

AGITATORS AND PACIFIERS

Women in Community-based Armed Groups in Kenya

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of conclusions from a RESOLVE Network's Community-based Armed Groups (CBAGs) Series Research Report investigating gender dynamics in conflict ecosystems, women's roles in conflict and security, and women's participation in CBAGs in Kenya. Data collection sites for the study included 1) the capital city, Nairobi; 2) Isiolo County; 3) Marsabit County; 4) Mombasa County; and 5) Bungoma County. The research report demonstrates the utility of context-specific analyses to capture the diversity of women's agency in their engagement with CBAGs and thus their contributions to the local peace and security landscape. The report also summarizes women's diverse motivations to participate in CBAGs in Kenya and their roles and agency within them. To learn more about the research methodology and detailed findings, please refer to the RESOLVE Research Report by Prisca Kamungi, Phoebe Donnelly, and Boglarka Bozsogi: [Agitators and Pacifiers: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in Kenya](#) (2022).

Women's motivations for participation and engagement with armed groups

Women's motivations and roles within CBAGs—much like those of men—are varied and highly contextual.



- Personal tragedies and the desire to avenge loved ones were seen as main motivations for joining or supporting CBAGs, especially in areas where state response to conflict dynamics is deemed unjust.
- In addition, poverty and a lack of sustainable livelihoods to support themselves and their families were frequently indicated as reasons for women joining CBAGs.
- Women's support of CBAGs was also found to respond to complex societal pressures within their communities.

Women's roles in armed groups and conflict



Beyond their material support to CBAGs, women's active roles within these groups were as diverse as their motivations. One of their key roles is motivating fighters and inciting violence through interpersonal ties and communal rituals and rites. Women also hold operational roles in recruitment, intelligence, networking, and planning.



Armed groups also exploit female stereotypes in two ways. First, groups use women for operational tasks, such as messengers or traffickers, because they are less likely to raise suspicion and be searched. Second, women also perform traditionally feminine tasks such as emotional support and cooking and cleaning.

Perceptions of women's engagement with armed groups and conflict



Community perceptions of women's participation in CBAGs differed. Some viewed them as transgressive, symbolic of a breakdown of social order. Others saw them as essential to community security, providing useful information and advanced warning regarding security concerns and generally contributing to the protection of their neighbors.



Outside of CBAGs, women contributed to other types of community security mechanisms, including peace committees, community policing committees, and neighborhood security efforts. While the inclusion of women in peace committees is largely applauded, interviews with community members showed their inclusion is not always welcome because of perceived interference in community traditions, cultural norms, and practices.

MOVING FORWARD

- **Ensure** women can earn a living outside of conflict crucial to overcoming cultures of conflict. Education, training, raising literacy levels, and business opportunities can help forgo turning to violence or illegal dealings for self-sustenance.
- **Involve** women in decision-making from the family to the wider community level and have access to government and community programs, resources, and services to be effective agents of peace and security. Men must be involved in addressing gender inequality.
- **Ensure** gender considerations form the cornerstone of reconciliation processes including disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and resocialization programs. Strategic operational guidelines must address the needs of both men and women.
- **Consider** women's diverse, complex experiences as valuable sources of knowledge and influence in programs seeking to address violence and insecurity. Interventions on inter-community violence must start at the household level and integrate women's views, perceptions, and experiences of conflict.
- **Support** women groups to lead in inter-communal relations, prevent violent extremism, and conduct needs assessments for at-risk individuals. Strengthening social networks can mitigate alienation, offer constructive, gender-sensitive socialization avenues, and advocate for women's empowerment and sustainable livelihoods.

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