There can be no Peacebuilding without Development and Vice Versa

James Otundo[*]

School of Arts and Human Sciences Daystar University

Kenya

*Corresponding Author: *James Otundo, School of Arts and Human Sciences Daystar University, Kenya*

Abstract: *The interdependent relationship between peacebuilding and development is fundamental to national progress and neither can be sustainably achieved without the other. In Kenya, this is tested by the challenges witnessed in various sectors, which directly hinders the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An effective development system is a cornerstone of a healthy, productive society and a prerequisite for lasting stability. Peacebuilding and development go hand in hand, and neither can exist in isolation, and an attempt to prioritize one over the other creates an imbalance that causes a good level of instability. Such scenarios help us appreciate the twist between development through resource and wealth coexisting with systemic underdevelopment due to conflict as a result of failed peacebuilding efforts, a theme that is worth exploring in literature.*

Keywords: *Peace-Development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Leadership, Kenya*

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of peacebuilding and development has long been a core area of discourse in academia and policy circles, yet despite the conversations and insight the manifestation in Africa remains wrapped up in contradictions and divergent views. While global frameworks often treat peacebuilding and development as distinct processes (Autesserre, 2017), the context in Africa seems to be different by going against the grain revealing the interdependence between peacebuilding and development as non-negotiable for sustainable progress. Peacebuilding and development go hand in hand, and neither can exist in isolation, and an attempt to prioritize one over the other creates an imbalance that causes a good level of instability. In Kenya for example the Nubian community in Kibra and Kenyan Somalis who have had a challenge accessing papers (Maupeu, 2021) have seen conflict arise in the various areas of settlement which helps us appreciate that where there is conflict there can be little development observed. In order to appreciate the value that peacebuilding efforts bring to to development, we need to look into the Political, Economic, Social, Technological Environmental and Legal landscape observed in Africa and compare this to the global north as this is the basis for challenging the Eurocentric paradigms that have dominated the field. Eurocentric paradigms have been unable to put on the forefront context-specific models that address structural inequities, state capture by the elite in society, and failed to address the legacy of colonial exploitation.

The subject under study adds value in the field of peacebuilding and development studies as it confronts the shortcomings of previous approaches to address the development challenges observed in Africa through peacebuilding efforts. While scholars like Galtung (1969), and Lederach (1995), have theorized the links between structural violence and peace, African voices such as Niyitunga (2017) and PLO Lumumba (Thee Alfa House, 2023) highlight how externally imposed frameworks neglect realities within the local context. This paper contributes new insights by adding a voice and centering African viewpoints, critiquing the multibillion business that is centered on wars and peacebuilding by elite regimes (Thee Alfa House, 2023), and interrogating the place and drive of resource-driven conflicts especially in stunting development in the African continent. Currently the Democratic Republic of Congo is facing conflicts that is destabilizing the country and while this is happening the irony is that Congo is considered not only a top exporter of good music but also one of the mineral-rich yet war-torn nation. Such scenarios help us appreciate the twist between development through resource and wealth

coexisting with systemic underdevelopment due to conflict as a result of failed peacebuilding efforts, a theme that is worth exploring in literature.

In order to better understand the topic in question, the researcher agrees with the statement "there can be no peacebuilding without development and vice versa." In this case Peacebuilding success is as our dependent variable where we measure its success by stability levels within the countries, absence of violent conflict, and social cohesion indices. These are a by-product of peacebuilding efforts measured by implementation of peace agreements, disarmament programs, and community reconciliation processes. Our Independent Variable in this case is sustainable development Initiatives which are measured by funding allocated to education, healthcare, and infrastructure projects from which the outcomes are measured by improvements in poverty rates, literacy rates, and access to basic services within the countries in discussion.

We are further guided by the following objectives that seek to address two critical questions in light of peacebuilding and development in Africa. First objective is to examine how addressing socio-economic gaps through development can reduce grievances and foster lasting peace and the second objective is to investigate whether participatory peace processes enhance trust in institutions, thereby accelerating progress toward development goals like poverty reduction. The critical questions this paper seeks to address are:

- To what extent do targeted development initiatives e.g., education and infrastructure projects contribute to peacebuilding success in post-conflict societies?

- How do inclusive peacebuilding efforts e.g., reconciliation programs and institutional reforms influence the sustainability of development outcomes?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Eliasson (2011) we cannot talk about peace building and development without including the inseparable link of human rights. He frames them as interdependent pillars that are essential for global stability. In his speech he asserts that lasting solutions require that the pursuit of peace, development, and human rights must take place in parallel. There is no peace without development; there is no development without peace; and there is no sustainable peace and development without respect for human rights (Eliasson, 2011). Zuber (2012), further elaborates the intrinsic link between peacebuilding and sustainable development, central to SDG 16, which asserts that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. From this discourse it helps us appreciate and question the approaches of international institutions, advocating instead for integrated, horizontal strategies that unite governments, NGOs, and multilateral organizations. This interdependence is emphasized as foundational, with the success of the 2030 Agenda hinging on stable, inclusive societies governed by trustworthy institutions free from corruption and violence. Drawing from this viewpoint it helps us highlight the necessity of addressing root causes like poverty and governance, which warns of cyclical fragility where not one low-income country coping with weak governance, poverty, and violence has achieved a single Millennium Development Goal (Eliasson, 2011).

Economic and social problems should rank equal with political problem and sometimes, they should have priority through breaking institutional barriers to foster shared responsibility. Ultimately, to help address the issue of peacebuilding and development it is integral to model the integration of diverse perspectives as vital for tackling 21st-century challenges (Eliasson, 2011). Peacebuilding especially in Africa has had a key target that include reducing illicit arms flows, ensuring access to justice, and fostering transparent governance, though challenges like geopolitical compromises and insufficient engagement with peace experts during target formulation persist. Zuber (2012), critiques the destabilizing impact of excessive arms production and transfers, highlighting the inadequacy of current treaties like the Arms Trade Treaty, which lacks robust oversight and fails to address legacy weapons. There is a need to balance security and development, with much caution being put on the observation that unaccountable security sectors and disproportionate militarization undermine public trust and development goals. A case study on the Middle East and North Africa best illustrates how conflict and high military spending drain resources, increasing the inequalities and governance failures (Zuber, 2012). There is a need to advocate for rights-based approaches, inclusive policies, and redefining security as a means to protect human rights because trust in the state is the soundest basis for peaceful,

just and inclusive societies. If we failto meet SDG 16 there risks to be a never ending cycle of violence and stalling global progress (Zuber, 2012).

Despite human rights being a foundational pillar for peacebuilding and development, chronic underfunding (3% of the budget) and systemic failures evidenced by the UN's inadequate responses to the Rwandan and Srebrenica genocides and the 2009 Sri Lankan crisis have hindered progress (Gilmour, 2014). This highlights the "Rights up Front Action Plan" as a pivotal reform, demanding a "system-wide UN commitment" to prioritize human rights across all operations, stressing "moral courage" in confronting violations and rejecting political censorship. Central to this initiative is the imperative to do everything and truly everything in their power to prevent or end atrocities, learning from past failures (Gilmour, 2014). Examples like UN bases sheltering civilians in South Sudan demonstrate progress, yet challenges persist, including funding gaps and member state resistance. From the lens of the UN human rights peacebuilding and development viewpoint we assert that sustainable peace and development are unattainable without embedding human rights into the UN's lifeblood, requiring bold, ethical leadership and accountability to uphold the Charter's principles (Gilmour, 2014). This frames peace as both a prerequisite and an outcome of equitable progress. lasting peace cannot exist without addressing the root causes of conflict which include poverty, inequality, and exclusion.

In order to address this there is a need to take a look deeper into the cultures of various people as cultural sensitivity is critical pathway to a the multi-sectoral approach that integrates governance reforms, youth empowerment, and community-led initiatives as a solution to a clear pathway to development that is sustainable. Investing in inclusive institutions and justice systems is non-negotiable for breaking cycles of violence and fostering resilient economies as highlighted in SDG 16 - Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, as foundational to achieving all other goals. Development gains are fragile without participatory peacebuilding anchored in local ownership for example in Nigeria Sulhu (Akintayo, 2025), local leadership in Tanzania (Mtenga, 2024) and there is a huge need for policies that simultaneously tackle socio-economic disparities and strengthen democratic accountability to create a self-reinforcing cycle of peace and prosperity.

According to Niyitunga (2017), peacebuilding and sustainable development are deeply interconnected, asserting that peace is both a "prerequisite and an outcome" of equitable growth. Lasting peace cannot exist without addressing the root causes of conflict which include poverty, inequality, and exclusion. There must be holistic strategies that are rooted in governance reforms and community-driven solutions in order to address the real problems in the communities. Institutional accountability is one of the critical pathways to sustainable development by investing in inclusive institutions and justice systems. Coming up with policies that address socio-economic gaps while reinforcing democratic systems to sustain a symbiotic relationship between peace and prosperity is critical to development. Niyitunga (2020), further contends that peace education is a critical tool for sustainable peacebuilding in Africa but its effectiveness is undermined by colonial legacies in educational systems. In Kenya there is a shift from the 8-4-4 system to the current Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) that is eliminating mathematics as a compulsory subject. The education system is not adapted to the local context and needs of the Kenyan and African space, a challenge brought about by the colonial legacies. Peace education must cultivate values, skills, and behaviors aligned with local cultures to address structural violence and recurring conflicts, such as xenophobic attacks, riots, and terrorism (Niyitunga, 2020). Colonial education has been central in perpetuating Eurocentric frameworks as it continues to breed a Eurocentric culture and perspective and has not led to sustainable peace in Africa. The erosion of indigenous identity has been increasing with majority abolishing their cultures, Niyitunga (2020) stresses that individuals living without their own culture have no sense of values, and easily succumb to their base instincts, which ultimately jeopardizes peace. There is a need to decolonize education through curriculum reforms and institutional transformations, advocating for systems rooted in African heritage to foster real peace grounded in justice, cultural solidarity, and social responsibility which in turn helps us proceed to real development that is alive to local realities. Sustainable peacebuilding requires rejecting colonial paradigms and focusing education on African values to address root causes of conflict and inequality. (Niyitunga, 2020).

Existing studies often treat peacebuilding as a very technical exercise to be handled by experts (Bächtold, 2021; Hirblinger et al., 2023), sidelining grassroots agency and the socio-economic roots of conflict. Conversely, conversations that are circled within development agendas frequently tend to ignore how inequality breeds dissatisfaction which escalates to violence. A good case in Kenya is when

farmers were angry at the rate at which the Ugandan based eggs were being flooded in the market. The Ugandan based eggs were cheaper than our local eggs due to the high tax on feeds in the country, an inequality that caused dissent from farmers to our neighbors' products. This paper attempts to fill the gap by bringing together in a unique manner the peacebuilding agenda along with development initiatives, arguing that sustainable development especially in our continent Africa must first break down the oppressive systems of the "Haves" in society and bring development to the grassroot level.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interdependence of Peacebuilding and Development

Peacebuilding and development go hand in hand, and neither can exist in isolation. In order to better understand the relationship, there is a need to review various frameworks under structural, relational, and cultural dimensions that helps build up on foundational theories of peacebuilding and development.

4. STRUCTURAL DIMENSION

The structural dimension emphasizes the institutional, economic and systemic foundations necessary for peacebuilding and development. Galtung (1969), distinction between negative peace (absence of direct violence) and positive peace (absence of structural violence) helps us appreciate that lasting peace requires addressing systemic inequities, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and economic marginalization. Kant (1795) in his classic essay, perpetual peace is of the view that democratic governance and economic interdependence are structural prerequisites for peace, an argument that was furthered by other theorists like Adam Smith linking free-market economies and democratic political systems to reduced conflict. The assertion that economic liberalization is a key ingredient for peace aligns with most modern development paradigms that prioritize poverty reduction, infrastructure, and institutional capacity-building as pillars of stability. This is contradicting the reality in Africa where we see imbalance in resource distribution with political elites harnessing wealth and using this to oppress people and maximize their influence by instigating conflict for their benefit. Structural peacebuilding tends to grapple with power imbalances and without development that dismantles structural violence, peace remains fragile, conversely, without peace, development initiatives falter amid instability.

5. RELATIONAL DIMENSION

The relational dimension focuses on repairing and transforming interactions between conflicting groups through mediation, trust and social cohesion. Galtung (1969) peacebuilding concept extends beyond ceasefires (peacekeeping) or elite negotiations (peacemaking) to address fractured relationships through inclusive processes. Conflict resolution and transformation schools highlight relational dimension as a critical move advocating for dialogue, mediation, and grassroots reconciliation. Lederach (1995), emphasizes rebuilding relational networks across societal levels sits on three tracks, track 1 (state-level mediation), track 2 (mid-level leadership workshops), and track 3 (community dialogues).

These levels reflect the necessity of relational repair at all societal levels to sustain peace. In Kenya, the 2007 pos- election violence had to undergo this three tier levels to see the nation back on track where key proponents had to sit with a mediator and call for total pull back from any form of violence, leaders within their levels of engagement had to conduct workshops and share on the value of peace which translated to the grass root level to address the pressing issues that surrounded land reforms and acquisition. Relational development therefore is firm base for peacebuilding whereby there is economic inclusion opportunities thus reducing grievances, while inclusive governance fosters social cohesion through activities engaged in. Without relational repair, structural development risks perpetuating exclusion and without development, relational efforts lack material foundations to sustain trust.

6. CULTURAL DIMENSION

The cultural dimension addresses the symbolic and normative frameworks that legitimize violence or peace. Galtung, (1969), concept of cultural violence such as the narratives, symbols, and ideologies that justify structural or direct violence highlights the need to transform societal norms. There is a need to prioritize cultural healing through trauma-informed approaches, memory projects, and inclusive storytelling, recognizing that unresolved cultural wounds perpetuate cycles of violence. Cultural peacebuilding intersects with development through initiatives that uplift local knowledge and empower marginalized identities. For example, in Kenya the Maasai land rights intertwine cultural preservation with economic equity, challenging extractive development models that perpetuate conflict. Educational

programs that integrate peace curricula foster intergenerational shifts in norms that may have been divisive in the past. However, cultural efforts require structural support through legal recognition of cultural rights and economic policies that sustain traditional livelihoods. Conversely, cultural shifts enable development by fostering solidarity and reducing resistance to equitable reforms. In Kenya for example the cattle rustling in the Turkana region and many opportunities to surrender arms have failed due to the misunderstanding amongst the people. That while some leaders would push for returning illegal arms, other tribes would note this and take that as an opportunity to attack which only increased the distrust. With the local knowledge, leaders take a different approach to address the cultural violence in order to help uphold peace and bring about lasting development.

The structural, relational, and cultural dimensions collectively argue that peacebuilding and development are mutually constitutive. Structural development dismantles systemic violence but requires relational trust to ensure inclusivity. Relational repair relies on cultural narratives of shared identity and structural investments to materialize cooperation. Cultural healing, in turn, depends on structural justice and relational dialogue. Neither peacebuilding nor development can thrive in isolation. Structural inequalities lead to relational fractures and cultural divides, conversely, without addressing relational and cultural wounds, structural reforms remain hollow and just a beautiful story. A holistic approach, integrating these dimensions, offers a pathway to sustainable peace where development eradicates structural violence, and peacebuilding nurtures the relational and cultural fabric necessary for collective thriving of communities.

7. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Peacebuilding and development theories have evolved in tandem yet remain fragmented. Galtung (1969), concept of "positive peace" helps us appreciate the need for social justice but often ignores the divides brought about by colonial legacies. Equitable economic policies are prerequisites for stability but we need to be cautious of systems that weaponize ethnicity to fragment dissent. Gendered dimensions of conflict and development that tend to advocate for women's exclusion from peace talks perpetuates economic marginalization. This creates a "conflict trap" that is due to the "resource curse" where communities are engaged in a never ending conflict while resources are being snatched which is the case of most oil rich countries in Africa and without addressing the systemic inequities, neither peace nor development can take root. Often situations priority is given to state-centric approaches, neglecting subnational actors, for example, Liberia's post-civil war reforms focused on disarmament but failed to integrate rural agrarian communities into economic planning, leading to recurrent tensions (Liu & Liu, 2024; Mross, 2024). This gap underscores the need for analysis at the multi-scalar level but being able to link the macro policies to the micro-level realities.

8. REALIST THEORY OF PEACEBUILDING

The realist theory of peacebuilding has its footing in power politics and state-centric pragmatism, as it holds that peace is a product of balance of power among sovereign states, often prioritizing stability over justice (Masataka, 2012; Ripsman, 2020). In Africa, realist theory thrives in peacekeeping interventions mostly headed by international actors, such as the African Union's (AU) military deployments in Somalia which aim to deal with violence but frequently neglect systemic inequities. A case is the Kenyan police being deployed to Haiti for a pea e keeping mission yet they had no idea of the lay of the land, cultures in the place or even better still the language which places the police at a disadvantage where. In Africa, the borders created is what cuff us from seeing beyond our possibilities and this is where the elite hold fort ensuring force is used to ensure stability. While such approaches tend to lead to negative peace they far more increase external dependency leading to prioritizing and protecting strategic interests over development. development.

9. IDEALIST THEORY OF PEACEBUILDING

The Idealist Theory of peacebuilding, inspired by Kantian cosmopolitanism (Brown, 2005; Kleingeld, 2011; Milstein, 2013), advocates for a rules-based international order mediated by institutions like the United Nations (UN) or regional bodies (e.g., ECOWAS). The UN's Agenda 2030 and the Africa Union's Silencing the Guns program create idealist norms, as they put emphasis on democratization, human rights, and economic interdependence. Idealism ignores cultural specificity as is seen not to work in countries like South Sudan where the cultural disconnect (Tsuwa, 2025), increases the tension between universal norms and localized realities.

10. STRUCTURALIST THEORY OF PEACEBUILDING

Structuralist Theory of peacebuilding centers on breaking down the systemic inequalities. This approach is best set to help Africa rise by addressing colonial legacies through redistributive justice. For instance, in Zimbabwe and South Africa's issues on land can be addressed to see that wealth redistribution reflect structuralist imperatives. However, structural peacebuilding risks stagnation without relational reconciliation, as seen in Zimbabwe's violent land seizures, which increased ethnic tensions (Matamanda et al., 2025; Sottilotta et al., 2025).

11. STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENT AS THE ROOT CAUSE OF CONFLICT

Structural violence that is commonly manifested in poverty, land dispossession, and ethnic marginalization creates fertile ground for conflict, rendering development impossible without addressing its root causes. In most oil rich countries we see communities within the extraction areas struggle with poverty and a case to observe is Nigeria's Niger Delta where through decades of oil extraction by multinationals a few have benefitted immensely while leaving local communities impoverished and environmentally devastated (Eduvwie et al., 2025; Imiti & Anyanwu, 2025). This "resource curse" fuels rise of illegal troops that seek to protect the interests of the few elites. Similarly, Kenya's post-election violence in 2007/08 was rooted in historical land injustices and economic exclusion of marginalized groups which we have seen a new narrative that arose in the 2022 elections forming the hustler and dynasties narratives all geared towards the push back of anti-China populism in Africa (Hess & and Aidoo, 2024; Mesok & Schildknecht, 2025). These cases illustrate the realties on how development initiatives that tend to ignore structural violence further lead to cycles of conflict.

12. ELITE CAPTURE IN PEACEBUILDING - THE PARADOX OF MANUFACTURED STABILITY

Peacebuilding in Africa is often co-opted by regimes to consolidate power, sidelining developmental priorities. South Sudan's 2011 independence, hailed as a peacebuilding triumph, quickly devolved into civil war as elites diverted oil revenues into personal coffers (Záhořík & Ylönen, 2025). Similarly, Kenya's handshake agreement between the late Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga saw peace agreements that prioritized elite power-sharing over poverty alleviation, leaving majority of Kenyans issue not addressed and a majority still struggling in extreme poverty. Such elite-driven "peace" perpetuates underdevelopment, revealing the futility of decoupling governance reform from economic justice.

In order to address the conflict, there is a need to adopt approaches that aid peace and catalyze development. The key approaches include conflict resolution approach, complementary approach and conflict transformational approach. The conflict resolution approach puts emphasis on dialogue and mediation. This approach has been instrumental in shaping African peace processes through indigenous mechanisms that are culturally rooted in practices that prioritize relational healing. Despite the effectiveness they often struggle to address structural drivers, such as economic marginalization or elite corruption. In contrast, the complementary approach advocates hybrid frameworks that merge top-down and bottom-up approaches. The conflict transformation approach, advocated by John Paul Lederach, redefines peacebuilding as generational societal change (Lederach, 1995). In order for this to work justice (structural), storytelling (cultural), and reparations (relational) aspects need to be put into thought especially in the African setting. Transformational peacebuilding demands integrating traditional justice e.g., Rwanda's Gacaca courts and currently Kenya incorporating traditional mediation methods with structural reforms e.g., Kenya's devolved governance, ensuring that cultural narratives of unity translate into inclusive development. Only through such synthesis can Africa's peacebuilding transcend the legacies of colonialism, resource curses, and fragmented identities

13. CASE STUDY - KENYA

Kenya, is often celebrated as an East African economic powerhouse based on the fair application of approaches that integrate peacebuilding and development, revealing both progress and persistent structural challenges that are rooted in colonial legacies, elite manipulation, and ethnic politicization. Post-independence, Kenya's development has been marked by unresolved land injustices dating to colonial-era dispossessions, which allocated fertile territories to settler communities while marginalizing Indigenous groups (Okembo et al., 2024; Samoei et al., 2025). A large percentage of arable land remains concentrated among few communities (Samoei et al., 2025) which is a key cause of the never ending violence, particularly during electoral cycles. The 2007/08 post-election violence that saw majority of people displaced, was not merely a political contest but a manifestation of deep-

seated grievances over land access and economic exclusion (Albertus & Klaus, 2024; Ndiema et al., 2024). These historical activities of injustices show how underdevelopment specifically, resource deprivation serves as a catalyst for conflict, validating the point that peacebuilding cannot thrive without redistributive justice that is hinged on development.

Kenya's peacebuilding initiatives often prioritize stability over systemic reform, enabling elites to co-opt processes for political gain. The elites tend to weaponize ethnic identities to fragment collective action, as seen in the recent fallout between president Ruto and Gacagua where narratives of the people of the mountain have reignited tensions and sharp views from various people. Reflecting back on the mega-infrastructure projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), funded through debt-driven partnerships with China, seemed to prioritize urban-centric growth and ignoring the real plight of Kenyans where they share the SGR trains are already depreciating and the payments have not been completed.

The 2010 Constitution introduced devolution, a landmark reform aimed at decentralizing power and resources to 47 counties. In Turkana County, where oil was discovered promised transformative development, yet local communities remained in impoverished situations due to opaque revenue-sharing agreements between national elites and multinationals like Tullow Oil. While the key focus was on locals being employed and working in the mines, there was little conversation on building of infrastructure like schools, hospitals and other amenities that would boost the economic situation of the Turkana area which reveals Kenya's potential to integrate peace and development but also expose the limitations of top-down models that only hinge on the intertest of the elite.

14. CONCLUSION

The African experience confirms that peacebuilding and development are inseparable. Africa's progress, though imperfect, demonstrates the potential of integrated approaches. Sustainable transformation requires dismantling neo-colonial economic structures, centering grassroots agency, and holding elites accountable. A hybrid approach of balancing state and grassroots agency offers lessons for pluralistic societies. Looking into Kenya's failed 2021 Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), this reveal the risks of forcing politics into genuine development and it is integral to understand the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal (PESTEL) landscape. Targeted development initiatives can contribute to peacebuilding success where we see improvement in road networks, access to educational facilities, add value to communities that are marred with conflict. It is important to take an all-inclusive peacebuilding approach that is centered on reconciliation programs and institutional reforms in order to influence the sustainability of development outcomes in the communities. It is on this premise that we conclude there can be no peacebuilding without development and there can be no development without peacebuilding.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Mr. James Otundo is a Development Studies PhD candidate at Daystar University, specializing in Leadership and Governance. His professional passion lies at the intersection of leadership development, effective governance, and social entrepreneurship as drivers for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He is a John Maxwell Certified Leadership Team member, a Certified Secretary (CS) with the Institute of Certified Secretaries (ICS), and a certified Governance Auditor with the same Institute.