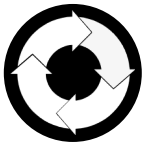


CENTRAL MALI: ARMED COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN CRISIS

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of conclusions from a case study in Mali of the RESOLVE Network's Community-Based Armed Groups (CBAGs) Research Initiative. It untangles the legitimacy of armed groups, mobilizing factors, and the multi-level impact of violence implicating CBAGs, further exploring the relations amongst different actors, including the state, armed groups, and communities. The proliferation of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in Mali's Mopti and Ségou Regions has contributed to transforming Central Mali into a regional epicenter of conflict since 2016. Due to the lack of adequate presence of the state, certain vulnerable, conflict-affected communities resorted to embracing non-state armed groups as security umbrellas in the context of inter-communal violence. These local conflicts are the result of long-standing issues over increasing pressure on natural resources, climate shocks, competing economic lifestyles, nepotistic and exclusionary resource management practices, and the shifting representations of a segregated, historically constructed sense of ethnic identities in the region. To learn more about the research methodology and findings, please refer to this fact sheet's companion RESOLVE Research Report by Rida Lyammouri: [Central Mali: Armed Community Mobilization in Crisis](#).

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ARMED COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Cycles of Retributive Violence—



The local jihadist group Katiba Macina exploited existing conflict dynamics and the grievances of marginalized Fulani communities to increase its power and influence. Lacking protection from state, people started to mobilize to protect their communities. Several self-defense and ethnic-based armed groups have emerged. The ethnic characterization of Dan Na Ambassagou and Katiba Macina reinforces local stereotypes and perpetuates an endless cycle of retributive attacks between these ethnic-based groups.

Historical Tensions—



The relationship between Fulani and Dogon communities, along with ongoing conflict between farmers and pastoralists in the region, is strained due to ancestral rivalries over influence. Worsening ecological conditions straining livelihood resources and the struggle of the central government and local authorities to address natural resource management put populations in competition over access to land, water, and natural resources.

Youth Vulnerability—



Insufficient job opportunities, poverty, poor access to education and vocational training, and social pressures to marry and start a family contribute to youth associations with CBAGs. Armed groups use discourses of identity and communitarianism, alongside promises of weapons and profit, to gain support. While the idea to create CBAGs often comes from elders, youth are mobilized on the frontline.

Economic and Ecological Deprivation—



The Central Mali economy is dependent on farming, fishing, and livestock herding, making employment opportunities limited and seasonal due to irregular rainfall. Economic deprivation, compounded by environmental shocks, contrasts with the relative riches of CBAG members. Cattle theft is a common source of revenue for armed groups and is an incentive to join.

State Absence—



Several existing governance issues have persisted for decades, and the accumulation of mishandling disputes and conflicts is not a result of recent developments in Central Mali. The limited government security presence fuels feelings of insecurity amongst villagers and reinforces the reliance on CBAGs as security providers. The shift in local governance mechanisms put justice, security, and governance decision-making at the heart of each community and created space for CBAGs to fill the gap in security-based decision-making.

Discourses of Legitimacy—



The presence of jihadist groups bolsters CBAG legitimacy in parts of Central Mali. Communities obey armed groups, including jihadists, and peace accords in the hopes of achieving peace, tranquility, and survival during ongoing conflict. However, compliance does not necessarily translate into providing active fighters and other means of material support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

01

For any government-led strategy to improve community trust in political leadership, government leaders, and the international community must respond to allegations of abuse by any parties to the internal armed conflict. The Malian government and international stakeholders must elevate the voice of local human rights and development organizations to investigate alleged crimes followed with well-publicized actions to fix a security model undone by conflict and distrust.

02

CBAGs will continue being legitimized to drive security behaviors based on identity politics led by the growing population of marginalized, radicalized youth. Any security approach must acknowledge that tensions amongst ethnically heterogenous communities will exist even if the jihadist threat is removed.

03

Lessons learned from French alignment with Tuareg groups in northern Mali for counterterrorism efforts must be applied to avoid any national, international, or multilateral security effort aligning with CBAGs. Rumors of French alignment with Dan Na Ambassagou are likely to intensify already existing social and ethnic tensions by more clearly pitting Fulanis and Dogons against one another—namely through reinforcing the Fulani-jihadist connection by creating Dogon-French linkages.

04

Security sector reform and disengagement, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) should not be a priority now for stabilization efforts when ethnic tensions remain unaddressed. CBAG members will likely hold a single-minded objective to protect their own community or ethnic group so any effort to integrate CBAGs members into larger, national security forces or law enforcement organizations will most likely fail

05

Taking a conflict-sensitive approach to addressing women's needs, behaviors, and potential contributions to positive change has not been adequately explored. To fully understand the potential roles women in Central Mali can play in peacebuilding processes, further research is required to understand women's roles in the current conflict and opportunities to positively incorporate women's voices into peace and security agendas.

06


Governments and state security actors should conduct thorough assessments of interdictions, bans, and curfews before implementation that may cause economic harm by preventing individuals from accessing markets. For the transitional government, to begin normalizing economic activity, opening trade, and providing skills training are simple measures to engage youth and adults in licit income production.

07

Given the constantly evolving dynamics, programming related to conflict and violence prevention, economic development, and humanitarian assistance requires more flexibility and more speed. An increase in rapid assessments and analysis could improve the ability of implementers and program decision-makers to proactively respond to dynamic changes in the situation.

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RESOLVE is housed at the U.S. Institute of Peace, building upon the Institute's decade-long legacy of deep engagement in conflict affected communities

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