

Community-Based Armed Groups

Women Peace and Security | 2019-2021

Project Scope and Purpose

The primary purpose of the RESOLVE Network initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa is to provide key stakeholders with contextual information on the dynamics of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and current, prospective, and past approaches to engage, manage, and transform them. The project grapples with a complicated series of questions and decisions negotiated by stakeholders operating in conflict-affected societies across Sub-Saharan Africa. While context is key to situating normative questions, policymakers and practitioners need concrete examples of where these groups have been useful, why, for whom, and for how long. Similarly, in what contexts has hybrid security been positive, for how long, and at what cost?

The challenge is finding evidence-based examples where hybridity has been successful and where regulatory frameworks seeking to limit or control CBAG behavior, internally or externally driven, can be constructive. The research will provide a deeper understanding of CBAG formation, identity, operational attributes, and relationships to local communities and formal government security architecture. Ultimately, the research reports will offer recommendations to policymakers about how to better understand the phenomenon of CBAGs across sub-Saharan Africa and provide avenues to address the continued evolution of these groups.

In the first phase of the initiative, RESOLVE collaborated with experienced researchers to generate three mapping papers that survey the existing literature on CBAGs and identify gaps in knowledge.

- The **first paper** develops a typology to organize the array of attributes, motivations, and relationships that determine CBAG behavior, identity, and the dynamics of their transitions between different types, and how these dynamics determine their exercise of violence. See: [From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups](#)
- The **second paper** provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamics and drivers of the formation and evolution of CBAGs and historical security governance legacies that contributed to the development of the normative culture of non-state community protection and armed mobilization. See: [Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)
- The **third paper** assesses the potential of the engagement, management, transformation (EMT) framework through a comparative review of current and historical efforts in technical post-conflict reconciliation methodologies—disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), security sector reform (SSR), alternative dispute resolution (ADR), community violence reduction (CVR), and preventing violent extremism (PVE)—on the continent. Research findings from the mapping papers inform in-depth case studies towards formulating recommendations under the EMT framework. See: [Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success](#)

Women Peace and Security Research Initiative

Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike appreciate the varied and complex roles of women and gender in conflict, including violent extremism and CBAGs. While the mobilization, networks, and operations of CBAGs affect women, they can also play more active roles that support and enable community-driven security and armed groups. This line of inquiry explores women's roles related to informal, community-based justice, conflict resolution, governance, and rule of law mechanisms. The project aims to rise beyond the conventional understanding of women in conflict, disambiguate their roles, agency, and choices in diverse security situations, demystify women's capacity for violence and peace, and open a policy-relevant conversation on the relationship of gender and security. The research will further the original intent of the project to expand the knowledge base on how and why community-based armed groups form and mobilize and understand other security-related options within the community, particularly the roles women play.

Preliminary Mapping Paper and Case Study Questions:

The role of women in security governance:

- What roles do women play to promote stability in communities as an alternative to CBAGs in the absence of formal support and in light of security threats on the community?
- What roles do women play that complement the security provisions of CBAGs that support the reintegration of CBAGs once they disband?
- What is the reality of women's political agency and capacity for violence and security beyond the mainstream conceptualization framed by their relationship with men?
- How does group ideology, politics, organization, and objectives influence women's role and agency and opportunities to participate?
- How do women's roles differ or change when participating in formal as opposed to informal security groups?
- What are the drivers of women's participation in informal security groups? What are their motivations for joining or quitting groups?
- How do groups strategically leverage men and women combatants or affiliates to increase community or state legitimacy?

Gender dynamics in hybrid security:

- To what extent is it socially acceptable for women to participate in security sector roles? How do social norms drive women's decisions to participate in formal or informal armed groups?
- How do different dimensions of identity (religious, ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic, family status) shape or determine roles in armed groups?
- How do gender dynamics of groups impact women's roles in the groups? What is the currency of gender within the group? How does this currency change based on the group's political, economic, or security outlook?
- What are the mechanisms women seek or move through towards receiving social approval to participate in formal or informal security groups (e.g. rejection, widowhood, displacement, affirmative norms)?
- Is there a correlation between local histories of inter- or intrastate conflict and women's participation in non-state or sub-state armed groups?

Policy implications for prevention and stabilization:

- How can research promote policy options for inclusive and gender sensitive conflict prevention, peacebuilding, reconciliation, DDR and SSR?
- What are the implications of gender dynamics and the role of women in security governance for post-conflict reconciliation, stabilization policies, and DDR and SSR?
- How do the roles of women change in post-conflict societies? What is the potential of women peacebuilders with intersectional identities?