

Women, CBAGs, and the Politics of Security Supply & Demand in Côte d'Ivoire

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of findings from a RESOLVE Network Community-based Armed Groups Series Research Report exploring women's roles in conflict and security in Côte d'Ivoire. Based on extensive field research and an original dataset of interviews with a wide range of informal security actors, the report explores the drivers of women's participation and the roles they play—both formally and informally—in community-based security groups (CBSGs). More specifically, the report seeks to understand how women are involved in CBSGs by investigating their motivations and roles in context, and how they influence both the supply side and demand side of security provision. To learn more about the research methodology and detailed findings, please refer to the RESOLVE Research Report by Arsène Brice Bado and Brandon Kendhammer: [Women, CBAGs, and the Politics of Security Supply & Demand in Côte d'Ivoire](#) (2022).



Women play key roles in shaping the CBSG landscape, both as direct or auxiliary participants and as engines of demand for security provision. The nature of these demands varies across the country's landscape—in rural areas, insecurity is shaped by post-conflict land tenure and communal tensions. In urban areas, crime and the needs of business owners and entrepreneurs to protect their property are key drivers.



Conflict from 2002-2011 reshaped social norms and expectations around women's participation in security provision and violence in uneven and impermanent ways. By any measure, women are more involved now—in both formal and informal ways, actively and more indirectly—in security provision and violence than in the years before the decline of state security capacity in the 1990s. Some are even openly motivated by a desire for justice or revenge, outgrowths of the social costs of a decade of conflict, and continued community tensions amidst a weak state security response.



Strong stigmas and social norms remain that challenge women's legitimacy in CBSGs. Regardless, at least some women involved in the more violent aspects of CBSG participation frame their personal stories of engagement in terms of challenging these norms or finding a new kind of community that accepts them. Nevertheless, women are more likely to be indirect or auxiliary participants—handling logistics, spying or reporting, and trafficking drugs or arms—than to be bearing arms.



A small but influential subset of women who have encouraged the emergence and consolidation of CBSGs in their community have achieved a level of operational and strategic control over these groups. As “patronnes” or “godmothers,” these women have effectively structured CBSGs around their private security needs, an alternative to professional private security or relationships with state authorities that have downstream consequences for the wider communities in which they operate.



Women’s participation and engagement with Ivoirien CBSGs is driven by a complex mix of forces and factors. Among women who emphasized their economic reasons for direct participation, few seemed satisfied with the outcome. CBSG engagement among poor women does not seem to function as an enrichment scheme. Instead, this engagement often simply helps them to keep afloat during difficult times while leaving them vulnerable and (at least sometimes) stigmatized.

MOVING FORWARD

- ▶ **Incorporate** more female personnel within the armed and security forces to mitigate women’s membership in armed groups and in informal community-based security groups.
- ▶ **Incorporate** a more intersectional lens to show how people’s social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination.
- ▶ **Further** research/assessment of the patronne phenomenon and its consequences, including avenues to involve women patronnes in interventions aiming to transform the informal security sector.
- ▶ **Support** programs aiming to improve women’s economic conditions, especially in locations affected by frequent intercommunal violence and in underprivileged urban neighborhoods.
- ▶ **Support** programs that—in culturally sensitive ways—examine, address, and avoid activating social stigmas that push women to join CBSGs and those around acknowledging that women can and do engage in armed violence.
- ▶ **Initiate** programs targeting women that aim at bringing armed CBSGs out of the shadows as a mechanism for disarmament and rebuilding trust at the community-level security.

RESOLVE NETWORK

Better Research | Informed Practice | Improved Policy on Violent Extremism
www.resolvenet.org | [@resolvenet](https://twitter.com/resolvenet)

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, acknowledged partners contributing to the production of this publication, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.



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



RESOLVE would like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for its generous support for this report and RESOLVE’s Community-Based Armed Groups Research Initiative.