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Competitive Advantage among Medium-Sized Enterprises in Juba, South Sudan: Why Research on Organizational Structure Needs New Direction

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Abstract

The role played by small and medium enterprises in the growth and development of economies is critical. Understanding how firms improve their performance to achieve competitiveness should, therefore, concern countries keen on economic growth. However, small and medium enterprises face growth challenges because they operate simultaneously in the global and local markets, making innovation imperative. This study investigated the effect of cost reduction capabilities and organisational structure capabilities on the competitive advantage among Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSEs) in Juba, South Sudan. The study was guided by the resource-based theory and dynamic capability theory. The target population constituted 491 MSEs operating in Juba, South Sudan. Yamane formula was used to calculate the sample size of 246 MSEs, which was selected using stratified and random sampling techniques. Questionnaires were used for data collection, and the data was analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. The results indicated a positive and statistical significance between organisational structure ($\beta = 0.582$, $t = 9.569$, $p < 0.05$) and the competitive advantage among MSEs in Juba, South Sudan. The study concluded that a formal organisational structure significantly affected the competitive advantage of MSEs. The study recommended that management should strengthen their organisational structure to facilitate the development and enhancement of leadership capabilities.

Keywords*:* Competitive Advantage, Organisational Structure Capabilities, Medium-Sized Enterprises, Organizational Capabilities, Juba, South Sudan

Introduction

Organisational capability is defined as a range of tactics and action plans to out-maneuver market rivals (Bature et al., 2018). According to the South Sudan National Bureau of Statistics (SSD-NBS), MSEs in the country are defined as having six to nine employees, comprising 6% of enterprises operating in the country (SSD-NBS, 2020). The vital organisational capabilities influencing the medium-sized enterprises (MSEs') competitive advantage are competence-based recruitment, ideas, products, processes and procedures (Wongsansukcharoen & Thaweepaiboonwong, 2023). Trieu et al. (2023) also observed that the other vital elements contributing to a conducive environment for the MSEs to perform and achieve competitive advantage include regulatory flexibility, financial support and private-public partnerships projects. Moreover, these elements influence innovation in products and services, change management and long-term growth for the MSEs enabling them to thrive in the global market.

According to Bianchi and Stoian (2022), the key organisational capabilities that enable SMEs to drive inbound internationalisation (attracting international firms to the local market) in Latin American markets are marketing, innovation, networking, technology and managerial capabilities. Bianchi and Stoian (2022). Hongyi (2022) argued that organisational capability was crucial to Canadian firms' competitiveness, while Barakat et al. (2022) considers it crucial to creating value for stakeholders among the publicly traded firms in Brazil. Otache (2024) concurred by stating that the critical organisational capabilities of innovation and strategic capability were crucial for the competitive advantage of MSEs in Nigeria. Okangi (2024) emphasised that the key capabilities that positively affected the export abilities of MSEs in Tanzania were product quality innovation. According to Mady et al. (2021), MSEs in Egypt configured resources and organisational capabilities to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the manufacturing sector. These capabilities included technical and organisational learning, knowledge management, and strategic environmental capabilities like eco-innovation and green absorptive capacity. Additionally, Anugwu et al. (2021) state that skilled human resources are the key organisational capability that positively affects small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The researchers found that the performance of 52% of the SMEs in Anambra State in Nigeria were negatively affected by the lack of this capability.

Hock-Doepgen et al. (2021) argue that innovation is driven by knowledge management and ICT, which could enable SMEs to enter new markets and increase their competitive advantage. The socio-economic development aspirations of the South Sudan Vision 2040 (Joint Donor Team, 2011), which promotes the social and economic development of South Sudan, are difficult to attain without the deployment of critical strategic management thinking geared towards attaining sustained competitive advantage. South Sudan's legal and institutional framework is undeveloped and has no clear articulation of policies in dialogue with the private sector (World Bank, 2009). According to Twijnstra and Hilhorst (2017), South Sudan is in a post-conflict state and is viewed as fragile and unpredictable when conducting business. The challenges of political stability to the South Sudan economy were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, making MSMEs struggle to survive globally (Rwigema, 2020).

From the foregoing, the following hypotheses guided the study.

$H0_1$: Organisational structure has no significant effect on the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan.

Literature Review

This section discusses the theories, conceptual framework and provides a critical review of literature, providing a foundation for this study.

Resourced-Based Theory

The resource-based view (RBV) began with the writings of Penrose in 1959, who argued that an organisation is a bundle of resources (Kessler, 2013). Resources may seem to be the same for every firm in the industry, but how they are bundled creates a competitive advantage (Wernerfelt, 1984). Empirical research in the last 30 years (since 1991) has indicated that the differential performance of firms cannot be explained, in many instances, through economic theories but through RBT (Barney, 2001). Singh, Dey, and Sahay (2020) observed that, from RBT's

perspective, resources can constantly be redeployed to meet changing market conditions. However, Kiyabo and Isaga (2019) recognised that RBT has some weaknesses that do not address how strategies are deployed, the processes of creating and acquiring strategic assets, why some enterprises perform in an unpredictable environment, and why others fail. Moreover, the Resource-based theory defines resources widely and ignores external environmental factors (Diin et al., 2018). The anchoring point of the RBT view is that firms can develop distinct resources and capabilities, which could always be redeployed to meet changing market conditions. Andersén (2021) demonstrated that RBT has been applied to research related to product innovation and distinct resources capabilities. In this study, RBT explains the variables of innovative capabilities. These capabilities are product, process, marketing, and organisational innovation.

Dynamic Capability Theory

Dynamic capability theory (DCT) is founded on the ability to amalgamate internal organisational capabilities and external competencies to take opportunities in a changing environment and to avoid risk (Teece et al., 1997). Teece (2007) explains that dynamic capability is the ability of an organisation to integrate all its systems, processes, and procedures. Moreover, it enables an organisation to respond to the external environment; DCT has a set of capabilities that provide an organisation with the freedom of action in response or reaction to the external environment. Kitenga et al. (2020) concur and outline that dynamic capability is the ability to react quickly to the changing market environment. In this study, DCT explains the organisational structure and quality-enhancing capability variables. MSEs' dynamic nature refers to their capacity for swift environmental adaptation.

Empirical Review

Organisational Structural and Competitive Advantage

The ability of a firm to innovate and achieve a competitive advantage in Yemen depends on how it is structured (AlQershi, 2019). A study conducted among commercial banks in Erbil, Iraq, demonstrated that the combined elements of information analysis, leadership, and customer attention are parts of total quality management (TQM) that lead to a competitive advantage (Othman et al., 2020).

Tadesse (2021) demonstrated that firm structure, in terms of size, ownership, and governance, when coupled with firm strategy, strategic resource deployment, innovation, and networking, was pivotal in Ethiopian firms achieving competitive advantage. Zakariyah et al. (2020) affirmed that team capability, leadership capability, strategy and firm structure were crucial to the performance of multi-cultural teams in the construction sector in Lagos, Nigeria. They claimed that good leadership involves managing organisational resources dynamically, changing the organisational structure to meet a project's needs and instituting a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. Nyokabi et al. (2019) found a positive and significant relationship between the firm structure, cost leadership, and performance of three-star hotels in Kenya. Organisational structures range mechanistically from low to high, as espoused by Burns and Stalker in 1961 (Mallén et al., 2016). A firm's ability to adapt, survive, continuously innovate, and remain competitive depends on its structure in a rapidly changing environment (Mulaa et al., 2021). According to their study, the elements that comprise a firm's structure are standardisation,

centralisation, and formalisation, which are sentiments that are in agreement with Nyokabi et al. (2019).

Organisations must adapt to the rapidly changing world to survive. Basile et al. (2018) conclude that organisations cannot afford rigid structures to survive in the marketplace. Entrepreneurial companies have flat organic structures and many informal structures that enable employees' rapid exploitation of opportunities (Sakhdari & Burgers, 2018). Therefore, entrepreneurial-oriented organisations tend to perform better with organic organisational structures.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive, specifically cross-sectional, research design that enabled the application of statistical data analysis techniques. This study's independent variables are cost-reduction capabilities and organisational structure capabilities. A sampling frame of the 491 MSEs registered in Juba was taken from the Integrated Business Establishment Survey (IBES) of 2019 from the SSD-NBS (SSD-NBS, 2020). However, stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select the required sample of 246 respondents, which was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula. Data was collected using a questionnaire tested for content, construct, and ecological validity (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, all the variables were tested for reliability and met Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.7, which was dimmed acceptable for data collection tools. Luo and Keefer (2021) affirmed that questionnaires enable efficient, inexpensive, and quick data collection from respondents.

Data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of regression analysis (Saunders et al., 2019) conducted at a 95% confidence interval using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. A p-value of $\leqslant 0.05$ was therefore used to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between study variables.

Results and Discussion

Response Rate

Out of the 246 questionnaires administered among MSEs in Juba, South Sudan, 244 were received back for analysis. A response rate of 99.2 percent is considered sufficient, following Khrisat and Alqadi's (2022) recommendations that a 60% response rate is acceptable, and a rate greater than 70% is considered good.

Table 1. Response Rate

Response category	Sample Size	Responses
Respondents	244	99.2
Non-respondents	2	0.8
Total	**246**	**100.0**

Age of the Business and Number of Employees

The study identified the business's age in years and the number of employees in the business as it facilitated information on the structure of the organisation. Figure 1 shows that 40.6% of the MSEs in Juba had been in operation for 4 to 7 years, while 3.7% had existed for over 15 years.

All the surveyed businesses had 6 to 9 employees. These findings imply that most of the MSEs surveyed had been in operation for less than 10 years, which implies a short life of MSEs.

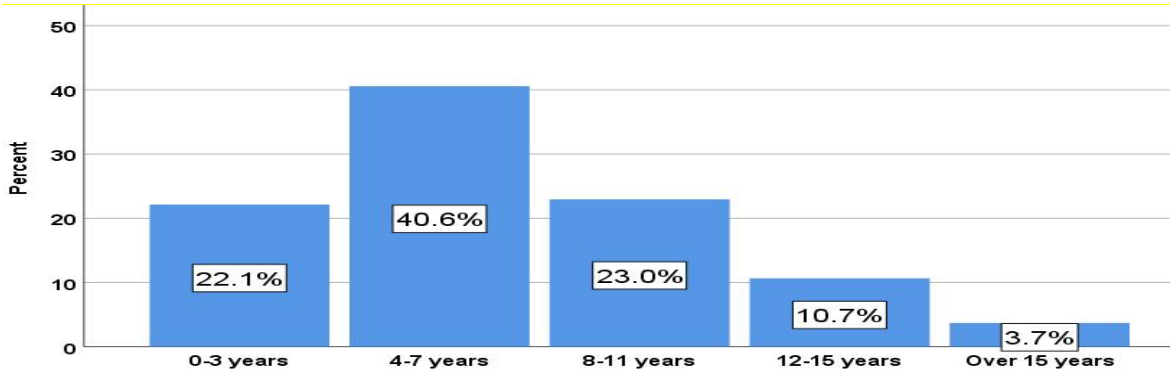

Figure 1. Age of the Business

Sector of the Business

The study inquired about the respondents' MSE sectors. The results in Table 2 depict that 41% of the respondents indicated that their MSEs operated in Services and General Trading, while 4.5% of the MSEs operated in mining and quarrying. It is important to note that all the sectors of the economy were represented in the survey.

Table 2. Sector of the Business

Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Services and General Trading	100	41.0
Manufacturing	19	7.8
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	13	5.3
Mining and Quarrying	11	4.5
Transport and Storage	18	7.4
Construction Activities	18	7.4
Information and Communication	20	8.2
Other	45	18.4
Total	**244**	**100.0**

Estimated Annual Sales of the Business

The estimated annual sales of the MSEs were sought in the study. The findings presented in Table 3 revealed that 29.2% of the MSEs had estimated annual sales of between 10 and 19 million SSP, whereas 8.6% of the MSEs had estimated annual sales of between 30 and 39 million SSP. These findings imply that most MSEs in Juba had revenues below 30 million SSP.

Table 3. Estimated Annual Sales of the Business

Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 10 million SSP	52	21.4
Between 10 – 19 million SSP	71	29.2
Between 20 – 29 million SSP	70	28.8
Between 30 – 39 million SSP	21	8.6
More than 39 million SSP	29	11.9
Total	**243**	**100.0**

Estimated Total Asset Cost of the Business

The findings in Table 4 indicated that 40.6% of the MSEs had an estimated total asset value of less than 20 million SSP, whereas 12.3% of the MSEs had an estimated asset value of more than 49 million SSP. The findings imply that the majority of MSEs in Juba had assets worth below 30 million SSP.

Table 4. Estimated Total Asset Cost of the Business

Sector	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 20 million SSP	99	40.6
Between 20 – 29 million SSP	44	18.0
Between 30 – 39 million SSP	32	13.1
Between 40 – 49 million SSP	39	16.0
More than 49 million SSP	30	12.3
Total	**244**	**100.0**

Competitive Advantage of MSEs in South Sudan

To assess the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, study participants were provided with a set of statements relating to annual net income, annual sales turnover, and annual return on investment. They were required to indicate the level of concurrence with statements regarding their MSEs on a five-point scale (1-5), indicating their level of agreement. The mean values that ranged from 1.00 to 1.80 were interpreted as strongly disagreeing, 1.81 to 2.60 as disagreeing, 2.61 to 3.40 as neither agree nor disagree, 3.41 to 4.20 as agreeing, and 4.21 to 5.00 as strongly agreeing. Table 5 shows the outcomes.

Table 5. Descriptive Analysis of Competitive Advantage

Statements on Competitive Advantage	Mean	SD
Over the last twelve months, the company has increased its internal rate of return (IRR)	3.84	.756
Over the last twelve months, the company has increased its net present value (NPV)	3.90	.710
Over the last twelve months, the company has paid out dividends	3.92	.720
The company has witnessed sales growth over the last twelve months	3.82	.901
The company has witnessed increased inventory purchases over the last twelve months	3.70	.868
The company has a higher sales turnover ratio over the last twelve months	3.71	.856
The company has witnessed increased revenue over the last twelve months	3.95	.823
The company over the last twelve months has paid off debts	4.07	.759
The company, over the last twelve months, has put aside cash for the future (saved money)	4.10	.800

Table 5 shows that participants agreed with all the statements on competitive advantage, as evidenced by means ranging between 3.70 and 4.10. The results indicate that the participants agreed that their MSEs over the last twelve months had put aside cash for the future (saved money) (M = 4.10, SD = 0.800) and also agreed that the MSEs over the last twelve months had paid off debts (M = 4.07, SD = 0.759). Besides, respondents agreed that the companies had witnessed increased revenue over the last twelve months (M = 3.95, SD = 0.823) and agreed that the companies had paid out dividends (M = 3.92, SD = 0.720). Further, respondents agreed that over the last twelve months, the companies had increased their net present value (NPV) (M = 3.90, SD = 0.710) and also agreed that over the last twelve months, the companies had increased their internal rate of return (IRR) (M = 3.84, SD = 0.756). Other results presented in Table 5 show that respondents agreed with the provided statements. These descriptive findings show that according to the study participants, the MSEs had the competitive advantage on the three fronts of annual net income, annual sales turnover and annual return on investment.

Organisational Structure and Competitive Advantage

Low organicity, moderate organicity and high organicity were used to measure organisational structure, while competitive advantage was measured through yearly net income, annual sales turnover, and annual return on investment.

Descriptive Statistics for Organisational Structure

A set of statements were provided to study participants to assess the organisational structure from which they were required to express their opinion on a five-point scale level of agreement. The mean values ranging from 1.00 to 1.80 were interpreted as strongly disagreeing, 1.81 to 2.60 as disagreeing, 2.61 to 3.40 as neither agreeing nor disagreeing, 3.4.1 to 3.20 as in agreement, and 5.21 to 5.50 as strongly agreeing As illustrated in Table 9.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Organisational Structure

Statements on Organisational Structure	M	SD
There is no formal organisational structure	2.98	1.257
Major operating and strategic decisions are based on research and quantitative analysis	3.79	.776
A strong emphasis on getting things done, even if this means disregarding formal procedures	3.17	1.036
The company uses a formal organisational structure	3.28	1.308
Major operating and strategic decisions are based on industry experience	4.02	.861
Major operating and strategic decisions are based on intuition	3.80	.826
The company follows laid-down instructions and guidelines	4.15	.810
The company's decision-making is centralised	3.88	.810
Highly structured channels of communication and highly restricted access to important financial and operating information	3.90	.862
A strong emphasis on always getting personnel to follow the formally laid down procedures	3.46	1.180
Tight formal control of most operations through sophisticated control and information systems	3.25	1.219
A strong emphasis on getting line and staff personnel to adhere closely to formal job descriptions	3.39	1.279

Table 9 shows that the study participants agreed with most statements with means of 3.46 to 4.15 but indicated neutrality to statements of 2.98 to 3.39. The research findings demonstrate that the participants agreed that the companies follow laid-down instructions and guidelines (M = 4.15, SD = 0.810) and also agreed that major operating and strategic decisions are based on industry experience (M = 4.02, SD = 0.861). Besides, respondents agreed that the MSEs had highly structured communication channels and restricted access to important financial and operating information (M = 3.90, SD = 0.862) and agreed that the companies' decision-making is centralised (M = 3.88, SD = 0.810). These findings show that the firms had a high organisational structure in guidelines and instructions, strategic decisions, communication and access to operational and financial information.

Descriptive findings, however, indicated that the study participants were neutral to the statements that the MSEs have a strong emphasis on getting line and staff personnel to adhere closely to formal job descriptions (M = 3.39, SD = 1.279) and that the companies use a formal organisation structure (M = 3.28, SD = 1.308). Moreover, respondents were neutral that the MSEs have tight formal control of most operations through sophisticated control and information systems (M = 3.25, SD = 1.219) and that the MSEs have a strong focus on getting things done, even if this means disregarding formal procedures (M = 3.17, SD = 1.036). However, some of the MSEs had formal job descriptions, formal organisational structures and formal procedures, and others did not have such and mostly adopted moderate organisational structures in such aspects.

Inferential Statistics for Organisational Structure and Competitive Advantage

Correlation Analysis

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis in Table 10 show the relationship between organisational structure and competitive advantage. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between organisational structure and the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba ($r = 0.525$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 7. Correlation between Organisational Structure and Competitive Advantage

		Competitive Advantage
Organisational Structure	Pearson Correlation	.525**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	244

**. At the 2-tailed 0.01 significance level, there is a correlation.

Linear Regression Analysis

For predictive modelling, the normal equation is used. In this study, it was used to investigate the influence of organisational structure on the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan. Before performing the linear regression analysis, the major assumptions of linear regression were evaluated to assess the suitability of the linear regression model.

$H0_1$: Organisational structure has no significant influence on the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan.

The linear regression model summary in Table 11a includes the correlation coefficient (R) and the R-squared relating to the organisational structure's relationship and explanatory power on the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan.

Table 8a. Model Summary for the Organizational Structure on Competitive Advantage

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.525[a]	.275	.272	.47535

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Structure

The findings in Table 4.11a indicated a significant and positive relationship between organisational structure and the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba ($r = 0.525$). The research results also suggested that the organisational structure of MSEs in Juba accounts for 27.5% of the variance in their competitive advantage (r-squared = 0.275). These findings proved that the residual term and other factors not included in the model may account for 72.5% of the variance in the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba. To assess the model's significance, the researcher performed an ANOVA test. The results are presented in Table 11b.

Table 8b. ANOVA for Organizational Structure and Competitive Advantage

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.691	1	20.691	91.962	.000[b]
	Residual	54.457	242	.225		
	Total	75.148	243			

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Structure

The research results in Table 11b demonstrated that the f-value for the model was statistically significant, thereby indicating the significance of the model ($F = 91.962$, $p < 0.05$). The results indicated that the regression model fits the data well. The results further portray that their organisational structure significantly influenced the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba.

The study generated regression coefficients to ascertain how organisational structure influenced the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba. The coefficients were used to evaluate the magnitude and direction of the influence. The research findings are presented in Table 11c, which contains regression coefficients and t-tests.

Table 8c: Regression Coefficients for Organizational Structure on Competitive Advantage

		Unstandardised Coefficients		**Standardised Coefficients**		
Model		**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1	(Constant)	1.609	.240		6.691	.000
	Organisational Structure	.582	.061	.525	9.569	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive advantage

Table 11c indicates the consequence of the study outcome.

$$\text{Competitive advantage} = 1.609 + 0.582\,(\text{Organisational Structure}) + \varepsilon$$

The findings presented in Table 4.11c indicated that organisational structure positively and significantly influence the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan ($\beta = 0.582$, $t = 9.569$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that organisational structure has no significant influence on the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan, was rejected. The findings indicated that a unit change in the organisational structure of MSEs in Juba from low organicity towards high organicity would yield a corresponding shift of 0.582 in competitive advantage. The findings suggested that changing the organisational structure of MSEs in Juba will likely result in a corresponding shift in their competitive advantage.

The study determined that organisational structure significantly affects the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan ($r = 0.525$, $p < 0.05$). These findings concurred with AlQershi (2019), who stated that the ability of a firm to innovate and achieve a competitive advantage in Yemen depends on how it is structured. Similar findings were noted by Zakariyah et al. (2020), who affirmed that organisational structure can enhance team capability, leadership

capability, and strategy, which are crucial to the performance of multi-cultural teams in the construction sector in Lagos, Nigeria. The ability of MSEs to adapt their organisational structure in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUGA) environment will determine their ability to grow and withstand global market shocks (Kaya, 2022). Kaya (2022) further elaborated that an enterprise's agility and flexibility in technological adoption and innovation are key to acquiring and sustaining competitive advantage. This implies that clear organisational structures enabling decisions to be made rapidly are desirable for firms that want to achieve competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The study findings indicated that organisational structure statistically affects the competitive advantage of MSEs in Juba, South Sudan. It is thus concluded that having a formal organisational structure and grounding major operating and strategic decisions on research and quantitative analysis can enable an MSE to gain a competitive advantage. The study also points out that having highly structured communication channels and formally laid down procedures and controls based on information systems can enable MSEs in Juba to gain a competitive advantage.

Recommendations

This study recommends that management in MSEs in Juba improve their structures from a low organisational structure to a medium to high organisational structure. The management should understand that the efficacy of an organisation's structure is contingent upon how its members perceive their objectives concerning the objectives of the MSE. Therefore, management should have an organisational structure that facilitates the development and enhancement of leadership capabilities within the MSE, provides ownership where there is widespread acceptance and commitment from all levels and throughout the whole structure, and ensures that the organisational structure is a dynamic design characterised by flexible limits that foster growth and facilitate achievement.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study focused on descriptive research design, specifically cross-sectional design, which is a snapshot at a time. Thus, future research should consider adopting a longitudinal study design, allowing for a comparison of results with those obtained in the present study. A future study should include other organisational capabilities variables not included in the study, such as seizing, reconfiguring, agility, and sensing capabilities. Finally, the study focused on MSE in Juba, South Sudan, which limits the generalizability of the study findings; hence, future research should include other towns like Wau, Yambio, Yei, Rumbek, Renk, Nimule, Kuajok, Bor, Bentiu, and Aweil, among others.

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