

Research Backgrounder

Community-Based Armed Groups

Exploring the Possibilities for Engaging, Managing, and Transforming Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa



Context

Community Based Armed Groups (CBAGs) in Sub-Saharan Africa present a complex phenomenon to communities, governments, development implementers, and security providers that requires a nuanced approach to understanding CBAG formation, identity, operational attributes, and relationships to local communities and formal government security architecture. Increasingly, CBAGs are emerging across Sub-Saharan Africa with varying degrees of popular support, often in contexts where official security actors lack reach, confidence, or resources. The missions and goals of CBAGs vary, and can range from protecting or promoting an ideology or community identity, to protecting territory or resources, to simply providing security for vulnerable populations. Their proliferation and prominence necessitates deeper, empirical understanding these groups and the contexts from which they arose – especially in areas where there is a confluence of weak governance, resource competition, and (in some cases) rising violent extremism – in order to craft more effective and appropriate practice and policy toward them.

Project Scope and Purpose

The primary purpose of the RESOLVE Network initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa is to provide key stakeholders with contextually specific information on the dynamics of CBAGs and current, prospective, and past approaches to engage, manage, transform, and interact with CBAGs. The RESOLVE Network offers an innovative means of helping USAID and other USG partners interested testing assumptions embedded their theories of change about state and civil society capacities towards addressing security issues raised and resolved by the formation of CBAGs. The core research question driving the initiative is: *how have governments and localities engaged with CBAGs, and to what extent have those engagements affected social cohesion and communities' relationships with the state?*

In partnership with USAID's Africa Bureau, and through a series of workshops and consultations with subject matter experts in the field, RESOLVE will work to:

- Generate substantive papers that address key questions critical to understanding the dynamics of CBAG formation and operation, as well as lessons that can be learned from existing state and international efforts to engage and reintegrate CBAGs. This includes the development of a typology useful in identifying variations in CBAGs and responses to or engagement with them.
- Generate a series of case studies focusing on two countries or sub-regions to address key questions and produce unique and locally contextualize analysis on the dynamics of CBAGs.
- Generate a series of policy notes synthesizing and providing additional, locally-informed insight and more nuanced recommendations for policymakers based on specific and particularly relevant findings as revealed by the research.
- Foster the establishment of a sustainable community of practice connecting local and international researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to continue collaboration on CBAG-related issues and efforts.

These combined efforts will contribute to new, locally-informed insights regarding the nature, history, activities, and future engagement opportunities with CBAGS and identify potential opportunities for more effective and proactive P/CVE policy and practice.

Contact

For more information about the RESOLVE Network's work in Sub-Saharan Africa and how to collaborate with or support the network please contact our research coordination team at: research@resolvenet.org. Additional information about the RESOLVE Network and its partners can be found on our website: www.resolvenet.org.