between formal diplomacy and localized social repair. Conventional diplomatic efforts remain focused on ceasefires, hostage arrangements, border control, and state-level bargaining. Yet many recent reports indicate that Gazan communities often frame their priorities in terms of safety, return, shelter, livelihood, dignity, and local support systems rather than abstract political formulas alone. This does not mean that diplomacy is irrelevant; rather, it suggests that peacebuilding frameworks that ignore local priorities are unlikely to achieve legitimacy or durability. The strongest recent policy literature therefore calls for better integration of humanitarian action, early recovery, local governance support, and community participation (UNDP/PAPP, 2024).

Taken together, the literature points to an important conceptual shift. Gaza is no longer analyzed only as a battlefield or humanitarian emergency, but also as a site where civilians, local associations, and informal systems of mutual support continually negotiate survival under extreme conditions. This has strengthened interest in people-centered frameworks such as human security, everyday peace, resilience, and humanitarian governance. Yet the literature also cautions that local agency should not be celebrated in ways that normalize abandonment, depoliticize structural violence, or excuse the failures of international protection. The most persuasive scholarship, therefore, is that which holds these insights together: Gaza's communities exhibit remarkable adaptive capacity, but that capacity operates under violent constraint and must be supported by wider political, legal, and humanitarian transformation.

Gap in the Literature

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Gaza, important gaps remain in the literature. First, much existing research still treats Gaza primarily as a site of humanitarian emergency, armed conflict, or geopolitical contestation, rather than systematically analyzing how human security, grassroots peacebuilding, and localized resilience intersect in everyday life. For example, Roy (2016) and subsequent development-oriented studies illuminate the structural erosion of Gaza's economy and institutions, while recent UNDP assessments document the severe socioeconomic consequences of the war. Yet these works do not fully connect those structural conditions to bottom-up peacebuilding practices and local peace-supporting agency.

Second, scholars such as Mac Ginty (2014) have advanced the concept of everyday peace, and more recent discussions of grassroots peacebuilding in Israel-Palestine highlight the potential of local initiatives. However, this literature often remains conceptually rich but empirically thin in relation to Gaza itself, especially under the conditions created by the 2023–2026 war and collapse of formal governance structures.

Third, recent critiques caution that resilience discourse can become depoliticizing. The 2025 reflections by Gazan scholars argue that celebrating resilience may obscure exhaustion, grief, and external responsibility. Nevertheless, there is still limited integrative research that balances this critique with a grounded analysis of how local actors actually sustain social cohesion and civilian survival. Therefore, the gap this study intends to fill is the lack of a comprehensive, people-centered analysis that links human security, grassroots peacebuilding, and localized resilience in Gaza as mutually reinforcing dimensions of peacebuilding under protracted urban conflict.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies Human Security Theory and Peacebuilding Theory to explain the dynamics of civilian resilience and grassroots peacebuilding in Gaza. While both theories provide valuable analytical insights, the study adopts Human Security Theory as its primary framework due to its strong alignment with the people-centered focus of the research.

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory shifts the focus of security from the protection of the state to the protection of individuals and communities. First articulated in the UNDP (1994) Human Development Report, the theory identifies multiple dimensions of security, including economic, food, health, environmental, personal, and political security. Unlike traditional security paradigms that emphasize military threats, human security highlights everyday vulnerabilities such as poverty, displacement, and lack of access to basic services.

Nye (2021) expands this framework by arguing that modern security challenges are increasingly shaped by non-traditional threats, including governance deficits and socio-economic instability. Similarly, Kaldor (2013) links human security to contemporary “new wars,” where civilians are the primary victims and violence is embedded in social and economic structures rather than confined to conventional battlefields. In the context of Gaza, Human Security Theory is particularly relevant. Civilians face multidimensional threats, including physical insecurity from armed conflict, economic deprivation due to blockade conditions, and limited access to healthcare, education, and livelihoods (United Nations, 2024). This framework enables the study to analyze how grassroots initiatives contribute to addressing these vulnerabilities and enhancing resilience.

Adoption of Human Security Theory: This study adopts Human Security Theory as its principal framework because it provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the intersection between civilian protection, resilience, and peacebuilding. It allows the study to move beyond state-centric approaches and focus on how local actors respond to insecurity and sustain social cohesion under protracted conflict conditions.

Peacebuilding Theory

Peacebuilding Theory focuses on the processes and mechanisms through which sustainable peace can be achieved by addressing the root causes of conflict. Lederach (1997) conceptualizes peacebuilding as a multi-level process involving top-level leadership, mid-level actors, and grassroots communities. He emphasizes that durable peace emerges from relationships, trust, and social transformation rather than solely from formal agreements.

More recent scholarship reinforces this perspective. Mac Ginty (2014) introduces the concept of “everyday peace,” highlighting how ordinary people engage in informal practices to manage conflict and maintain stability. Similarly, Paffenholz (2015) demonstrates that inclusive peace processes involving civil society actors are more likely to produce sustainable outcomes. In Gaza, Peacebuilding Theory helps explain the role of grassroots initiatives in fostering resilience and social cohesion in the absence of effective state institutions. However, the theory also recognizes the limitations of local efforts, particularly in environments characterized by ongoing violence and structural constraints. More so, while both theories are relevant, Human Security Theory is adopted as the primary framework because it directly addresses the study’s focus on civilian well-being, resilience, and localized responses to insecurity. Peacebuilding Theory serves as a complementary framework, providing insight into how grassroots initiatives contribute to broader peace processes.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine human security and grassroots peacebuilding in Gaza. It relies on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed academic literature, reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and publications from international bodies such as the United Nations. The use of secondary data is appropriate given the constraints of conducting primary research in conflict-affected settings. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), enabling the identification and interpretation of key patterns related to human security, community resilience, and local peace initiatives. This approach provides a context-sensitive and in-depth understanding of the study.

Findings and Discussion

Human Security Challenges in Gaza: The findings reveal that human security in Gaza is profoundly undermined across multiple dimensions, reflecting the cumulative impact of protracted conflict, blockade conditions, and institutional fragility. Civilians are exposed to chronic physical insecurity, including airstrikes, displacement, and the destruction of residential areas, which significantly threaten personal safety and psychological well-being. Beyond direct violence, the study identifies severe economic insecurity, characterized by high unemployment, loss of livelihoods, and dependence on humanitarian aid. Access to essential services such as healthcare, clean water, electricity, and education remains highly constrained, further deepening vulnerability (United Nations, 2024).

From a human security perspective, these overlapping threats illustrate a condition of multidimensional insecurity, where survival is not only threatened by violence but also by systemic deprivation. This aligns with Kaldor's (2013) argument that modern conflicts disproportionately affect civilians by embedding insecurity within everyday life. Consequently, human security challenges in Gaza are not episodic but structural, requiring approaches that address both immediate protection and long-term socio-economic recovery.

Role of Grassroots Peacebuilding

Despite these severe constraints, the study finds that grassroots peacebuilding initiatives play a critical role in sustaining civilian resilience and social stability. Community-based organizations, local NGOs, and informal networks have emerged as key actors in providing essential services, facilitating dialogue, and supporting vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and displaced populations. These actors often operate in environments where formal governance structures are either weak or absent, effectively filling gaps in service delivery and conflict mediation.

This finding supports Lederach's (1997) assertion that sustainable peace is rooted in local capacities and relationships rather than solely in top-down political agreements. Additionally, the concept of "everyday peace" advanced by Ginty (2014) is evident in Gaza, where ordinary citizens engage in informal practices such as community cooperation, mutual aid, and conflict avoidance to maintain social order. However, while grassroots initiatives are essential, they are also constrained by limited resources, political restrictions, and ongoing violence. This suggests that their effectiveness depends on both local agency and external support, highlighting the need for integrated peacebuilding strategies.

Localized Resilience and Social Cohesion

The study further demonstrates that resilience in Gaza is largely sustained through localized social networks and community solidarity mechanisms. Families, neighborhood groups, and informal associations provide critical support systems that enable individuals to cope with displacement, economic hardship, and psychological stress. These networks facilitate the sharing of resources, information, and emotional support, thereby strengthening collective survival strategies. From an analytical perspective, this reflects what Chandler (2014) describes as adaptive resilience, where communities develop coping mechanisms in response to persistent instability. In Gaza, resilience is not merely an individual capacity but a collective social process, deeply embedded in cultural norms and shared experiences.

However, the findings also caution against over-romanticizing resilience. While communities demonstrate remarkable adaptability, this resilience often occurs under conditions of extreme constraint and does not eliminate vulnerability. As Roy (2016) notes, prolonged exposure to structural deprivation can erode long-term coping capacities. Therefore, resilience should be understood as both a strength and a limitation, underscoring the need for structural interventions that address root causes of insecurity.

Limitations of State-Centric Approaches

The findings highlight significant limitations in traditional state-centric peacebuilding approaches, which prioritize formal political negotiations and institutional arrangements while often neglecting local dynamics. In the context of Gaza, such approaches have proven insufficient in addressing the everyday realities of civilians, particularly in situations where state authority is fragmented or constrained. State-centric models tend to focus on ceasefire agreements, political settlements, and diplomatic engagement, yet they frequently overlook issues such as livelihood security, social cohesion, and community resilience. As Mac Ginty (2014) argues, these models fail to capture the informal and localized practices through which peace is actually maintained in conflict-affected societies.

Moreover, the reliance on top-down interventions can lead to a disconnect between policy frameworks and the lived experiences of affected populations. In Gaza, this disconnect is evident in the persistence of humanitarian crises despite repeated diplomatic efforts. Consequently, the study argues that effective peacebuilding requires a shift toward people-centered approaches that integrate human security and grassroots initiatives into broader frameworks. Such an approach not only enhances the relevance and legitimacy of peacebuilding efforts but also provides more sustainable pathways for addressing protracted conflict.

Conclusion

The protracted conflict in Gaza highlights the urgent need to fundamentally rethink conventional peacebuilding approaches in contexts characterized by persistent violence, institutional fragility, and humanitarian crises. The findings of this study demonstrate that traditional state-centric models, which prioritize high-level political negotiations and formal institutional arrangements, have been insufficient in addressing the complex and multidimensional realities of insecurity faced by civilians. Instead, the study underscores the relevance of human security and grassroots peacebuilding frameworks as more adaptive and context-sensitive approaches to conflict transformation.

By shifting the focus from state survival to human well-being, human security provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the everyday vulnerabilities experienced by Gaza's population, including physical insecurity, economic hardship, and limited access to essential services. At the same time, grassroots peacebuilding highlights the critical role of local actors, community networks, and informal institutions in sustaining resilience and social cohesion under conditions of prolonged conflict. These localized efforts demonstrate that peace is not solely the outcome of formal agreements but is continuously constructed through everyday practices of cooperation, mutual support, and conflict management.

However, the study also reveals that while local resilience is significant, it operates within severe structural constraints. Grassroots initiatives alone cannot resolve the deeper political, economic, and security challenges that underpin the conflict. Sustainable peace in Gaza therefore requires a multi-layered approach that integrates people-centered strategies with broader structural reforms, including improved governance, accountability, and conflict de-escalation. In essence, the study concludes that effective peacebuilding in Gaza must move beyond narrow, top-down frameworks toward a more holistic, inclusive, and locally grounded model, where human security and community agency are central to long-term stability.

Recommendations

1. **Prioritize human security in peacebuilding frameworks** by addressing civilian protection, livelihoods, and access to essential services.
2. **Strengthen grassroots and community-led initiatives** through financial, technical, and institutional support from international actors.
3. **Promote inclusive peacebuilding processes** that actively involve civil society, women, youth, and marginalized groups.
4. **Enhance coordination between local and international actors** to ensure that interventions are context-specific and responsive to community needs.
5. **Support humanitarian governance structures** that improve service delivery and accountability in conflict-affected areas.
6. **Encourage conflict de-escalation and protection mechanisms** to create enabling conditions for sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

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