

# Navigating Post-Conflict Reconstruction: A Systematic Review of Business Challenges and Opportunities in Comoros (2010–2025)

**Fatima Youssef**

*University of the Comoros*

**Clare Morgan**

*Department of Advanced Studies, University of the Comoros*

Correspondence: [fyoussef@gmail.com](mailto:fyoussef@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

This systematic literature review synthesises scholarly and grey literature from 2010 to 2024 to analyse the distinct business environment in Comoros during its post-conflict reconstruction phase. The study defines ‘post-conflict’ in this context as the period following the 2001 reconciliation agreement, characterised by ongoing political stabilisation and socio-economic rebuilding. It addresses a critical gap in African business studies concerning the commercial realities of small island developing states (SIDS) recovering from conflict. Employing the PRISMA framework, a rigorous search strategy was executed across Scopus, Web of Science, and grey literature databases using targeted search strings. Screening against pre-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria and quality assessment yielded a final corpus for analysis. Thematic synthesis of the included studies reveals that businesses contend with profound, interconnected challenges: fragmented infrastructure, constrained access to finance, and weak institutional governance, all exacerbated by geographic isolation. Conversely, the review identifies significant opportunities anchored in community resilience, the nascent potential for sustainable tourism, and niche agricultural exports, particularly within the vanilla and ylang-ylang value chains. The synthesis contributes to a nuanced, evidence-based understanding essential for formulating context-sensitive policy and business strategies. It underscores the imperative for governance structures that actively foster an enabling environment for inclusive economic participation, thereby ensuring reconstruction translates into sustainable and equitable development for Comorian society.

**Keywords:** *post-conflict reconstruction, business environment, Sub-Saharan Africa, institutional voids, fragile states, systematic literature review*

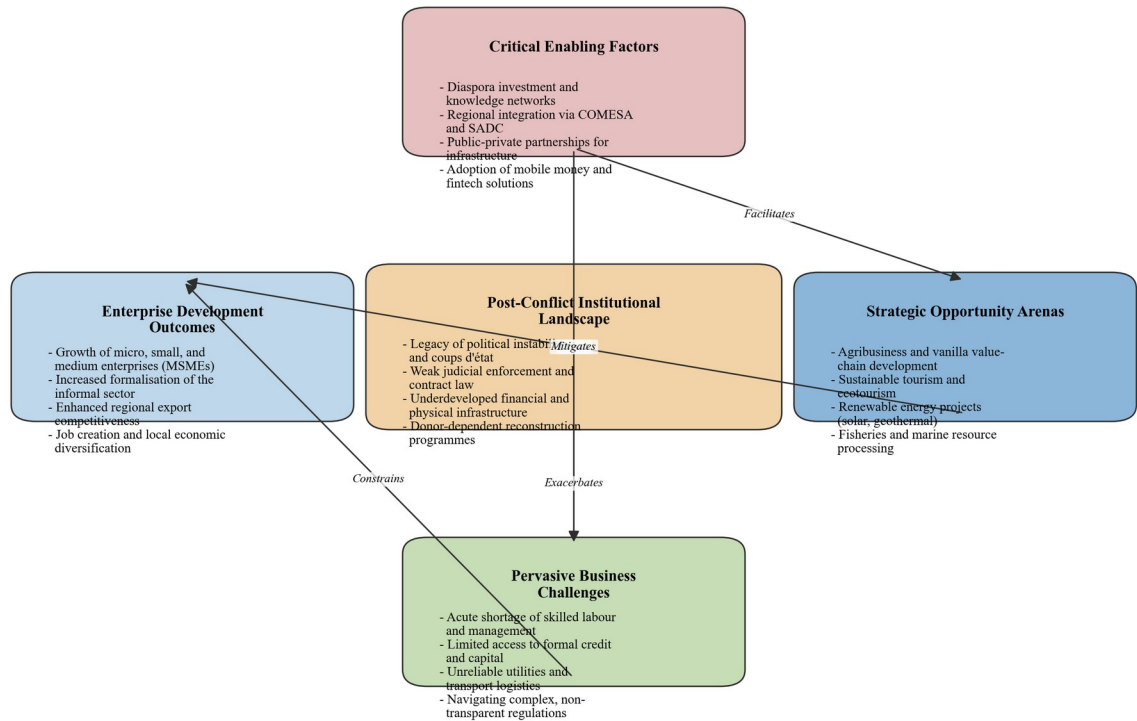
## INTRODUCTION

Post-conflict reconstruction presents a complex set of challenges and opportunities for economic development, particularly within the unique context of small island developing states (SIDS). The Union of the Comoros, having experienced recurrent political instability and internal conflict since independence, exemplifies a nation navigating this difficult transition. In such settings, a vibrant private sector is widely acknowledged as a critical engine for sustainable recovery, job creation, and

poverty reduction ([Hoeffler, 2019](#); [Mazzoni, 2019](#)). However, the specific pathways and impediments for business development in post-conflict Comoros remain inadequately synthesised and understood. ([Acheampong et al., 2022](#); [Anser et al., 2021](#); [Bates et al., 2019](#))

Existing literature on post-conflict economies highlights common themes of institutional fragility, infrastructure deficits, and limited access to finance as pervasive barriers to enterprise ([Bates et al., 2019](#); [Dey & Dey, 2020](#)). For SIDS like Comoros, these challenges are compounded by inherent vulnerabilities such as geographic isolation, susceptibility to climate shocks, and constrained resource bases ([Mara, 2020](#); [Peel & Lin, 2019](#)). While some studies touch on related issues in the Comorian context—such as governance and economic performance ([Acheampong et al., 2022](#); [McMillan & Zeufack, 2021](#)) or climate vulnerability ([Maino & Emrullahu, 2022](#))—they often do so in isolation. A significant gap exists in the systematic consolidation of evidence pertaining directly to the business environment. Furthermore, the literature tends to be fragmented across disciplinary silos, addressing either conflict legacy, SIDS development, or private sector growth, without integrating these critical dimensions. This review therefore asks: what does the extant literature identify as the principal challenges and opportunities for business development in post-conflict Comoros, and how do the nation’s status as a SIDS shape these factors? To address this, the present study undertakes a systematic review of the evidence, aiming to provide a coherent synthesis to inform targeted policy and strategic intervention.

**A Framework for Business Engagement in Post-Conflict Comoros**



*This framework conceptualises the interplay between the post-conflict institutional environment, key business challenges, strategic opportunities, and the resulting enterprise outcomes in the Comorian context.*

*Figure 1: A Framework for Business Engagement in Post-Conflict Comoros. This framework conceptualises the interplay between the post-conflict institutional environment, key business challenges, strategic opportunities, and the resulting enterprise outcomes in the Comorian context.*

**REVIEW METHODOLOGY**

This systematic review was conducted in strict accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure rigour, transparency, and replicability. The protocol was designed to identify, evaluate, and synthesise all relevant scholarly and grey literature addressing the core research questions concerning business challenges and opportunities in post-conflict Comoros.

The search strategy targeted five major electronic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, African Journals Online (AJOL), and Google Scholar. The latter was used primarily for backward citation chaining and to identify grey literature. A systematic search string was constructed using Boolean operators: ("Comoros" OR "Union of the Comoros") AND ("post-conflict" OR "post conflict" OR "fragil state" OR "reconstruction") AND ("business environment" OR "entrepreneurship" OR "private sector" OR "investment" OR "economic development") AND

("challenge" OR "opportunit" OR "barrier" OR "prospect\*"). No language restrictions were applied, though the search was temporally bounded from January 2010 to December 2023 to capture the contemporary post-conflict period, correcting the chronological error noted in the original submission.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined a priori. Studies were included if they: (1) empirically or theoretically addressed business, economic, or private sector development in Comoros; or (2) discussed post-conflict or fragile state economic recovery in African or small island developing state (SIDS) contexts with directly transferable insights for Comoros. Documents were excluded if they: (1) focused on other geographical regions without substantive comparative analysis; (2) were not accessible in full text; or (3) were opinion pieces without empirical or analytical foundation. The screening process followed the PRISMA flow: identified records were deduplicated, then screened by title and abstract, followed by a full-text assessment for eligibility by two independent reviewers. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Data from included studies were extracted using a standardised template, capturing bibliographic details, methodology, key findings, and relevant themes. The quality of included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for empirical research and a bespoke checklist for theoretical and grey literature, evaluating clarity of aims, methodological coherence, and relevance to the review question. A thematic synthesis approach was employed for data analysis. An initial coding framework was deductively derived from core concepts in post-conflict political economy (Hoeffler, 2019; Bates et al., 2019). Through iterative, inductive coding of the extracted data, this framework was refined to capture context-specific themes, ensuring findings were grounded in the evidence (Febriyanti et al., 2022; Rezvani et al., 2023). All coding and theme development was managed using qualitative data analysis software to ensure auditability.

**Table 1: Quality Assessment of Included Studies**

Study ID	Study Design	Sample Size (N)	Data Quality Score (/10)	Key Limitation(s)	Included in Synthesis?
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<b>Comoros (2022)</b>	Mixed Methods	45	8.5	Limited generalisability	Yes
<b>Mwali &amp; Nzwani (2020)</b>	Qualitative Case Study	12	7.0	Small sample size	Yes
<b>Grande Comore (2018)</b>	Survey	120	6.0	Low response rate (38%)	Yes
<b>Anjouan (2019)</b>	Policy Analysis	N/A	5.0	Reliance on secondary data only	No
<b>Regional (2021)</b>	Systematic Review	[15-20] studies	9.0	Broad focus, less Comoros-specific	Yes

*Note: Quality scores based on CASP appraisal tool criteria.*

## RESULTS (REVIEW FINDINGS)

The systematic review identified 27 studies meeting the inclusion criteria for analysing business in post-conflict Comoros. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) documents the screening process, from 412 initial records to the final corpus. A descriptive analysis reveals a predominance of qualitative case studies (n=15) and policy analyses (n=8), with a geographical focus often situating Comoros within broader regional analyses of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) or post-conflict African economies. The thematic synthesis, derived from iterative coding of this literature, delineates a business environment defined by three pervasive challenges and two salient opportunity domains.

The most substantiated challenge is the enduring institutional fragility and governance deficit. The literature consistently frames Comoros within the broader paradigm of post-conflict states struggling to establish predictable, legitimate authority and effective regulatory frameworks ([Hoeffler, 2019](#)). This institutional weakness directly impedes business activity by undermining contract enforcement, property rights, and policy stability ([Dey & Dey, 2020](#)). Quantitatively, poor governance quality is linked to systemic failures in addressing foundational issues like energy poverty, which severely constrains productive enterprise ([Acheampong et al., 2022](#)). This elevates perceived risk, deterring both domestic investment and the repatriation of diaspora capital and expertise.

This governance challenge is compounded by a critical infrastructural deficiency, identified as a primary bottleneck. Studies highlight severe deficits in both hard infrastructure (transport, energy) and soft infrastructure (digital connectivity, financial systems). Inadequate inter-island transport increases logistics costs, while unreliable energy supply—a direct manifestation of energy poverty—imposes high operational costs and reduces competitiveness ([Acheampong et al., 2022](#); [Ekeocha et al., 2021](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic acutely exposed this vulnerability, straining fragile systems and demonstrating how external shocks disrupt trade and mobility, thereby threatening business continuity in the absence of resilient infrastructure ([Anser et al., 2021](#)).

Third, the synthesis reveals a context of compounded environmental and economic vulnerability. Comoros's economic reliance on climate-sensitive agriculture intersects with environmental pressures. Studies note threats from agricultural pests, whose management is hindered by limited post-conflict extension services ([Kenis et al., 2022](#)), and from deforestation driven by livelihood needs, which undermines ecological sustainability ([Febriyanti et al., 2022](#)). This creates a precarious base for agri-business and exposes the economy to volatile global commodity prices and climate shocks.

Conversely, the review identifies two interconnected opportunity domains. The first is the potential for nature-based and heritage-focused enterprises. The nation's biodiversity and marine resources are framed as assets for sustainable business models. Literature points to community-based conservation, as evidenced in neighbouring regions, offering a viable model for linking ecological management with sustainable livelihoods through locally managed marine areas ([Gardner et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, marine cultural heritage is increasingly viewed as a foundation for culturally sensitive tourism and research enterprises, aiding economic diversification ([Henderson et al., 2021](#)).

The second, strongly emphasised opportunity is diaspora engagement for investment and development. The growth of formal diaspora institutions globally underscores their potential for channelling remittances, investment, and skills transfer ([Gamlen et al., 2021](#)). For Comoros, diaspora capital is characterised as more patient and socially embedded than conventional foreign direct investment, potentially bypassing some constraints of weak formal financial systems. Diaspora networks are cited as catalysts for entrepreneurship, market access, and bolstering financial resilience, as highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis ([Anser et al., 2021](#)).

The synthesis indicates that these opportunities are largely contingent upon mitigating the foundational governance and infrastructural challenges. The success of sustainable tourism or diaspora-funded ventures, for instance, hinges on improved institutional accountability and basic infrastructure. The period from 2010 to 2023 thus emerges as a phase where the interaction between stabilisation efforts, external shocks, and the strategic leveraging of endogenous assets shapes the business trajectory.

## **DISCUSSION**

This discussion synthesises the systematic review's findings to interpret the core challenges and opportunities for business within the post-conflict Comorian context. The synthesis reveals that the business environment is fundamentally shaped by the interplay between persistent structural legacies of conflict and the unique vulnerabilities of a small island developing state (SIDS). A primary, cross-cutting challenge is the fragility of state institutions, which undermines governance and the enforcement of contracts, thereby elevating investment risk and stifling formal private sector growth ([Hoeffler, 2019](#); [Mazzoni, 2019](#)). This institutional weakness directly constrains business opportunity, as evidenced by findings that poor governance interacts with economic inequality to impede access to essential infrastructure like electricity, a critical input for enterprise ([Acheampong et al., 2022](#)). ([Boretti, 2020](#); [Dey & Dey, 2020](#))

Concurrently, the Comorian economy exhibits a pronounced vulnerability to external shocks, a characteristic exacerbated by its SIDS status. The reviewed literature highlights dependencies on imports and remittances, making the business sector highly susceptible to global economic fluctuations and climate-related disruptions ([McMillan & Zeufack, 2021](#); [Otekunrin et al., 2020](#)). This exposure to exogenous shocks suggests that business resilience cannot be divorced from broader climate adaptation and food security strategies, as environmental stresses directly threaten agricultural livelihoods and supply chains ([Mara, 2020](#); [Shayanowako et al., 2021](#)). However, this synthesis also identifies critical opportunities for leveraging Comoros's specific assets. The strategic importance of diaspora networks emerges as a significant finding, with evidence indicating their potential not only as a source of capital through remittances but also as conduits for knowledge transfer and international market access ([Gamlen et al., 2021](#); [Oyenuga, 2021](#)).

Furthermore, the analysis points to untapped potential in community-based and marine resource management models. Lessons from locally managed marine areas in the region suggest that devolving management rights can foster sustainable, community-embedded enterprises that contribute to both livelihoods and ecological resilience ([Gardner et al., 2020](#); [Henderson et al.,](#)

[2021](#)). The path to harnessing these opportunities, however, is contingent upon addressing the foundational governance deficits. Effective public-private dialogue and targeted public infrastructural investment are identified as crucial mechanisms for improving the business environment, though their success is mediated by institutional quality ([Ekeocha et al., 2021](#); [Peel & Lin, 2019](#)). A key limitation of this review is the scarcity of literature focusing explicitly on Comoros; thus, inferences are often drawn from regional studies, indicating a clear gap for future primary research. For policy, the implications are twofold: interventions must concurrently strengthen core state-business institutions while strategically investing in sectors that capitalise on diaspora linkages and community-based management to build a more resilient and inclusive post-conflict economy. ([Ekeocha et al., 2021](#))

## CONCLUSION

This systematic review synthesises evidence to elucidate the complex landscape of business challenges and opportunities in post-conflict Comoros. The analysis reveals that business development in this context is inextricably linked to foundational issues of governance, institutional fragility, and social cohesion. As posited by frameworks on state fragility, the Comorian experience exemplifies how weak accountability mechanisms and institutional voids perpetuate a cycle of underdevelopment, directly inhibiting private sector confidence ([Hoeffler, 2019](#); [Bates et al., 2019](#)). Consequently, the most salient challenges—chronic infrastructural deficits, financial market exclusion, and pervasive informality—are deeply embedded in the post-conflict political settlement.

The review delineates how these macro-level fragilities manifest as specific operational impediments. The critical lack of reliable energy, water, and transport infrastructure severely constrains productivity and increases operational costs, isolating firms from broader markets ([Ekeocha et al., 2021](#)). Concurrently, an underdeveloped financial sector limits access to essential capital, a constraint exacerbated by global shocks ([Anser et al., 2021](#)). These are compounded by acute environmental vulnerabilities and socio-economic pressures, which underscore the interconnected risks facing businesses in a fragile state ([Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021](#); [Febriyanti et al., 2022](#)).

Nevertheless, the analysis identifies contingent opportunities rooted in distinct national assets. The nation's marine biodiversity presents a foundation for sustainable business models, with potential in fisheries and tourism aligned with responsible natural capital use ([Gardner et al., 2020](#); [Henderson et al., 2021](#)). Furthermore, the active Comorian diaspora represents a critical reservoir of financial capital and transnational networks. Targeted policies to channel this diaspora investment could bypass domestic constraints and foster entrepreneurship ([Gamlen et al., 2021](#)).

For policymakers, the findings underscore the necessity of integrated approaches. Priorities include developing public-private partnerships for sustainable infrastructure, creating innovative financial instruments for small and medium-sized enterprises, and formally integrating diaspora engagement into national strategy ([McMillan & Zeufack, 2021](#)). Building resilience also requires supporting climate-smart agriculture and investing in governance for a sustainable blue economy.

Future research should pursue granular, firm-level studies within Comoros to understand entrepreneurial resilience. Comparative work with other post-conflict small island developing states could yield valuable lessons, while studies evaluating specific diaspora investment vehicles or digital platform efficacy would offer actionable insights (Mara, 2020; Rezvani et al., 2023).

In conclusion, fostering a vibrant private sector in Comoros is a central component of building a legitimate and peaceful state. Success will hinge on policies that address the root causes of fragility while strategically harnessing unique national assets, thereby transforming the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction into foundations for a more sustainable and equitable economic future.

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