

Brokers of Legitimacy:

Women in Community-Based Armed Groups

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of conclusions from the mapping effort of the RESOLVE Network's Community-Based Armed Groups Research Initiative. This line of inquiry on women, peace, and security aims to rise beyond the conventional understanding of women in conflict, disambiguate their roles, agency, and choices in diverse security situations, demystify women's capacity for violence and peace, and open a policy-relevant conversation on the relationship of gender and security. This Research Report documents women's forms of participation in community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and peacebuilding in areas affected by CBAG violence in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on East Africa. To learn more about the research methodology and findings, please refer to this fact sheet's companion RESOLVE Research Report by Hilary Matfess: *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*.

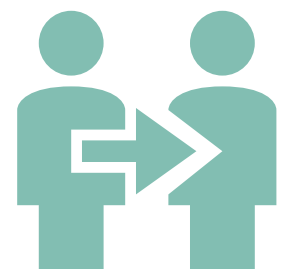
Entry into CBAGs



- » Women participate in operations, provide logistical support, and legitimize CBAGs' activities to the civilian population. Many narratives of women and conflict emphasize conscription and coercion as pathways for women's entry into armed groups, however, women also lend support to CBAGs to advance their economic, social, or personal interests.

Contributions to CBAGs

- » Women's contributions to CBAGs are often underestimated due to their influence in informal 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.



A Diverse Group



- » 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.

Peacebuilding Efforts

- » Women are often well-placed to diffuse non-violent norms and help legitimize peacebuilding efforts. However, a gender-essentialist assumption that women's interests are automatically aligned with policymakers' and peacebuilders' objectives undermines the effectiveness of peacebuilding and stabilization efforts.



Key Takeaways

- » 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.

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