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RESOLVE

NETWORK

Brokers of Legitimacy:

Women in
Community-Based
Armed Groups

Hilary Matfess

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Community-based armed groups (CBAGs) represent a persistent, but understudied threat to stability throughout sub-Saharan Africa. These organizations, in contrast to other types of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), are distinguished by their relationships with the communities and identity groups from which they emerged and their circumscribed political objectives, which exclude competing against the state for national authority. The risks that CBAGs pose demand that we pay closer attention to these groups' membership bases, the ways in which they legitimize themselves to the communities they operate within, how they conduct their operations, and the community interventions that can promote peace in areas marked by CBAG violence. Doing so requires examining the myriad roles of women in these organizations, examining how different types of women relate to CBAGs, and documenting how women can contribute to peacebuilding initiatives in communities affected by this violence.

Need for Further Research

Despite decades of feminist research documenting the gendered aspects and implications of violence, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how women navigate and contribute to conflict. Though both the deleterious effects of communal violence on women and the characteristics of CBAGs have been documented, less attention has been paid to the ways in which women contribute to these armed groups and benefit from their operations. Women play critical—though often obscured—roles in CBAG activities. Similarly, though there is a robust literature on the role that women can play as peacebuilders following civil war, there is less attention paid to women's ability to promote non-violence in contexts of low-grade violence.

This report seeks to remedy this oversight by documenting women's forms of participation in both CBAGs and peacebuilding in areas affected by CBAG violence in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on East Africa.

Contributions

In examining women's relationship with these armed groups, this report finds that women participate in violence and clandestine operations, provide logistical support to CBAGs, and legitimize the groups' activities to the civilian population. Though many narratives of women and conflict emphasize conscription and coercion as pathways for women's entry into armed groups, women also lend support to CBAGs to advance their economic, social, or personal interests.¹

1 Though this report recognizes that coercion and sexual violence are common features of women's experiences in armed groups and important phenomena for policymakers and academics to understand, such experiences have been well-detailed elsewhere and are not the focus of this project.

Veiled Engagements

Women’s contributions to CBAGs are often underestimated in part due to their influence in informal or customary venues or through personal relationships; in many contexts, women express opinions through songs or customary rituals. Such fora may not be accessible or legible to the international community or even domestic governments. As a part of gender mainstreaming efforts, policymakers should seek to identify these fora, their participants, and the degree to which women can access such fora to express their influence.

The Implications of Heterogeneity

This report also underlines that women are not a homogenous group and not all women are equally placed to participate in CBAG activities. Age, ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, religion, reputation, and other characteristics shape ability and extent of contributions to armed groups. Recognizing this, policymakers and analysts must take a more nuanced approach to identifying women’s contributions to and participation in armed groups, as well as to understanding their post-conflict. Failing to do so risks privileging a certain subset of women over others, contributing to discriminatory dynamics that may facilitate further conflict. This finding underlines the need to ask not only “where are the women?”² but also “which women are where?”³ and “how are these distinctions made and enforced?” when discussing gender and conflict to understand how different types of women contribute differently to community-based armed groups.

Contributions to Peace

Just as women contribute to the conduct of violence, women can contribute to peacebuilding efforts. This report identifies a number of instances when women have worked to mitigate conflict in their communities. Women are often well-placed to diffuse non-violent norms and help legitimize peacebuilding efforts. Though women can be powerful advocates for peace, adopting a gender-essentialist assumption that women’s interests are automatically aligned with policymakers’ and peacebuilders’ objectives undermines the effectiveness of peacebuilding and stabilization efforts. Furthermore, policymakers must also acknowledge that increasing women’s participation in formal peacebuilding activities will only be transformational under two conditions: (1) if these fora consider conflict dynamics, and (2) if they critically engage a plurality of women’s interests. If policymakers want women to constructively engage with peacebuilding initiatives, the grievances or conditions that drive women to support or participate in CBAG activity must be identified and addressed in peacebuilding programs engaging influential power-brokers. Ultimately, addressing women’s issues and engaging them in peacebuilding activities should be considered complementary, but not synonymous objectives.

2 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

3 Helen Kinsella, “Feminism,” in John Baylis, ed., *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 148.

Recommendations

Recognizing women's contributions to CBAGs is critical to understanding how these groups operate and to designing effective peacebuilding programs for communities impacted by CBAG violence. Recommendations for policymakers and academics engaging with these conflict dynamics include the following:

- **Incorporate informal structures and fora into peacebuilding programming where women may have a comparative advantage in peacebuilding.** Policymakers should acknowledge the influence women exercise in the home, within social networks, or through customary practices and incorporate women's abilities to shift community norms to facilitate peacebuilding. Policy and programming should produce gendered analysis of formal peacebuilding programs on women's well-being, particularly of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs. These formal, technical programs may increase women's economic or social vulnerability, further raising the risk of gendered violence.
- **Ensure that peacebuilding and redevelopment programs engage meaningfully with a wide range of women's interests.** Policymakers should fund participatory research to engage a broad cross-section of women and other relevant demographics. Engaging women along the socioeconomic spectrum, of different ages, religions, and ethnicities, is critical to understanding the landscape of women's interests and capabilities in CBAG-affected contexts.

INTRODUCTION & STUDY SCOPE

This mapping paper contributes to the effort to take a more nuanced and holistic approach to understanding women and conflict by detailing women's participation in community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in sub-Saharan Africa (with a focus on East Africa) and the implications of their participation for post-conflict stability and reconciliation. The category 'CBAGs' encompasses a variety of armed groups; this report will focus on a subset of those groups, predominantly in East Africa.⁴ It will also provide snapshots of case studies that detail examples of women's experiences with demobilization of CBAGs in the Karamoja region in Uganda, the Mungiki in Kenya and their influence in the *Gadaa/Siqqee* system in Ethiopia, and the Al-Hakkamat Baggara women of Darfur. Though this report primarily focuses on women in East African CBAGs, it draws on the literature on women in non-state armed groups (NSAGs), a broader category of armed groups, to provide theoretical grounding or comparison between different types of armed groups and discuss examples of women's contributions to CBAGs throughout the continent.

4 In this research report, I will primarily discuss women's contributions to vigilante and identity-oriented CBAGs. Such case selection means focusing mostly on security-focused community based armed groups, as laid out in Van Metre's typology. Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 24, summarizing table 3. Worth noting, however, is that perceptions of CBAGs and their functions can shift overtime; what is one man's community defense militias can be another man's cattle rustlers and seen by another man as a gang or criminals.

The report begins by describing the core characteristics of CBAGs and delineating the geographic and substantive scope of the research. Following sections interrogate the process of women’s incorporation into CBAGs and unpack the caveats and nuances surrounding the nature of women’s contributions to these organizations. This endeavor builds on a long history of feminist security studies, which has sought for decades to identify what women do during wartime, how they shape conflict dynamics, and the impacts of violence on women’s lives. The relative lack of information about women’s roles in CBAG activities arises from both the nature of their contributions—which are often clandestine, channeled through personal relationships, or are channeled through fora that pose difficulties for policymaker engagement—and a persistent gender bias that discredits women’s capacity to engage in violence. Women, however, often lend their support to armed groups voluntarily, with full knowledge of the groups’ objectives. These groups, on the other side, often actively seek women’s support and encourage their participation because of the tangible benefits brought by their membership. It is critical to dispel myths about women’s (non)participation in conflict—a better understanding of what women contribute to armed groups will result in more impactful peacebuilding programs in the aftermath of conflict and can inform efforts to prevent recruitment into armed groups.

The report also discusses potential post-conflict challenges for women. This section focuses on the economic and social marginalization that women associated with CBAGs may face after conflict, suggesting that the characteristics of conflict shape the nature of women’s post-conflict issues, thus, programming cannot be directly repurposed from other post-conflict contexts and applied to CBAGs. Emphasizing separate discussions of women-specific issues and women’s participation is intended to underline that gender-sensitive programming must do more than ensure women’s participation in programs—it must engage with context-specific gender dynamics and the diversity of women’s interests that influence conflict dynamics. The report concludes with a summary of the findings; an outline of avenues for future research on women’s contributions to CBAGs; a set of policy recommendations for gender-sensitive peacebuilding programs; and a discussion of how women can contribute to the engagement, management, and transformation (EMT) of community-based armed groups.⁵

What are CBAGs? And What Will Identifying Women’s Contributions Yield?

DEFINING CBAGS

“Community-based armed groups (CBAGs)” is a broad category that encompasses a number of armed group types: warlords, vigilantes, cartels, gangs, self-defense militias, and traffickers, among a number of other kinds of armed groups.⁶

5 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 16. https://www.resolve.net.org/system/files/2019-10/RSVE_CBAGs_Approaches_Schuberth_Oct2019_0.pdf.

6 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 24, summarizing table 3.

Agbiboa notes that “a definition of CBAGs has proven difficult due to their many types and characteristics, and the fact that they are often located in zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of law and order.”⁷

Though a definition of CBAGs is elusive, one of the most important distinguishing features of CBAGs is their proximity to the community. Agbiboa notes that “CBAGs draw their legitimacy from various and, at times, competing sources, including traditional and communal, religious, and political establishments,” rather than transnational ideologies or external sources.⁸ The repertoire of violence that CBAGs can employ is similarly varied—these groups may engage in political, economic, and security provision activities, and deploy a wide variety of tactics to those ends.⁹

Previous RESOLVE reports define CBAGs as a form of non-state armed group, distinguished from other NSAGs by “their relationship to the state and local communities and the ways they exercise power. While NSAGs, such as insurgent or terrorist groups, seek to disrupt or undermine the state to seize power or establish an alternative political system, CBAGs can be aligned with, or complementary to, the state, or they can operate in gray areas with minimal state presence. They do not typically aspire to extensive political ambitions and strategies; rather, they advance the local ambitions of their stakeholders.”¹⁰

Van Metre identifies two core features of CBAGs: “(1) the external factor of the group’s relationships with the state and communities,” which includes the resources accessible by the group, the threat environment in which the group is operating, and the norms of community-CBAG relations, and “(2) the internal

7 Daniel Agiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

8 Agiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

9 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 24.

10 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

function of the group’s exercise of violence,” which includes the leadership structure, recruitment tactics, intra-group discipline, and the degree to which its exercise of violence is coerced or negotiated.¹¹

Though CBAGs are distinguished from NSAGs more generally by their relationship to the community they are defending, not all CBAGs enjoy cooperative relationships with civilians. Van Metre notes that CBAGs can operate in negotiated relationships or coercive relationships with civilians and that the relationship can change over time.¹² However, CBAGs can become NSAGs if the nature of their objectives or relationship to the community changes. This research report focuses on a subset of CBAGs and their activities, primarily on the political and security-related activities of vigilante and identity-oriented armed groups.

REVELATIONS OF A GENDERED CBAG ANALYSIS

This report builds on previous RESOLVE work mapping CBAGs by detailing the ways in which women shape the core characteristics of CBAGs. Both as individuals and as symbols of the community, women play important roles in shaping CBAG activity. The ways in which CBAGs treat women or the roles that women play within CBAGs often reflect the broader social context from which CBAGs emerged. Women, as individuals, are often tasked with logistical work such as cooking, cleaning, and serving as porters for fighters; thus, the internal organization and day-to-day functioning of CBAGs often rely on women’s contributions, though this assistance may be difficult to observe. The position of women within the organization serves as an important organizational principle for CBAGs and may reflect the gender ideology of the armed group. For example, when women are excluded from certain tasks within a CBAG, it may be a means by which men demonstrate their masculinity; if men fail to do so, they can be held responsible by women for this shortcoming. The delineation of tasks gendered masculine and those considered feminine may reflect the social norms from which the CBAG emerged, and the practice of such a division of labor may help legitimize the armed group in the eyes of the community.

Women also play important roles in defining relationships between CBAGs and civilian communities; women’s participation in and approval of CBAGs activities can be an important method for the group to gain legitimacy and garner positive social sanction from the communities within which they operate. Women may play this bridging function as a result of their active participation and agency, or as a result of the symbolic weight they carry as targets of violence. An example of the former is a woman choosing to endorse or decry CBAG activity to the local community; examples of the latter are the abduction of women into CBAGs or armed groups targeting women associated with rivals. Similarly, in a number of contexts marked by CBAG activity, marriage signifies social status, and the significance of a man’s ability to marry may facilitate recruitment into the group.¹³ The following section will delineate the range of women’s roles in CBAGs and will briefly discuss how these contributions shape CBAG activities.

11 Ibid, 23, summarizing table 2.

12 Ibid.

13 Phoebe Grace Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups,” PhD diss., Tufts University, 2019; Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess, “In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict,” *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 7–40.

THIS WOMAN'S WORK, THIS WOMAN'S WORLD: WHAT WOMEN DO IN CBAGS

How do Women Join CBAGs?

Before discussing women's contributions to the groups, the question of *how* women come to be involved must be considered. A dearth of sex-disaggregated data on recruitment into CBAGs makes it difficult to systematically assess the similarities and differences in how and why men and women join these groups.¹⁴ Qualitative accounts, however, suggest that women's reasons for joining CBAGs are often similar to men's.¹⁵ As with men, women may see conflict as a means of increasing their individual or community prestige. Watson, in a study of Turkana women in Kenya, notes that women who are affiliated with successful (generally male) raiders have the opportunity to gain social status and increase their livestock holdings.¹⁶

A number of studies examining pastoralist conflicts note the connection between men's participation in violence and women's interests: women's desire for higher brideprices¹⁷ or demands that men exact revenge in response to previous violence or insult, for example, can inflame tensions.¹⁸ More direct economic motivation can also encourage women to join such groups. Nolte notes that the Nigerian vigilante group the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) comprises of "many men and women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, such as market women and street traders who resented their suffering under state brutality and the declining economy."¹⁹ Thus, economically precarious women may have the same incentives to join a CBAG as their economically precarious male counterparts.

Not all armed groups, however, are enthusiastically supported by the community or rely on community sanction to operate. Thus, they cannot rely as easily on voluntary or grievance-driven recruitment. In contrast to CBAGs that broker a "negotiated" relationship with the community, "coercive" CBAGs, or CBAGs that are "more offensive, conflictive, and indiscriminate, targeted against the state or the community,

14 This issue also confronts those who study women's participation in NSAGs more generally.

15 Similar drivers of recruitment among men and women is not a feature unique to CBAGs—though gendered portrayals of conflict dynamics can obscure women's agency in the recruitment process. Alexis Leanna Henshaw, "Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 1 (2016): 39–60.

16 Cathy Watson, "Pastoral Women As Peacemakers," (Nairobi: USAID, DFID, AU/IBAR, 2003).

17 Brideprice is a term for the resources that must pass from the groom's family to the bride's family ahead of their marriage; this custom is the inverse of "dowry" and is widely practiced. Naomi Kipuri and Andrew Ridgewell, *A Double Bind: The Exclusion of Pastoralist Women in the East and Horn of Africa* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2008), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/494672bc2.pdf>, 18; Janpeter Schilling, Francis EO Opiyo, and Jürgen Scheffran, "Raiding Pastoral Livelihoods: Motives and Effects of Violent Conflict in North-western Kenya," *Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1–16.

18 Martina Padmanabhan, "Pastoral Women as Strategic and Tactical Agents in Conflicts: Negotiating Access to Resources and Gender Relations in Afar, Ethiopia," *Quarterly Journal of International Agriculture* 47, no. 3 (2008): 233–34.

19 Insa Nolte, "Ethnic Vigilantes and the State: The Oodua People's Congress in South-Western Nigeria," *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 222; Insa Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed': Yoruba Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 93.

and disregarding local social norms around violence to serve CBAG goals and objectives,” would by definition rely more heavily on abduction—of men, women, boys, and girls—to fill their ranks.²⁰ The abduction of women and girls intended as wives for male members represents a common coercive method of women’s incorporation into community-based armed groups. This form of violence, however, is not always linked to armed-group activity—in some contexts, bride kidnapping or abduction is a practice unaffiliated with armed group activity. Distinguishing between the degree to which such abductions are a conflict dynamic—as a result of CBAG organizational needs or longer-standing community practices—is difficult.²¹

Women’s participation may fluctuate across an organization’s different units and over time. As in other armed groups, the roles that women play in CBAGs depend in part on the organization’s vision for society.²² Across a number of different cases, CBAGs have incorporated women into their organizations in a manner that implicitly or explicitly invokes traditional gender relations, mirroring community norms or evoking a shared history.²³ For example, both the OPC and the al-Hakkamat—a group of influential women that were integral to mobilizing and legitimizing CBAG violence through public performances in Sudan— included women in leadership positions throughout the organization in a manner that explicitly positioned their contributions as complementary to men’s.²⁴ These differentiated roles for men and women may reflect that many CBAGs, particularly those that emerge as community-defense militias, are mobilized in response to violent challenges to state order. Within the same armed groups, certain units may be more amenable to female participation than others. Nagajaran’s study of vigilante groups in Northern Nigeria found significantly different degrees of women’s participation between different units of the Yan Gora, or the Civilian Joint Task Force.²⁵

Female participation in CBAGs is often conditioned on additional identity characteristics. Marriage status and partner, age, ethnicity, clan, religious identity, and other social factors all shape a woman’s rela-

20 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 10; Kennedy Agade Mktu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa” (PhD diss., University of Bradford, 2005), 343.

21 Scott MacEachern has discussed the historical precedent for mass abductions with regards to Boko Haram’s practices of raiding and abduction in the mountainous areas between Nigeria and Cameroon. Scott MacEachern, *Searching for Boko Haram: A History of Violence in Central Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); see also Stephen Morewitz, “Bride Abduction,” in *Kidnapping and Violence* (New York, NY: Springer, 2019), 11–22.

22 This is a commonality between CBAGs and other types of NSAGs. Valentine Moghadam, for example, distinguishes between “the women’s emancipation” and the “woman-in-the-family” models of revolutionary behavior. Valentine M. Moghadam, “Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989,” *Gender & Society* 9, no. 3 (1995): 335.

23 This is not to suggest that tradition is not constructed.

24 The opportunities for female leadership may be limited to opportunities to exercise power *over other women*, as Henshaw et al. found among rebel groups. Alexis Henshaw, June Eric-Udorie, Hannah Godefa, Kathryn Howley, Cat Jeon, Elise Sweezy, and Katheryn Zhao, “Understanding Women at War: A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Leadership in Non-state Armed Groups,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (2019): 1089–1116; Nolte, ““Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed,”” 93; Suad M.E. Musa, *Hawks & Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict: Al-Hakkamat Baggara Women of Darfur* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer), 49; the Khail-Hakkamah is the “pinnacle” of al-Hakkamah, 51, and is responsible for a number of important tasks.

25 Chitra Nagajaran, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria* (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018): 10.

tionship to and role within CBAGs.²⁶ A number of studies note that older women or women married to high-ranking men are better able to exert influence over their communities. Pre-existing or traditional power brokers often mediate mobilization into CBAGs, and these power brokers may recruit along ethnic or religious lines and limit the degree to which women can join these organizations at all.²⁷ Age may be an especially important differentiating factor. Al-Hakkamat women, for instance, need “confidence, charisma, social relationships... local knowledge and cultural insight”—qualities that may take time to develop; on the other hand, these women must also be physically and mentally capable of carrying out the variety of tasks they are assigned.²⁸ Similarly, Nagajaran notes that “in much of northern Nigeria, women’s freedoms and opportunities are curtailed when they are of reproductive age but increase once they become older,” meaning that women past their reproductive years may have more opportunities than younger women to join the vigilante groups that emerged from long-standing hunters organizations.²⁹ This has implications for CBAG recruitment strategies and may shed light on which categories of civilians may be more likely to face violent (as opposed to negotiated or voluntary) recruitment. Women are not a homogeneous social group, which makes it necessary to ask not only “where are the women?”³⁰ but also “which women are where?”³¹ and “how are these distinctions made and enforced?” when discussing gender and conflict.

Women Tasks in Community Based Armed Groups

Across a variety of CBAG types and organizations, women participate in a number of different tasks; in many of these cases, women’s contributions to CBAGs mirror their contributions to their families and communities more generally. In some CBAGs, women have engaged in violence directly. Women’s non-combat contributions include logistics management, clandestine operations, and legitimizing group activity to the community, boosting CBAG members’ morale and recruiting men into violence. As with women in armed groups, women affiliated with CBAGs often wear many hats, providing more than one service to the CBAGs with which they are affiliated; Mazurana et al. found that more than 40 percent of the women they interviewed who had been members of Sierra Leonean armed groups had received “basic military and weapons training from their commanders or captor ‘husbands.’”³² Narratives that emphasize merely one of these roles (particularly those that emphasize women’s contributions as wives)

26 Donnelly and Petrich note the hierarchy between Kenyan and Somali women within al Shabaab, for example. See Katharine Petrich and Pheobe Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab’s Shifting Relationship with Kenyan Women,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (2019): 1169–92.

27 Jonathan Filip Forney, “Who Can We Trust with a Gun? Information Networks and Adverse Selection in Militia Recruitment,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 824–49.

28 Musa, *Hawks & Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 49.

29 Hunters refers to bush hunters; their characteristics are discussed by Colin Freeman, “Meet the Hunters Tracking Down Boko Haram Fighters Using Musket Guns and Their Wits,” *The Telegraph*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/30/meet-hunters-tracking-boko-haram-fighters-using-musket-guns/>; Nagajaran, “Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria,” 2018, 10.

30 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.

31 Kinsella, “Feminism,” 148.

32 Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and girls of Sierra Leone* (Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004), 12.

obscure the degree to which women contribute to a variety of CBAG efforts and military objectives; thus, the tasks described below should not be considered mutually exclusive.

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT WITH VIOLENCE

Female participation in direct combat as a part of CBAG activities is rare but not unheard of in sub-Saharan Africa. There is some evidence that women's participation in direct conflict is generally an outgrowth of organizational need in the face of a stronger enemy.³³ Wood asserts that conflict severity predicts the use of female combatants by armed groups; he also notes that the leaders of leftist armed groups may be more comfortable deploying women in gender-bending roles like direct combat. Because CBAGs are often engaged in low-intensity conflict and rarely espouse an ideology of anti-state, radical political change, one would expect relatively low levels of female frontline combat. Nevertheless, some studies point to fairly high levels of women's participation in conflict as combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo³⁴ and women's active participation in violence in clan-conflict in Kismayo.³⁵

In the subset of CBAGs considered in this report, female participation in direct combat activities appears more common in vigilante groups than in those that are identity-oriented community-based armed groups. Three percent of those arrested by the Nigerian police after clashes with the OPC were women.³⁶ Nolte suggests that though this is a low proportion, "the fact that they were arrested as fighters is an indicator of high female mobilization for active OPC work."³⁷ In recent years, women in the Yan Gora in Northern Nigeria have played an important role in screening other women; this position is particularly important to security in the region because of the frequency with which Boko Haram deploys female suicide bombers.³⁸ There are also reports of (often young, unmarried) women participating in Sungusungu vigilante groups in Tanzania and of women participating in South African neighborhood watches.³⁹

LOGISTICS & MANAGEMENT

Women in CBAGs contribute to logistics by supporting military operations and through intra-organizational management.⁴⁰ In addition to maintaining order in CBAG camps or in fighters' homes, women

33 Nathalie Wlodarczyk, "Creating Magic Soldiers: Kamajor Mobilization and Initiation," in *Magic and Warfare*, 93–111 (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009); Reed M. Wood, *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

34 Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008).

35 Judith Gardner, "Increasing Women's Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes: Life Histories: Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo" (2018).

36 Nolte, "Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed," 97.

37 Ibid.

38 Nagajaran, "Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria."

39 Kimani Njogu and Hervé Maupeu, eds., *Songs and politics in Eastern Africa* (African Books Collective, 2007), 230; Ray Abrahams, "Sungusungu: Village Vigilante Groups in Tanzania," *African Affairs* 86, no. 343 (1987): 179–96; Christopher Clark and Saun Swingler, "On Night Patrol with a South African Vigilante Group," *Al Jazeera*, October 24, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/night-patrol-south-african-vigilante-group-181022110640921.html>.

40 A survey of women affiliated with armed groups in Sierra Leone found that 72 percent of women interviewed worked as cooks. Mazurana and Carlson, *From Combat to Community*.

provide food to fighters, carry weapons and supplies, provide support to the frontlines, and care for wounded fighters—in addition to maintaining order in CBAG camps or in fighters’ homes.⁴¹ One woman from Kismayo reported that “Until my clan community lost, I participated in the conflict by bringing fighters water, food or ammunition. I even remember that I was seven months pregnant when I carried water to the fighters.”⁴² Search for Common Ground notes that in the pastoralist conflict in Nigeria there are “reported cases of women indirectly supporting men in preparing for attacks for example, in the Mangu-Bokkos conflict in 1997–1998 women were allegedly involved in the selection of stones and other objects to use in this fight.”⁴³ Women who are not formally members of the organization may contribute to these support functions. A review of pastoralist violence in the Horn of Africa notes that women can demonstrate their support or opposition to a campaign by providing (or not providing) food or coffee to men involved in the violence.⁴⁴

Women also often contribute to CBAG logistical operations and external relations in their positions as wives—both when these unions are coerced and when they are voluntary. The responsibilities that women take on as wives and mothers reduce the burdens on men, freeing their labor for combat or other tasks. Less evident is the way that marriage shapes the relationship between the CBAG and the local community.⁴⁵ The process of making women into wives, which women are made into wives, and the roles that these wives play in supporting CBAG operations together constitute an oft-overlooked phenomenon that provides valuable insight into CBAGs’ relationships with civilians and the groups’ internal hierarchy.⁴⁶

CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS

For a number of different CBAGs, women’s presence helps evade suspicion from government or enemy forces. Women are often valuable in smuggling or porting positions because they arouse less suspicion than men. Mkutu, reflecting on pastoralist conflict in the northern Rift Valley, in northeastern Africa, notes that “It is easy to carry bullets in food bags, milk gourds or water jugs. Security forces rarely check women, making it relatively easy for them to carry loads of ammunition across the border—it is difficult [for socio-cultural reasons] for men to carefully search women.”⁴⁷ Gender stereotypes of women as inherently peaceful or uninterested in the activities of armed groups make them effective actors in clandestine operations and smuggling.

41 Bukoa I. Ademola-Adelehin, Achakpa Priscilla, Jamila Suleiman, Donli Patricia, and Osakwe Bridget, “The Contributions and the Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Women” (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2018), 20. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Policy_Brief_on_the_Impact_of_Farmer_Herder_Conflict_on_Women_in_Adamawa_Gombe_and_Plateau_States_of_Nigeria.pdf; Gardner, “Increasing Women’s Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes.”

42 Gardner, “Increasing Women’s Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes,” 28.

43 Ademola-Adelehin et al., “The Contributions and the Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Women,” 19.

44 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*.

45 Natasja Rupesinghe and Yida Diall, “Women and the Katiba Macina in Central Mali,” *Nupi Policy Brief* (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 2019); Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare.”

46 For a discussion of these dynamics with regard to NSAGs, see: Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare.”

47 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 275.

Furthermore, women’s ability to access civilian’s homes and different types of civilian spaces without arousing suspicion makes them particularly effective at intelligence gathering. Information on rival or enemy groups may be collected in the course of everyday activities. For example, Search for Common Ground reports allegations of “Fulani women spying on farming communities, in the process of selling *nono*” (a fermented milk dish).⁴⁸

Women do not necessarily have to be members of an armed group, or ideologically sympathetic to its objectives, to contribute to clandestine operations. Petrich and Donnelly document the role that sex workers in Kenya play in al-Shabaab’s intelligence gathering efforts.⁴⁹ Al-Shabaab’s relationship with sex workers allows the organization to gather information on Kenyan security forces who patronize them; in exchange, the sex workers enjoy an additional income source.⁵⁰ Other armed groups may also contract such labor from women outside of the organization.

SOCIAL SANCTIONING, LEGITIMACY, & RECRUITMENT INTO VIOLENCE

Women play important roles mobilizing and legitimizing violence.⁵¹ A number of reports documenting conflict dynamics throughout sub-Saharan Africa note that women use songs and public proclamations to articulate their preferences and attitudes. In some contexts, women use traditional symbols to express their support or opposition to violence. This support dynamic can also manifest in informal and non-institutionalized methods, such as expression in familial and interpersonal relationships. Though women are often not able to express their opinions in formal community discussions, they may be able to listen to these conversations and discuss their preferences with their husbands and family members in the privacy of their home, as has been observed in Kenya and Ethiopia.⁵² The intimate, less-overt manner in which women may exercise influence partially explains why scholars and policymakers frequently overlook their impact. In Kismayo, “some women judge and humiliate men unwilling or unable to fight” and compel men to engage in violence by threatening to uncover their hair (a manner of undermining their masculinity).⁵³

Mkutu relays the observations of a nun who noted that in pastoralist conflict in the North Rift women “wear the arapet skin in a special way when they want to send their sons to raid. They smear them and they make them pass through their legs. When they return from revenge, they dance and sing songs

48 Ademola-Adelehin et al., “The Contributions and the Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Women,” 20.

49 Petrich and Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins.”

50 Ibid.

51 It’s worth noting that women have used the tactics described in this section for decades; Decker’s discussion of women’s resistance in the colonial era makes clear that these are long-standing patterns. She notes “the Igbo Women’s War” illustrates “how women used traditional forms of protest and how oblivious colonial officials were to the meanings and significance of their actions.” Alicia C. Decker, “Women and National Liberation in Africa,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, ed. Immanuel Nass (Blackwell Reference Online, 2009), 2.

52 Watson, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers”; Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*.

53 Judith Gardner, “Increasing Women’s Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes: Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo,” 2018.

of praise.”⁵⁴ Turkana women in Kenya have encouraged conflict by providing their blessings (formally or informally) before a raid, preparing food for combatants, welcoming fighters back with celebrations, and ridiculing and emasculating men reluctant to engage in conflict.⁵⁵ Among the Karimojong in North-eastern Uganda, warriors traditionally receive a blessing from an older woman prior to embarking on a raid. Onyango notes that “The warriors leave with the confidence and full support of the women in their lives. As they march away to battle, the women sprinkle water on them as the journey to acquire wealth begins.”⁵⁶ Even once the men are out of ear and eye-shot, “Mothers or wives of the already married warriors continue in ritual...Each of the warrior’s stools must be kept in an upright position at the centre of the hut as a symbolic sign that the warrior stands strong in combat.”⁵⁷

These rituals not only bolster the morale of combatants but also represent important connections to the community from which the CBAG emerged. While difficult to quantify or measure, cross-continental similarities in customary displays of support by women suggest that these rituals are important for CBAG operations.

Women’s homecoming rituals for men also shape conflict dynamics. Reflecting on the dynamics of cattle raiding in Tanzania, Fleisher notes that when “cattle raiders return home from a raid,... the three dozen or so village women living in homesteads along their path rush out to greet them, ululating joyfully, knowing that the raiders will likely distribute all the sheep and goats they have taken to village women as gifts, retaining only the cattle to sell for cash.”⁵⁸ Even in armed groups where women contribute to frontline combat, they may also bolster morale among members through songs expressing approval and praising them in the armed-group base camps.⁵⁹

In some instances, the legitimizing role is formalized and institutionalized, as with the al-Hakkamat women in Sudan. Al-Hakkamat women play a critical mobilizing role in the community: they “seize every opportunity to inculcate a sense of moral responsibility in the community, and to emphasize adherence to social values and customs,” which can lead to violence aimed at preserving the community’s well-being or in retribution to past violence.⁶⁰ Musa describes the al-Hakkamat’s use of “mocking and inciting diction, which has become a characteristic feature of the mobilization methods.” It is a continuation of “a cultural method of censorship and discipline” rooted in precolonial times in some African societies (like the Igbo in Nigeria and the Kom in Cameroon), in which women’s groups were influential in economic and social activities.⁶¹

54 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 140.

55 Watson, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers.”

56 Eria Olowo Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 152.

57 Ibid.

58 Michael L. Fleisher, “‘Sungusungu’: State-Sponsored Village Vigilante Groups among the Kuria of Tanzania,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 2 (2000), 209–228.

59 Remco Van Hauwermeiren, “The Ogaden War: Somali Women’s Roles,” *Afrika Focus* 25, no. 2 (2012).

60 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 56.

61 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 85, 63.

THE SIQEE/GAADA SYSTEM OF OROMO DEMOCRACY

The example of Siqee under the Gaada system demonstrates how women can articulate their interests through customary systems of governance. The Gaada system is an “indigenous democratic socio-political system” of governance among the Oromo in the Horn of Africa, recognized by UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity.⁶² The practice dates back to at least the 16th Century.⁶³ Though this system is subordinate to the national government’s laws, Gaada remains an important customary practice.⁶⁴ Women have developed “a parallel system, the Siiqee, and through a strong bond through women’s familial, and non-familial relationships” to advance women’s interests in the Gadaa system.⁶⁵ Berhane notes that this system enables “Oromo women to have control over resources and to form mechanisms of solidarity and sisterhood to deter men from infringing upon their rights and promote gender equality.”⁶⁶

Thus, the Siqee system is an important way for women to voice their grievances and advance their interests. Under this system, if women’s rights are being impinged on, “women leave their homes and children to travel to a place where there is a big tree called Qilxuu and assemble there until the problems they face are solved through negotiation by elders of men and women.”⁶⁷ This system represents a way in which women shape social norms regarding acceptable behavior and influence their community. As Muchie and Bayeh note, “though it is indirect, the Oromo women also have a great role in solving conflicts among Oromo clans by intervening and requesting for reconciliation” through Siqee.⁶⁸ This system also distributes power unevenly among women. “Women may also enjoy different rights and privileges according to their seniority,” even privileging senior wives over junior wives in the household.⁶⁹

62 Daniel Berhane, “Briefing: What is Oromo’s Gada system?” *Horn Affairs*, December 1, 2016, <https://hornaffairs.com/2016/12/01/description-oromo-gada-system/>.

63 Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer, “The Oromo, Gadaa/Siqee Democracy and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9, no. 4 (2013): 277–95.

64 Dejene N. Debsu, “Gender and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: An Ethnographic Analysis of Guji-Oromo Women’s Customary Rights,” *African Study Monographs* 30, no. 1 (March 2009): 15–36.

65 Firaol Belay and Sehin Teferra, “Siiqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia,” *Setaweeet*, (May 2018).

66 Berhane, “Briefing: What is Oromo’s Gada System?”

67 Belay and Teferra, “Siiqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia.”

68 Muchie Zelalem and Bayeh Endalcatchew, “Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among Ambo Woreda Communities,” *International Journal of Research* 1, no. 11 (2014): 822–29.

69 Jeylan W. Hussein, “A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromo society,” *African Study Monographs* 25, no. 3 (2004): 103–47.

KARAMOJA REGION & DISARMAMENT⁷⁰

The Ugandan government's disarmament efforts in the Karamoja region shed light on the methods through which peacebuilding efforts can leverage women's role in society towards peaceful ends and demonstrate the consequences of failing to engage in gender-sensitive program analysis. The Karamoja region has struggled for decades to contain intercommunal violence; the government has attempted to implement numerous disarmament programs, dating back to 1945.⁷¹ Women played important roles in the government's most recent demobilization effort in the mid-2000s. The Ugandan Government reported that "Women formed groups of ten per sub-county, composed songs encouraging voluntary surrender of guns."⁷² Not only were women able to provide public support for the demobilization effort through such public displays, women were able to provide information about weapons in the community because "because women are custodians of weapons in the homes."⁷³

Yet, despite women's participation in these programs, disarmament efforts have not been an unmitigated good for women. The government's heavy hand during these efforts makes women more vulnerable and has also facilitated the rise of community-level coping mechanisms that place additional burdens on women.⁷⁴ A Feinstein Center report noted that as economic production shifted away from livestock, women were increasingly responsible for providing for the household. The report notes that "Women are supporting their households through increased exploitation of natural resources at the same time that access to remote bush areas has become more dangerous."⁷⁵ The study also found "increases in incidents of gender-based violence against women and girls as part of the overall rise in insecurity," with different contexts producing different forms of gendered insecurity.⁷⁶

70 Discussions of conflict dynamics in the region that refer to the "Karamoja" obscure the number of ethnic groups that reside in that area; though there are "shifting alliances" between these groups the region is home to an array of ethnic groups; "roughly speaking, the Jie inhabit the central portion of the region, the Dodoth are to the north, and the Karimojong to the south. The Karimojong are further divided into three territorial groups— the Matheniko, Bokora and Pian." Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabwai, "We Are Now Reduced to Women': Impacts of Forced Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda," *Nomadic Peoples* 14, no. 2 (2010): 24–43.

71 James Bevan, *Crisis in Karamoja: Armed Violence and the Failure of Disarmament in Uganda's Most Deprived Region* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008), <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/B-Occasional-papers/SAS-OP21-Karamoja.pdf>.

72 *Creating Conditions for Promoting Human Security and Recovery in Karamoja, 2007/2008-2009/2010*, (Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, January 2007). <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b44c3ee4.pdf>

73 Ibid.

74 Bevan, "Crisis in Karamoja."

75 Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabwai, *Changing Roles, Shifting Risks: Livelihood Impacts of Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009).

76 Stites and Akabwai, *Changing Roles, Shifting Risks*.

AL-HAKKAMAT

Though not as well-known as the Arrow Boys or the Janjaweed, al-Hakkamat were an important element of conflict dynamics in Darfur, a civil war in western Sudan in the early 2000s. The activities and trajectory of al-Hakkamat, a group of women that perform songs and dances that act as powerful molders of community norms, demonstrate not only demonstrate the degree to which women legitimize conflict, but also illustrate how the state can co-opt customary institutions and how practices can be coopted by the state.

Al-Hakkamat is a hierarchical organization of rural Baggara women, an ethnic group spread across a number of countries in the Sahel.⁷⁷ Women obtain entry into and prestige within the organization by “the quality of the expressions used and their succinct brevity, the number of stanzas, the musical tone and the coordination and performance among the chorus. This must be integrated with the ability to react spontaneously and poetically to instant occasions or incidents and to compose on the support of the moment.”⁷⁸

Al-Hakkamat Khail-Hakkamah is the “pinnacle” within the hierarchy and is typically selected in a process supervised by the tribe’s head of defense (the Ageed al-Augada).⁷⁹ Musa notes that the nomination of a potential Khail-Hakkamah is “endorsed by notable village women, and generally by other community members, based on her skills and qualities of agency, personality, experience, knowledge, and outgoing character.”⁸⁰ Once installed in her position, she “is required to undertake massive social responsibilities, along with helping the Ageed and his horsemen to undertake security missions, which may involve fighting.”⁸¹ Additionally, “the horsemen makes no move on tribal affairs unless this Hakkamah is informed,” making them of “vital importance during conflict.”⁸²

The Sudanese government, recognizing the influence that al-Hakkamat women exercise over their communities, has sought to further formalize and co-opt the group as a part of its efforts to draw Darfuri Arabs into its coalition.⁸³ The relationship between al-Hakkamat and the government included “organized military training” and providing the provision of “military identities and rank titles” to these women.⁸⁴ Musa adds that, whether women have been enthusiastic or reticent to engage in such activity, their activities since this relationship was brokered have “included, among many others, mobilizing for war in South Sudan and against the Darfur insurgency, escorting the army, providing sustenance (food rations), recruiting women and engaging with officials and public events.”⁸⁵

77 See, “Baggara, Shuwa Arab in Sudan,” The Joshua Project, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14926/SU, accessed May 2, 2020.

78 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 49.

79 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 51–52.

80 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 52.

81 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 53.

82 Ibid.

83 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 117.

84 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 126.

85 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 131.

MUNGIKI

The role of women and gender norms in Mungiki demonstrates the ways women's presence and their performance of specific gendered roles are powerful methods through which armed groups legitimize their actions. Mungiki is a violent youth movement that purports to represent the Kikuyu, a demographically, politically, and historically significant ethnic group in Kenya. The Mungiki has dabbled in a variety of different CBAG roles, ranging from thuggery for Kenya African National Union (KANU) to enforcing their perceived code of moral conduct. Though its membership is drawn predominantly from lower-class youth and has ties to modern businesses such as the matatu industry.⁸⁶ The Mungiki rely on the traditions and iconography of the Kikuyu to legitimize themselves. Dreadlocks, sniffing tobacco, and oath-swearing are all aspects of the 1952–1962 Mau Mau rebellion and Kikuyu tradition that the Mungiki have adopted.⁸⁷

Despite its absence from many of the qualitative accounts of the Mungiki, an estimated 20–25 percent of the group's membership is female.⁸⁸ The delineation and enforcement of proper gender roles (in addition to venting youth grievances), appears to be an important aspect of the Mungiki's activities. The group's propaganda, for example, states that a woman is “the guardian of, and has obligation to, the house of her husband and his children.”⁸⁹ There are also reports that the Mungiki enforce circumcision among female members and the group is linked to attacks on women for being “improperly dressed” in pants.⁹⁰

Qualitative accounts suggest that women in Mungiki are often responsible for domestic tasks but that they also may play a role in the recruitment of members and the management of women within the group.⁹¹ Many accounts frame women's participation in domestic duties as an apolitical act, contrasting it to male members' meetings.⁹² Dismissing their participation as such, however, overlooks how the performance of domesticity can itself be a political act. Furthermore, these accounts overlook the possibility of political conversations taking place amidst the quotidian tasks of running a household.

86 “Factbox: Key Facts about Kenya's Mungiki Gang,” *Reuters*, March 6, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-gang-mungiki-sb/factbox-key-facts-about-kenyas-mungiki-gang-idUSTRE52537620090306>; Adams Oloo, Okumu Wafula, and A. Ikelegbe, *Marginalization and the Rise of Militia Groups in Kenya: The Mungiki and the Sabaot Land Defence Force* (South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2010).

87 “Factbox: Key Facts about Kenya's Mungiki Gang.”

88 Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal, “Country Advice Kenya Kenya,” January 13, 2012, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5033b44c60.html>

89 Ibid.

90 Nyabola, H. Nanjala, “The Legal Challenge of Civil Militia Groups in Kenya,” *African Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 89–102.

91 Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal, “Country Advice Kenya Kenya.”

92 Jacob Rasmussen, “Mungiki As Youth Movement: Revolution, Gender and Generational Politics in Nairobi, Kenya,” *Young* 18, no. 3 (2010): 301–19.

The very presence of women associated with Mungiki has helped the CBAG with its reputation. As Rasmussen notes:

The young women played a significant role in the temporary change of the media discourse about Mungiki, as their testimonies as wives, widows, sisters and mothers were essential in recording the police brutality and the disappearances of the young Mungiki men. At the same time, the women also offered a different picture of Mungiki from the well-known portrait of a violent, criminal band of young Kikuyu men. The young women described the everyday life of poor Kikuyu families struggling to get by on the margins of both city and society. Thus, the role of young women within the movement also changed since they were instrumental in shaping and temporarily changing the public image of Mungiki.⁹³

This not only highlights the tangible benefits that its female membership have brought the CBAG, but also demonstrates that women within the Mungiki are hardly apolitical. These young women acted not only as individuals with relationships to those abused by the state, but also as individuals with grievances against the current system.

The use of traditional mechanisms to legitimize CBAG behavior may be complementary to the rarity of women in direct fighting roles; both reflect a CBAG strategy of legitimizing itself by way of rigid gender relations and appeals to traditional beliefs. Such activity may thus be an outgrowth of the fact that, as Kipuri and Ridgewell noted in their examination of pastoralist women in East Africa, “Women and girls tend to be regarded, and regard themselves, as the custodians of cultural values and beliefs, much more so than men and boys.”⁹⁴ Though traditional cultural practices are not often considered a part of conflict dynamics, Watson notes that “songs are a legitimate way for women to express their views in public - either their approbation or their disapproval.”⁹⁵

WOMEN’S POST-CONFLICT ISSUES & THE CHALLENGES OF PROMOTING RECONCILIATION IN SOCIETIES WITH CBAG ACTIVITY

After the guns fall silent, women’s contributions to conflict are often erased and their potential contributions to peacebuilding are frequently overlooked. In the post-conflict period, women face economic

93 Rasmussen, “Mungiki As Youth Movement.”

94 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 6.

95 Watson, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers,” 23.

and social hurdles to societal reintegration. Some of these challenges are shared with their male counterparts, while others are gender-specific. Women's marginalization presents an issue both because of the denial of women's rights that it represents, as well as being associated with a higher risk of conflict recidivism.⁹⁶ Detailed below are the social and economic hurdles women face in the post-conflict era.

Social Status

The fate of women associated with CBAGs may be linked to the post-conflict reputation of the CBAG. How much women's contribution to CBAGs affects their social status may also depend on how visible or well-known these activities are. Musa notes that during peace negotiations in Sudan...

the role played by al-Hakkamat in conflict was either obscured or only mentioned obliquely. When it was mentioned, some 'silly bureaucrats' simply suggested that these Hakkamat must be put on trial. But these alien and naive ideas were simply met with scornful laughter from both sides to the conflict. Apparently, this ignorance on the part of the executive participants about local knowledge about rural women and gender power relations in these societies further explains the failure to take on board the experience of women, their capabilities and their interests, and to listen to their voice.⁹⁷

The degree of stigma that women face at the individual level after conflict may be a function of the degree to which their activities deviated from social norms.⁹⁸ Women who were involved in frontline combat or another gender-bending activity may face particular hurdles to reintegration. Women who were integrated in a fashion that did not subvert traditional gender norms may not face such challenges.⁹⁹ An additional source of social marginalization may be post-conflict shifts in gender norms. Efforts to promote women's post-conflict social reintegration must take into account the degree of male resistance and men's attitudes towards women's contributions to CBAGs. Male resistance to women's empowerment can manifest in a number of different ways—or not at all.¹⁰⁰

Because CBAGs often incorporate women into their activities in line with prevailing gender norms, women may face fewer difficulties in their attempts to reintegrate into their communities after conflict. This may come at the expense of the existence of conflict-related shifts in social norms that can

96 Valerie M. Hudson Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

97 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan's Armed Conflict*, 155.

98 Miranda Worthen, Angela Veale, Susan McKay, and Michael Wessells, "'I Stand Like a Woman': Empowerment and Human Rights in the Context of Community-Based Reintegration of Girl Mothers Formerly Associated with Fighting Forces and Armed Groups," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2, no. 1 (2010): 55.

99 Ibid.

100 Judy El-Bushra, "Fused in Combat: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict," *Development in Practice* 13, no. 2–3 (2003): 257.

be institutionalized in the post-conflict era to improve women’s status.¹⁰¹ Designing post-conflict social reintegration programs to address women’s roles in CBAGs requires engaging with a number of gendered dynamics, including the degree to which women’s participation broke with prevailing norms, the community’s attitude towards the CBAG generally, and men’s attitudes towards women’s participation in these organizations.

ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION

Women may have taken on new economic roles or responsibilities during conflict. Attempts to return the economy to pre-conflict production levels or arrangements may displace women who have taken on new roles and jobs during the conflict. Annan et al. note that women’s participation in armed groups in northern Uganda did not adversely affect their stock of human capital or opportunities for employment, relative to women that did not participate in armed groups. They note, however, that this is a function of “low educational investment and few opportunities for skilled employment” for women generally.¹⁰²

These discriminatory dynamics are at play in a number of contexts with active CBAGs. Thus, while women may not be as disadvantaged by wartime losses in human capital, their exclusion and marginalization represent a challenge for policymakers seeking to stabilize communities affected by CBAG violence. Ultimately, targeting only ex-combatants (or those who participated directly in fighting) in post-conflict economic redevelopment programs obscures the ways in which communities, individuals, and markets responded to wartime economies.

ENGAGING WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

Engaging Women & Women’s Issues in the EMT Framework

As discussed in *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa Lessons: Learned & Measures of Success*, the Engagement, Management, Transformation (EMT) approach to CBAGs is comprised of short-, medium-, or long-term strategies to confront the challenges presented by CBAGs.¹⁰³ Schuberth outlines the different objectives of each phase of the EMT approach, noting that “engagement focuses on ensuring safe access for intervening actors to areas with CBAGs; coercive management aims to reduce the reach and legitimacy of CBAGs; cooperative management strives to improve the treatment

101 Fallon and Viterna, analyzing the extent to which democratic transitions are likely to result in women’s post-conflict empowerment note that women whose activities “‘bent gender’ or broke with traditional understandings of the feminine (e.g., guerrilla combatants or political organizers), are thought particularly likely to launch strong feminist movements under new democratic regimes.” Jocelyn Viterna and Kathleen M. Fallon, “Democratization, Women’s Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison,” *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 4 (2008): 668–89.

102 Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, “Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda,” *Journal of conflict resolution* 55, no. 6 (2011): 981.

103 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success*.

of local populations by CBAGs; and transformation aspires to render CBAGs obsolete for their members, sponsors, and communities.”¹⁰⁴

In assessing how policymakers have responded to CBAGs, Schubert calls for more engagement with questions concerning the necessary buy-in for each of the stages of the EMT approach. This report partially takes up this call, asserting that women can contribute to each of the phases of the Engagement, Management, Transformation (EMT) approach to CBAGs. Identifying women’s comparative advantage in each of these stages and the ways that they can contribute to objectives in each phase is a promising agenda for those interested in promoting gender-sensitive peace-building.¹⁰⁵ A preliminary assessment reveals that efforts to engage and manage CBAGs under the EMT framework requires including women and assessing their roles in these groups.

Below, the report highlights the benefits of engaging women in peacebuilding programs as a part of the cooperative management approach to CBAGs.¹⁰⁶ In particular, public proclamations, symbolic rituals and organizing provide ways for women to contribute to cooperative management efforts. The following methods of engaging women should not be regarded as the only possibilities for including women in the EMT approach to CBAGs, but rather a starting point for a broader research and policy agenda.

Legitimizing Peace

SERVING AS LEGITIMIZERS OF PEACE PROCESSES, DIFFUSING NON-VIOLENT NORMS, & PROMOTING PEACE THROUGH CEREMONIES & RITUALS

Given women’s ability to act as intermediaries, they seem well-suited to contribute to the “improved relationship between communities and CBAGs” EMT objective in the management phase of the EMT approach.¹⁰⁷ As Marks notes, “relationships are a central unit of analysis and theoretical driver for understanding gender norms and equality during and after war.”¹⁰⁸ Women’s ability to use social norms, informal influence, and symbolism to shape men’s behavior can form a valuable contribution to peacebuilding endeavors.

The songs and public declarations that women use to express their opinion about the prospects of conflict can also feature messages of peace or promote reconciliation; women’s symbolic power is thus a double-edged sword, capable of stoking conflict and promoting peace. Reflecting on ethnic groups in eastern Ethiopia, Tadesse and Beyene note that “Women praise victory and success as fruits of peace in order to promote peace and stability instead of enmity. Their ideological propaganda in the community

104 Ibid, 16.

105 A starting point for this may, for example, be gendering the indicators Schubert lays out in his report.

106 Schubert, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 4.

107 Schubert, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 13.

108 Zoe Marks, “Gender, Social Networks and Conflict Processes,” *feminists@law* 9, no. 1 (2019): 23.

to prevent conflict is important.”¹⁰⁹ This support for peace can include defusing tension by using “traditional phrases” that extol the virtues of peace.¹¹⁰ In Dillo, a region in southern Ethiopia, a campaign to “promote non-violent values” among the community’s women resulted in the women singing songs of peace rather than pro-war songs.¹¹¹

Watson notes that women can engage in important ceremonies promoting peace or serve as symbols of peace themselves.¹¹² Women associated with armed groups in Karamoja can “choose to go on peace crusades of their own, sharing milk and tobacco with enemy communities as peace offerings.”¹¹³ Onyango notes that “these offerings are rarely refused, as it is believed that to reject a woman’s peace initiative is to invite a curse.”¹¹⁴ In one pastoralist community in Uganda “mothers from warring groups may swap babies and breastfeed them as a symbolic alliance between the two warring communities.”¹¹⁵

Following an intervention to promote peace, women of the Dassanech in southern Ethiopia that were affiliated with local peace committees or that participated in local peacebuilding efforts often decided to withhold beads that honored men’s participation in violence.¹¹⁶ One woman reported: “I can no longer give beads, I cannot bless my sons to go to conflict, because I am on the peace committee.”¹¹⁷ In other instances, women have intervened directly to prevent conflict from escalating. In Somalia, for example, “women at times employed desperate measures to stop inter- and intra-clan wars. They formed a human chain, lined themselves up between the warring parties, and refused to leave until the two groups backed down.”¹¹⁸ An UNESCO report noted that “their immediate objective was to see to it that the two armies did not shoot at each other. A related objective was to bring in alternative conflict resolution methods based on dialogue and peace.”¹¹⁹ This sort of advocacy in the midst of conflict is an example of “high-risk feminism”—in which women putting their lives on the line to prevent a further degradation of their rights and well-being.¹²⁰

Similarly, women may make use of customary rituals not directly connected to conflict to enforce community dictates (in addition to lending or withholding support to CBAG operations, as discussed above) and

109 Bamlaku Tadesse, Yeneneh Tesfaye, and Fekadu Beyene, “Women in Conflict and Indigenous Conflict Resolution among the Issa and Gurgura Clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia,” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 10, no. 1 (2010): 92.

110 Ibid.

111 Luke Glowacki and Katja Gonc, “Customary Institutions and Traditions in Pastoralist Societies: Neglected Potential for Conflict Resolution,” *Conflict Trends* 2013, no. 1 (2013): 26–32.

112 Watson, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers.”

113 Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 150.

114 Ibid.

115 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 140.

116 Glowacki and Gonc, “Customary Institutions and Traditions in Pastoralist Societies,” 32.

117 Ibid.

118 Mohamed Abdi Mohamed, “The Role of Somali Women in the Search for Peace,” in *Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practice*, ed. UNESCO (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), 103.

119 Josephine Ntahobari, Basilissa Ndayiziga, and Anatole Ayissi, *Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices* (Geneva: UNESCO, 2003), 103, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000133274>.

120 Julia Zulver, “High-Risk Feminism in El Salvador: Women’s Mobilisation in Violent Times,” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 2 (2016): 171–85.

shape social norms towards non-violence. Research shows that improving women’s security in the home contributes to overall state stability.¹²¹ Across a number of pastoralist communities in East Africa, “women’s institutions have customarily mitigated the abuses of husbands and other male kin.”¹²² Kipuri and Ridgewell note that Maasi women can organize to “mob a man, or a woman, who has violated sanctions” through the ol-kishiroto institution. Ol-kishiroto is a form of “ritual attack” that women can undertake in response to “serious moral affronts to their fertility and procreative powers.”¹²³ Kipuri and Ridgewell also observe that “Boran women in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia carry a stick called a *siiqqee*, which provides them with a symbolic rallying point for collective action.”¹²⁴ The *siiqqee* represents a powerful check on moral behavior and community standards. Kipuri and Ridgewell assert that “In extreme cases of trespassing, a group of women will embark on a *godaansa siiqqee*, or *siiqqee* trek, leaving their homes and children for the men to look after. The perpetrator must pay a fine or perform degrading actions for the women to return. If the abuse continues, the community can prohibit the perpetrator from holding positions of authority within the community.”¹²⁵ Though women are often excluded from positions of formal power, these informal or customary practices offer women the ability to exercise moral influence over the community and could thus be a powerful tool for building peace and promoting norms of peace.

Recent decades have seen ‘grassroots’ or customary reconciliation post-conflict programs grow in popularity. A thorny issue that policymakers must also confront when engaging with women’s organizations or influential women is the possibility of ‘tradition’ being used to obscure oppression along identity lines.¹²⁶ As a UN report notes, “in some cases, transitional justice measures can affect women negatively, for example by reinforcing gender stereotypes, dealing inappropriately with issues such as sexual violence, or even institutionalizing new forms of hardship or unfairness for women.”¹²⁷

Women’s Inclusion in Formal Peacebuilding Programs & Venues

In addition to the difficulty of harmonizing women’s interests with peacebuilding efforts, policymakers must grapple with how they can meaningfully engage women in formal peacebuilding endeavors. The relatively low levels of international mediation of CBAG conflicts (as compared to conflicts involving rebel

121 Valerie M. Hudson, Mary Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott, and Chad F. Emmett, “The Heart of the Matter: The security of Women and the Security of States,” *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 7–45.

122 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 9.

123 Dorothy L. Hodgson, *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 65.

124 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 9.

125 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 9; Belay and Teferra, “Siiqqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia.”

126 As Anderson notes “while ‘traditional’ or grassroots justice programs may address many of the issues that top-down decontextualized post-conflict reconciliation programs have exhibited, they are not a panacea. Tradition is malleable and subject to interpretation—and can thus contribute to backlash against women after war” or overlook women entirely. Jessica L. Anderson, “Gender, Local Justice, and Ownership: Confronting Masculinities and Femininities in Northern Uganda,” *Peace Research* (2009): 59–83.

127 Astrid Jamar and Christine Bell, *Transitional Justice and Peace Negotiations with a Gender Lens* (New York: UN Women, 2018), 2, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/inclusive-peace-processes-transition-al-justice-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1200>.

groups) may put women at a disadvantage, as local institutions may have less of a commitment to the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which “affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace.”¹²⁸ Context-specific norms and practices shape whether women are likely to seek redress for their grievances or support through formal or informal mechanisms. Incorporating women into more formal negotiations or programs may help shift gender norms or establish new roles for women but it would not necessarily capitalize on women’s comparative advantage in these informal channels.

In the instances in which the international community intervenes to help manage CBAG violence, attempts to tell women how to exercise their power—and to what end—may result in resistance and frustration, whether expressed in formal or informal settings.¹²⁹ Before designing and implementing their own interventions, the international community should take careful note of how women work to advance their own interests, documenting both the fora and manners in which they exercise their influence. Programs can then be developed to strengthen efforts local women themselves have initiated.

Furthermore, improving women’s representation in formal contexts (a metric often adopted in line with UNSCR 1325 recommendations) may not promote stabilization if conflict is mediated primarily through customary organizations; meaningfully implementing UNSCR 1325 means not only women’s presence in political fora, but also their engagement in deliberations of consequence.¹³⁰ Though women may be able to exercise influence to promote defection and community reconciliation, this influence should not obscure the degree to which women themselves need support to transition from war to peace. Peacebuilding programs in general must recognize the degree to which conflict has or has not opened space for revisions to social norms and gender relations and work within the local context to promote peacebuilding and gender equality.

Hudson suggests that a four-fold approach to feminist peacebuilding, which would “(1) analyze women’s varied and often invisible roles in conflict and their needs in peacebuilding, (2) establish a post-conflict reconstruction framework that takes account of gender and women’s issues, (3) empower women’s groups to effectively build the bridge between the current neglect of gender in peacebuilding processes and gender mainstreamed processes which would be more effective and more gender-emancipatory, and (4) adapt international frameworks for gender equality in culturally sensitive ways.”¹³¹ At the heart of this approach is a recognition of women’s agency and the diversity of women’s interests after war. Women cannot and should not be used as a Trojan horse for external mediators’ interests.

128 United States Institute of Peace, “What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security,” accessed May 2, 2020, https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

129 Watson, “Pastoral Women as Peacemakers.”

130 Heidi Hudson, “Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 287–318.

131 Ibid.

Finally, the potential for backlash against female activists, shifts in gender norms, or increases in women's involvement in the public sphere also presents an additional hurdle to involving women in peace-building activities.¹³² Backlash against women's empowerment is neither fore-ordained nor universal—but when it does manifest, it can take different forms. As El-Bushra notes, shifts in women's power in the home have been met with recognition of “women's resourcefulness and industry,” that “have pulled them through crises” in Somalia and Angola, a re-writing of gender roles in Rwanda, and “increased alcoholism among men and... domestic violence” in Sudan and Uganda.¹³³ Monitoring and evaluation of activities aimed at improving women's status in post-conflict contexts must include regular assessments of whether there is backlash in both public and private institutions.

Women's Organizing & Nuancing the Concept of Women's Inclusion

The shifts in gender norms that often accompany conflict may open up opportunities for women to create new organizations to lobby on behalf of women's issues and advocate for peace. Shared threats that emerged or became more acute during conflict may provide grounds for women to mobilize across social divisions. There is some evidence that higher levels of sexual violence during war is associated with higher levels of women's activism in NGOs in the post-war period.¹³⁴ After the genocide in Rwanda, women's organizing around identities as victims and widows resulted in a robust civil society network advocating for women's issues.¹³⁵

In a number of identity-based conflicts, women may be particularly well-placed to serve as intermediaries between communities and peace-brokers. The development of ‘the Sixth Clan’ in Somalia demonstrates the possibility of such organizing as a form of community reconciliation and peacebuilding; the Sixth Clan is “the clan of women.”¹³⁶ Women's ability to mobilize *as women* can be “considered to be extensions of women's existing gender roles,”¹³⁷ as “Somali women have always been the integrative girdles that through marriage brought together and cemented two different and distant clans.”¹³⁸ Yet, serving in this intermediary role also presents a risk to women. As Ingiriis and Hoehne note, because “a woman's identity was split between her father's and her husband's group,” she has the opportunity to serve as a “go-between,” but may be hamstrung by the lack of a clear political position and the mistrust on both sides of her identity categories.¹³⁹

132 El-Bushra, “Fused in Combat,” 257.

133 Ibid.

134 Anne-Kathrin Kreft, “Responding to Sexual Violence: Women's Mobilization in War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 220–33.

135 Marie E. Berry, *War, Women, and Power: From Violence to Mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

136 Mohamed H. Ingiriis and Markus V. Hoehne, “The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women: A Blessing in Disguise,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013): 314–33.

137 Padmanabhan, “Pastoral Women As Strategic and Tactical Agents in Conflicts,” 243–44.

138 Ntahobari, Ndayiziga, and Ayissi, “Women and Peace in Africa.”

139 Ingiriis and Hoehne, “The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women.”

Not all women are equally well-positioned to mobilize for peace. Economically or socially marginal women may find it difficult to participate in peace processes or vocalize their concerns to the community. In Somalia, for example, “there is ample evidence that demonstrates the exalted status of elderly, specifically widowed, pastoralist women in their own households and wider communities”—women outside of this demographic will be less able to exercise influence.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Berry’s work in Rwanda observes that women’s networks can produce a hierarchy of victimhood that privileges certain women’s experiences or loss over others.¹⁴¹ The tendency to consider women’s activism apolitical obscures women’s balancing of multiple identities and interests and divorces women’s organizing from the oppression they face as women and members of other identity groups. Though the inclusion of women’s perspectives is important, assuming that female representatives will be in a position to represent the full spectrum of women’s interests and experiences is problematic.

Furthermore, women’s inclusion in peacebuilding activities should not be regarded as a surefire guarantee of success. Despite frequent proclamations that women are inherently more peaceful than men, it is clear that women’s mobilization and social influence can facilitate both violence *and* peacebuilding. A task for policymakers seeking to promote peace and post-conflict reconciliation is to harmonize women’s interests with peace or to identify the groups already working toward this end and broker partnerships with them. Though it is often observed that women bear a particular burden during conflict, they may see conflict as a means of advancing their status or well-being. Some reports suggest that women encourage men to go on raids or participate in violence because of the material or social benefits that they may gain.¹⁴²

If women feel insecure or threatened, they may see mobilization into violence as the best means of ensuring their own safety and pursuing their interests. Describing dynamics in the northern Rift Valley, Mkutu observes that “When women are told that their sons or husbands have been killed in raids, the first thing some of the cross border women will request is the deceased’s gun, since the gun can be used to protect the home and is also a convertible currency.¹⁴³ He also notes reports “that widowed women buy guns for their sons, so their boys will get cows, and the security of the homestead will be assured.”¹⁴⁴ In other instances, women’s feelings of insecurity lead them to encourage men to take up arms either to improve their security or retaliate in retribution for violence they experienced violence.¹⁴⁵

Failing to identify and incorporate women’s interests into peacebuilding activities produces blind spots and perpetuates drivers of violence to continue. Peace builders are ill-served by the assumption that all women in a community will identify disarmament or the cessation of hostilities as being in their imme-

140 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 6.

141 Berry, *War, Women, and Power*.

142 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*.

143 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 350.

144 Ibid.

145 Some of the dynamics of retaliatory violence are discussed in Jana Krause, “Stabilization and Local Conflicts: Communal and Civil War in South Sudan,” *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 5 (2019): 478–93.

diate self-interest. In some instances, part of the peacebuilding process will involve bringing women's interests (and women's organizations) into alignment with the objectives of peacebuilding programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Women can contribute to peacebuilding activities, particularly by helping to legitimize peacebuilding efforts and diffusing non-violent norms. Leveraging women's social influence for peace, however, requires engaging with women's interests and ensuring that the grievances and conditions that drive women's participation in and contributions to armed groups are adequately addressed in peacebuilding programs. Given women's roles in shaping community norms, getting women's buy-in may be a means of increasing the legitimacy of externally designed, funded, or implemented peacebuilding programs. The following recommendations outline how policymakers can build gender-sensitive peacebuilding programs for CBAG-related conflict.

- As a part of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding programs, policymakers should fund participatory research to engage a broad cross-section of women and other relevant demographics. Engaging women along the socio-economic spectrum, of different ages, religions, and ethnicities, is critical to understanding the landscape of women's interests and capabilities in CBAG-affected contexts. Doing so will not only help policymakers engage women in programming but also identify hierarchies within women's access to power and groups of women that are doubly marginalized by dint of their gender and other identity markers. Participatory research would also help policymakers identify the venues in which women are most effectively engaged as peacebuilders and which women are best placed to promote peace.
- Policy and programming should produce gendered analysis¹⁴⁶ of the impact of formal peacebuilding programs (particularly disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs) on women's well-being. These formal, technical programs may make women more economically or socially vulnerable, raising the risk of violence against women.
- Incorporate informal structures and fora into peacebuilding programming where women may have a comparative advantage in peacebuilding. Gendering the EMT approach to CBAGs reveals that women may be especially effective at managing and transforming CBAGs through shaping norms about the acceptability of violence outside of formal venues.
 - » Policymakers should acknowledge the influence women exercise in the home, in their social networks, or through customary practices and incorporate women's abilities to shift community norms to facilitate peacebuilding.

146 The Canadian government defines gender analysis as "the variety of methods used to understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities, and the constraints they face relative to each other. Gender analysis provides information that recognizes that gender, and its relationship with race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, disability, and/or other status, is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behaviour and activities that women and men have in economic, social and legal structures." Government of Canada, "Gender Analysis," <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/gender-analysis-analyse-comparative.aspx?lang=eng>, accessed May 2, 2020.

- » Those seeking to promote peace in CBAG-affected areas can provide women with the fora to collaborate on pro-peace messaging and encourage women to leverage their social influence to reduce violence.
- » Blessings and ceremonies are important aspects of conflict dynamics in a number of CBAGs described in this report. In some contexts, the performance of violence is a means of achieving manhood or demonstrating masculinity. Policymakers can work with communities to promote ceremonies and rites of passage that do not depend on the exercise of violence. This may require working with community leaders to develop ceremonial achievements of adulthood and markers of social standing that do not reward violence or association with violence.
- Ensure that peacebuilding and redevelopment programs meaningfully engage with a wide range of women’s interests. Women are not a homogenous bloc—various categories of women will be affected by conflict differently and will have divergent interests and capabilities in the post-conflict period. Understanding how peacebuilding programs impact various categories of women is critical for ensuring their effectiveness and durability.
 - » Women involved in perpetrating violence as a part of a community-based armed group may be a minority of combatants, but should not be overlooked in demobilization and reintegration efforts. Recruitment into these programs, in addition to being context specific, should not demand that women produce a weapon to qualify.
 - » Peacebuilding initiatives should ensure that the interests of a broad cross-section of women are represented in formal conflict resolution programs. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 requires not only women’s involvement in programs but also the meaningful incorporation of a diverse array of women’s interests. This may require adopting more nuanced measures than merely the quota of women participants, to include the involvement of women of different religions, ethnicities, classes, and identity groups.
 - » Gender-sensitive program analyses should disaggregate the anticipated effect of programming of women of different socio-economic classes, ethnic groups, religious communities, and other relevant social groupings.
 - » Policymakers must bear in mind that a return to pre-conflict social or economic orders may not benefit women and may put specific categories of women at a disadvantage.

CONCLUSION

Though not always as visibly, women play important roles in community-based armed groups (CBAGs). Women affiliated with CBAGs engage in a variety of tasks, including frontline fighting, logistics and management, clandestine operations, and legitimizing the CBAG within the community. Women’s contributions to CBAGs are often made through informal, private, or otherwise difficult-to-observe channels, including personal relationships with their husbands, brothers, fathers, and suitors.

This study finds that, in contrast to some revisionist or radical armed groups, CBAGs often incorporate women into their organizations in line with pre-existing gender norms or in a manner that corresponds to customary roles for women. Not all women may be in a position to contribute to these organizations; identity characteristics beyond gender shape whether and how women can contribute to CBAGs. Overlapping and intersectional identities shape the ways in which women interact with CBAGs. Analysts and policymakers concerned with the implementation of UNSCR 1325 must grapple with the reality that not all women will be equally well-positioned to exercise influence over CBAG activity. Not all women will be equally likely to experience predatory behavior at the hands of coercive CBAGs, and not all women will be equally able to contribute to peacebuilding.

Future analysis examining women's participation in community-based armed groups and conflict dynamics should examine the degree to which women help shape norms of masculinity, the ways in which women's performance of domesticity or traditional femininity is a political act, and the relationship between women and weapons in places marked by community-based armed-group violence. Additionally, there may be lessons learned from a more detailed discussion of instances in which women's interests have not been aligned with peacebuilders' objectives.

This study also found that effectively engaging women in peacebuilding often means engaging the fora in which women exercise authority. Policymakers, more accustomed to engaging with government bodies and formal institutions, may struggle to do so. Though women may be able to leverage traditional or customary systems to advance their interests, policymakers should be cognizant of the ways in which these fora or practices can entrench marginalization along other relevant demographic lines. Furthermore, peacebuilding efforts must recognize that women affiliated with CBAGs may face a different set of challenges related to social and economic integration relative to women affiliated with other types of NSAGs.

There are no defined set of post-conflict peacebuilding activities that are best for women's interests or inclusion across different contexts. Peacebuilding and redevelopment programs must take into account a diverse set of women's experiences, perspectives, and priorities. Ultimately, peacebuilders are better served by identifying a set of gender-sensitive analytical practices that can be adapted to specific contexts than attempting to develop a one-size-fits-all approach.

Though challenging, it is imperative to incorporate women into peacebuilding programs responding to CBAG violence. Failing to engage women in peacebuilding efforts and post-conflict reconciliation programs will undermine the durability and effectiveness of these programs.

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