

PHASE 3: Mapping the Literature on Women in Community-Based Armed Groups in East and West Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) would be incomplete without an examination of the complex and diverse roles of women. Not only do the mobilization, networks, and operations of CBAGs affect women, often most harshly, but women also assume active roles in community-driven security and armed groups. Yet, despite decades of feminist research documenting the gendered aspects of violence, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how women navigate conflict. While the negative effects of communal violence on women have been well-studied, less attention has been paid to the ways in which women contribute to and even benefit from this type of violence. 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. These gaps in understanding have significant implications for policymakers and practitioners seeking to address conflicts where women play critical—though often obscured—roles.

This phase of the RESOLVE CBAGs research initiative begins with two research reports that map the available literature on women’s participation in CBAGs in East and West Africa. In the East Africa mapping paper, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*, author Hilary Matfess examines the myriad roles of women in CBAGs, how different women relate to these groups, and how women can contribute to peacebuilding initiatives in communities affected by violence. The report underlines that women, as a group, are heterogenous and have different abilities and willingness to participate in CBAGs, violence, or peacebuilding. In *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*, author Jakana Thomas reviews the current literature on women’s participation in community security and proposes research questions for further study, and examines accounts of recruitment into CBAGs in four West African countries. The report offers recommendations, informed by the reviewed cases, for policymakers and practitioners to integrate an understanding of gender dynamics affecting the behavior of West African CBAGs into their work.

Findings

While the reports analyzed the available literature on micro-level perspectives and local dynamics specific to their regional focus, they did not find a stark deviation between East and West Africa. The research found that women’s motivations for joining CBAGs are often similar to those of men. “Few uniquely female reasons for seeking membership in CBAGs are apparent, with the pursuit of gender equity as one

notable exception,” according to Thomas.¹ The research also found that affiliation with or participation in CBAGs can be an avenue to gain social status, transcend traditional gender roles, or pursue gender equality. Generally, security-related drivers are prominent, as women feel a sense of duty to defend their homeland or the need to seek protection for themselves. Participation in CBAGs can also serve to avenge loss and grievances, and groups that enjoy high levels of community support and legitimacy can rely on voluntary or grievance-driven recruitment. Women in economically precarious situations may also be incentivized to join a CBAG for material benefits, career opportunities, or political opportunism.

Outside of women’s desire to participate in CBAGs, the norms of these groups determine whether women are able to do so. As these norms are often informed by local norms, community gender relations and traditions determine the scope and way of women’s engagement. Their participation is also affected by additional identity characteristics, such as marriage status and partner, age, ethnicity, clan, religious identity, and socioeconomic factors. This finding highlights the need to see women not as a monolithic group but as diverse as men in populations where CBAGs operate. Frequently, “women’s contributions to CBAGs mirror their contributions to their families and communities more generally,” writes Matfess. In some cases, women engage in violence directly, while some CBAGs proscribe women’s direct participation in violence. In turn, indirect contributions include non-combat tasks such as logistics management, clandestine operations, intelligence gathering, searching other women, and transporting and smuggling in support of group operations. When women’s involvement is limited, this seems to be a sign of suppression rather than of disinterest. Nevertheless, the research proves that while norms affect women’s opportunities, women can also bend and transform norms.

Even without formal affiliations, women exert substantial influence over CBAGs as arbiters of morality and legitimacy. Women have used traditional sources of influence or symbolism, songs, poetry, rituals, blessings, and public proclamations to express their support of or opposition to conflict and compel fighters into action or constrain violence. Across West Africa, by leveraging matrifocal morality or gerontocracy, women have summoned female sources of power to express anger or desperation such as female genital power: defiant disrobing weaponizing nakedness as a curse and protective amulet. Such rituals can avert violence, legitimize group activity to the community, or encourage violence and inspire bravery, boosting members’ morale or recruiting more men into fighting.

Precisely because of the informal and customary nature of their influence, women’s contributions are often downplayed and underestimated. Even when women are involved in CBAGs in a way that subverts gender norms, their participation does not transform gender dynamics in their societies. Thomas argues that “women’s participation in CBAGs appears to have failed in producing large-scale, sweeping changes for women, writ large.”² The East Africa study found that CBAGs, often by nature, incorporate women in accordance with existing communal, customary gender norms and roles. Since CBAGs tend to be armed groups that are not revisionist but rather aim to uphold the status quo, their operations cannot

1 Jakana Thomas. *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>, 12.

2 Ibid, 23.

be assumed to facilitate changes to political and social orders, and, likewise, female participation to reap straightforward benefits for women.

The findings on women’s agency in security governance carry implications for policy and practice. This research strives to promote policy options for inclusive and gender-sensitive conflict prevention, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconciliation and stabilization, demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR), and security sector reform (SSR).³ Women can contribute to all phases of the engagement, management, transformation (EMT) framework⁴ with the potential of reducing the destructive edge of CBAGs. In short- and medium-term engagement, women can build trust and legitimacy between a CBAG and the wider community, influence group-community relationships, prevent atrocities against women, and mitigate CBAG violence.

Conclusion

At its core, the project seeks to understand the reality of women’s political agency and capacity for violence and security beyond the mainstream conceptualization framed by their relationship with men. As such, a key takeaway from the mapping effort is the heterogeneity of women and the fluidity of their engagement with CBAGs. “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.”⁵ Instead of reinforcing stereotypes, the focus must remain on understanding the specificities of women’s grievances, motivations, roles in conflict, and contributions to peace.

Not all women can or will be peacemakers. Just like men, women can curb violence, promote peace, or add further instability; they can be potential veto-players, arbiters of violence, or sources of legitimacy. When and why do women make the choice to advocate for peace over violence? “In this vein, peace and conflict can be viewed as instruments; when it is considered necessary to achieve a desired outcome, women are likely to promote violence. When conflict has reached its productive limits, women may pursue peace with equal fervor.”⁶ Rather, since women shape community norms, acquiring their buy-in can increase the legitimacy of externally designed, funded, or implemented programs.

Assessing the formal and informal contributions women make to armed community mobilization and hybrid security reveals opportunities for gender-specific engagement. However, the research findings suggest that unidimensional considerations of women’s relationship to conflict and security may under-

3 See: Jakana Thomas, *Gendered Security Sector Reform: What Can We Learn from Women’s Participation in Community-Based Armed Groups?* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2022.1.cbags>.

4 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.1>.

5 Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>, 30.

6 Thomas, *Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*, 31.

mine violence reduction and peacebuilding efforts. Further research is suggested to help explain how these dynamics work in practice. Comparative case study research can help to illuminate key variations in women's involvement across groups and geographic regions.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Matfess, Hilary. *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

Available in French: Matfess, Hilary. *Pourvoyeuses de légitimité : Les femmes dans les groupes armés communautaires*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags.fr.2021.3>.

Thomas, Jakana. *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

Available in French: Thomas, Jakana. *Devoir et défiance : Les femmes dans les groupes armés communautaires en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

POLICY NOTES

Thomas, Jakana. *Gendered Security Sector Reform: What Can We Learn from Women's Participation in Community-Based Armed Groups?* Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2022.1.cbags>.

BROKERS OF LEGITIMACY

Women in Community-
based Armed Groups

Hilary Matfess

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Hilary Matfess is a PhD Candidate in Yale University's Political Science department, where her research examines gender and conflict, with a regional focus on sub-Saharan Africa. *Women and the War on Boko Haram*, Hilary's first book, was published in 2017. Her academic research has been published in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and *African Studies Review*. She has also written for the Washington Post's 'Monkey Cage Blog,' Lawfare, *Quartz Africa*, and *World Politics Review*, among others.

For more information about RESOLVE, its network of experts, and its research across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, please visit our website at www.resolve.net.org and follow the discussion on Twitter via [@resolvenet](https://twitter.com/resolvenet).

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 demands 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 AND 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 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 23, summarizing table 2.

12 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 23, summarizing table 2.

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

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. Henshaw, Alexis Leanna. "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 C. Watson and R. Grahn, "Pastoral Women As Peacemakers," (Nairobi: USAID, DFID, AU/IBAR, 2003), <https://web.archive.org/web/20110615183320/.https://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/DOC12925.pdf>

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 M. 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): 233–234.

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.

that are “more offensive, conflictive, and indiscriminate, targeted against the state or the community, 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 Kathryn 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): 1169–1192.

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): 824–849.

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/>; Chitra Nagajaran, “Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria,” *Center for Civilians in Conflict*, (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 AND 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, "c'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed,'" 97.

37 "Nolte, "Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed,'" 97.

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): 179–196; 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, 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, AND 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 Petrich and Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins.”

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

53 Gardner, Judith. “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 and Grahn, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers.”

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

57 Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 152.

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): 220.

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.

OROMO SIQQEE / GAADA

The example of Siqqee 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 Siqqee, 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 Siqqee 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 Siqqee.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/Siqqee Democracy and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9, no. 4 (2013): 277–295.

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, “Siqqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia,” *Setawet*, (May 2018).

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

67 Belay and Teferra, “Siqqee 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): 822–829.

69 Jeylan W. Hussein, “A cultural representation of women in the Oromo society,” *African Study Monographs* 25, no. 3 (2004): 103–147.

KARAMOJA REGION AND 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 "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>

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

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.

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

86 Reuters, "Factbox: Key Facts about Kenya's Mungiki Gang," 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 Reuters, "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 Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal, "Country Advice Kenya Kenya."

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): 301–319.

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 AND 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 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.

93 Rasmussen, “Mungiki As Youth Movement.”.

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

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

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

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 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.

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 Worthen et al., "'I stand like a woman,'" 55.

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

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): 668–689.

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 and 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 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, Schuberth 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

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

104 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 16.

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, AND PROMOTING PEACE THROUGH CEREMONIES AND 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 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

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

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 Bamlaku, Tesfaye, and Beyene, “Women in Conflict and Indigenous Conflict Resolution among the Issa and Gurgura Clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia,” 92.

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.

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.” 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.”¹¹⁸ 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.¹¹⁹

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 shape social norms towards non-violence. Research shows that improving women’s security in the home contributes to overall state stability.¹²⁰ Across a number of pastoralist communities in East Africa, “women’s institutions have customarily mitigated the abuses of husbands and other male kin.”¹²¹ 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.”¹²² Kipuri and Ridgewell also

112 Watson and Grahn, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers.”

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

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

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

118 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>.

119 Julia Zulver, “High-Risk Feminism in El Salvador: Women’s Mobilisation in Violent Times,” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 2 (2016): 171–185.

120 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.

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

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

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.”¹²³ 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.”¹²⁴ 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.¹²⁵ 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.”¹²⁶

Women’s inclusion in formal peacebuilding programs and 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 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.”¹²⁷ 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.

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

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

125 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.

126 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-transitional-justice-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1200>.

127 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.

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.¹²⁸ 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.¹²⁹ 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.”¹³⁰ 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.

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 peacebuilding activities.¹³¹ 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.¹³² 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.

128 Watson and Grahn, “Pastoral Women as Peacemakers.”

129 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.

130 Hudson, “Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire.”

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

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

Women’s organizing and 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.¹³³ 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.¹³⁴

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.”¹³⁵ Women’s ability to mobilize *as women* can be “considered to be extensions of women’s existing gender roles,”¹³⁶ as “Somali women have always been the integrative girdles that through marriage brought together and cemented two different and distant clans.”¹³⁷ 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.¹³⁸

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.¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰ 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 import-

133 Anne-Kathrin Kreft, “Responding to Sexual Violence: Women’s Mobilization in War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 220–233.

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

135 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): 314–333.

136 Padmanabhan, “Pastoral Women As Strategic and Tactical Agents in Conflicts,” 243–244.

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

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

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

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

ant, 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.¹⁴¹

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."¹⁴² 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."¹⁴³ 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.¹⁴⁴

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 immediate 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

141 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*.

142 Mkutu, "Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa," 350.

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

144 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): 478–493.

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 analysis¹⁴⁵ 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.
 - » 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 pro-

145 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.

mote 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.

CONCLUSIONS

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.

SOURCES

- Abrahams, Ray. "Sungusungu: Village Vigilante Groups in Tanzania." *African Affairs* 86, no. 343 (1987): 179–196.
- 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, July 2018.
- Agiboba, Daniel. *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019.
- Anderson, Jessica L. "Gender, Local Justice, and Ownership: Confronting Masculinities and Femininities in Northern Uganda." *Peace Research* (2009): 59–83.
- Annan, Jeannie, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson. "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 6 (2011): 877–908.
- Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal. "Country Advice: Kenya." January 13, 2012, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5033b44c60.html>.
- Belay, Firaol and Sehin Teferra. "Siiqqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia." *Setaweet* (May 2018).
- Berhane, Daniel. "Briefing: What is Oromo's Gada system?" *Horn Affairs*, December 1, 2016. <https://hornaffairs.com/2016/12/01/description-oromo-gada-system/>.
- Berry, Marie E. *War, Women, and Power: From Violence to Mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Bevan, James. *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>.
- Clark, Christopher 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>.
- Coulter, Chris, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas. *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008.
- Decker, Alicia C. "Women and National Liberation in Africa." *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, edited by Immanuel Nass. Blackwell Reference online, 2009.
- Debsu, Dejene N. "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.
- Donnelly, Phoebe Grace. "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups." PhD diss., Tufts University, 2019.
- El-Bushra, Judy. "Fused in Combat: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict." *Development in Practice* 13, no. 2–3 (2003): 252–265.
- Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- Fleisher, Michael L. "'Sungusungu': State-Sponsored Village Vigilante Groups among the Kuria of Tanzania." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 40, no. 228–299 (2010): 2.
- Forney, Jonathan Filip. "Who can we trust with a gun? Information networks and adverse selection in militia recruitment." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 824–849.
- Freeman, Colin. "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/>.
- Frontier Ventures. "Baggara, Shuwa Arab in Sudan." The Joshua Project, accessed May 2, 2020, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14926/SU.
- Gardner, Judith. "Increasing Women's Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes: Life Histories: Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo." Uppsala: Life and Peace Institute, 2018.
- Glowacki, Luke, and Katja Gonc. "Customary Institutions and Traditions in Pastoralist Societies: Neglected Potential for Conflict Resolution." *Conflict Trends* no. 1 (2013): 26–32.
- Government of Canada. "Gender Analysis." Canada and the World, accessed May 2, 2020, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/gender_analysis-analyse_comparative.aspx?lang=eng.

- Henshaw, Alexis, June Eric-Udorie, Hannah Godefia, 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.
- Hodgson, Dorothy L. *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Hudson, Heidi. "Peacebuilding through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire." *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 287–318.
- Hudson, Valerie M. and Hilary Matfess. "In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict." *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 7–40.
- Hudson, Valerie M., 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.
- Hudson, Valerie M., Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett. *Sex and world peace*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Hussein, Jeylan W. "A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromo Society." *African Study Monographs* 25, no. 3 (2004): 103–147.
- Ingiiris, Mohamed H. 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): 314–333.
- Jalata, Asafa and Harwood Schaffer. "The Oromo, Gadaa/Siqqee Democracy and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9, no. 4 (2013): 277–295.
- Jamar, Astrid and Christine Bell. "Transitional Justice and Peace Negotiations with a Gender Lens." UN Women, 2018, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/inclusive-peace-processes-transitional-justice-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1200>.
- Kinsella, Helen. "Feminism." In *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by John Baylis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Kipuri, Naomi, 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>.
- Krause, Jana. "Stabilization and Local Conflicts: Communal and Civil War in South Sudan." *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 5 (2019): 478–493.
- Kreft, Anne-Kathrin. "Responding to Sexual Violence: Women's Mobilization in War." *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 220–233.
- MacEachern, Scott. *Searching for Boko Haram: A History of Violence in Central Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Marks, Zoe. "Gender, Social Networks and Conflict Processes." *feminists@ law* 9, no. 1 (2019). <https://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/feministsatlaw/article/view/743>.
- Mazurana, Dyan, and Khristopher Carlson. *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004.
- Mkutu, Kennedy Agade. "Pastoralist Conflict, Governance and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa." PhD diss., University of Bradford, 2005.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. "Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989." *Gender & Society* 9, no. 3 (1995): 328–358.
- Morewitz, Stephen. "Bride Abduction." In *Kidnapping and Violence*, 11–22. New York, NY: Springer, 2019.
- Nagajaran, Chitra. "Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria." Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018.
- Njogu, Kimani and Hervé Maupeu, eds. *Songs and Politics in Eastern Africa*. Dar es Salaam: African Books Collective, 2007.
- Nolte, Insa. "Ethnic Vigilantes and the State: The Oodua People's Congress in South-Western Nigeria." *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 217–235.
- . "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed': Yoruba Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria." *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 84–106.
- Ntahobari, Josephine, Basilissa Ndayiziga, and Anatole Ayissi. "Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices." Geneva: UNESCO, 2003.
- Nyabola, H. Nanjala. "The Legal Challenge of Civil Militia Groups in Kenya." *African Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 89–102.

- Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda. "Creating Conditions for Promoting Human Security and Recovery in Karamoja, 2007/2008-2009/2010." January 2007. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b44c3ee4.pdf>.
- Oloo, Adams, 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.
- Onyango, Eria Olowo. "Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State. The Case of the Karimojong in Northeastern Uganda." PhD diss., University of Borgen, 2010.
- Padmanabhan, M. "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): 239–266.
- Petrich, Katharine and Phoebe Donnelly. "Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab's Shifting Relationship with Kenyan Women." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (2019): 1169–1192.
- Rasmussen, Jacob. "Mungiki As Youth Movement: Revolution, Gender and Generational Politics in Nairobi, Kenya." *Young* 18, no. 3 (2010): 301–319.
- Reuters. "Factbox: Key facts about Kenya's Mungiki gang." March 6, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-gang-mungiki-sb/factbox-key-facts-about-kenyas-mungiki-gang-idUSTRE52537620090306>.
- Rupesinghe, Natasja and Yida Diall. "Women and the Katiba Macina in Central Mali." *Nupi Policy Brief*. Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 2019.
- Schilling, Janpeter, 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.
- Schubert, Moritz. *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa Lessons Learned & Measures of Success*. Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019.
- Stites, Elizabeth, and Darlington Akabwai. "Changing Roles, Shifting Risks: Livelihood Impacts of Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda." Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009.
- Stites, Elizabeth, and Darlington Akabwai. "'We Are Now Reduced to Women': Impacts of Forced Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda." *Nomadic Peoples* 14, no. 2 (2010): 24–43.
- Tadesse, Bamlaku, 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): 85–110.
- Taylor, Lucy. "Hawks & Doves in Sudan's Armed Conflict: Al-Hakkamat Baggara Women of Darfur, by Suad ME Musa." *Journal of African Military History* 3, no. 1 (2019): 67–69.
- 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.
- Van Hauwermeiren, Remco. "The Ogaden War: Somali Women's Roles." *Afrika Focus* 25, no. 2 (2012): 9–30.
- Van Metre, Lauren. *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019.
- Viterna, Jocelyn and Kathleen M. Fallon. "Democratization, Women's Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison." *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 4 (2008): 668–689.
- Watson, C. and R. Grahm. "Pastoral Women As Peacemakers." Nairobi, Kenya: USAID, DFID, AU/IBAR, 2003. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110615183320/https://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/DOC12925.pdf>.
- Włodarczyk, Nathalie. "Creating Magic Soldiers: Kamajor Mobilization and Initiation." In *Magic and Warfare*, 93–111. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Wood, Reed M. *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019.
- Worthen, Miranda, 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): 49–70.
- Zelalem, Muchie and Bayeh Endalcachew. "Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among Ambo Woreda Communities." *International Journal of Research* 1, no. 11 (2014): 822–829.
- Zulver, Julia. "High-risk Feminism in El Salvador: Women's Mobilisation in Violent Times." *Gender & Development* 24, no. 2 (2016): 171–185.

DUTY AND DEFIANCE

Women in Community-Based
Armed Groups in West Africa

Dr. Jakana Thomas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This desk report explores how West African community-based armed groups (CBAGs)¹ facilitate women's engagement with politics, create avenues for female expressions of anger, commitment to community values and national identity, and enable women to push for change in their communities by opening spaces for female participation. According to Agbiboa, CBAGs include security-oriented organizations such as hunter associations, vigilante groups, militias and gangs that *protect* communities from “petty crimes to insurgencies.”² Assessing the formal and informal contributions women make to armed community mobilization and hybrid security reveals opportunities for gender-specific engagement, and cautions that unidimensional considerations of where and how women intersect with conflict and security have the potential to undermine violence reduction and post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

In some CBAGs, such as Mali's Ganda Koy, women are among the formal leadership of community security organizations. In other contexts, such as in Northern Mali's Tuareg community, women are largely absent from active security roles. Women are also found in gray areas, where it is hard to assess whether their activities are formal or informal, or active or supportive. Given the ambiguity of female roles within such organizations, it is often difficult to evaluate the significance of women's activities in and to CBAGs. Indeed, women often articulate their roles as more instrumental to security provision than organization or community leaders do. This is not to suggest that women overestimate their accomplishments; instead in communities where men are typically assigned political agency while women are agents only in the domestic sphere, communities are more apt to rely on women's contributions without giving them due credit. This dynamic persists because women's participation is often offered and accepted out of necessity. Due to the ephemeral nature of these security arrangements, communities often have little interest in allowing the immediate security circumstances to upend enduring social structures, particularly gender hierarchies. Thus, CBAGs are often willing to accept women's help in a *marriage of convenience*, as long as it does not lead to long-term changes in traditional roles. This suggests a disjuncture between organizations' and women's interests, as many women who risk their lives to further community security do so for their own emancipation and for that of their nation.

Although many women hope to gain from their participation in CBAGs, most engage in community security provision for pragmatic reasons; both women and men find it important to seek out collective security arrangements when they perceive no other options. Likewise, community-based armed groups are most likely to assent to the incorporation of women when they recognize a strategic benefit to female participation. CBAGS are most likely to recruit women when they are needed as specialized labor or to fill

1 Launched in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development Africa Bureau, the RESOLVE Network Community-Based Armed Groups research initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa aims to provide key stakeholders with contextual information on the dynamics of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and current, prospective, and past approaches to engage, manage, and transform them. The project grapples with a complicated series of questions and decisions negotiated by stakeholders operating in conflict-affected societies across Sub-Saharan Africa.

2 Daniel Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37808/cbags.19.2>.

manpower shortfalls. Women’s participation in CBAGs can be beneficial to women as well. Armed groups offer women opportunities to advance community welfare, exercise political power and transcend their proscribed domestic roles. These benefits should not be taken as given, however. Since women’s roles in CBAGs are often dictated by local gender hierarchies,³ the prospects for meaningful gender empowerment owing from women’s participation in CBAGs during conflict is uncertain and the potential for long-term change appears to be minimal. Relatedly, this report cautions that women’s participation does not always improve the prospects for peace, nor reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence and related human rights abuses. Thus, a strategy of “add women and mix” may be ill-advised. Instead, solutions that acknowledge local gender hierarchies, recognize the diversity of women’s motives and orientations toward peace and conflict, and address root causes of male and female participation in CBAGs may contribute more to successful peacebuilding efforts.

Finally, it is important to recognize that while some CBAGs fulfill vital security and political roles in their communities, they may also undermine peace and security by exacerbating and perpetrating violence, which often inordinately affects women. Moreover, a subset of the community-based armed groups that women support openly work to subjugate and actively undermine women’s interests. Thus, any benefits women gain from participation in these groups must be weighed against the potential negative externalities these groups produce. Ultimately, there exists important heterogeneity in CBAGs that should not be overlooked when crafting policy and programmatic responses; these groups are not all helpful or harmful. They should not all be accommodated nor should they all be disbanded. Further study of these groups is necessary to parse their positive attributes from their destructive potential in order to determine whether women’s participation in CBAGs constitutes a net positive.

INTRODUCTION

Women often work toward the provision of community security during war through formal and informal membership in self-defense, paramilitary and vigilante organizations. Women fought as paramilitaries in the recent conflicts in both Ukraine and Syria. Some Ukrainian women joined the 39th Women’s Maidan, Aidar, and Azov battalions and were propelled by personal circumstances, while others saw their participation in self-defense units as an expression of their nationalist ideology or duty to protect their homeland.⁴ On the other hand, women in the Syrian Kurdish forces, particularly the Kurdish Women’s Protection Units (YPJ), mobilized against ISIS to protect women’s rights and advance the organization’s leftist, egalitarian vision of society.⁵ Colombian women also made up approximately 10 percent of the forces of the repressive United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).⁶

3 See Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington DC: RESOLVE Network, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

4 Jessica Trisko-Darden, Alexis Henshaw, and Ora Szekely, *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars* (Georgetown University Press, 2019), 19–20.

5 Trisko-Darden et al, *Insurgent Women*, 2019.

6 Andrea Méndez, “Militarized Gender Performativity: Women and Demobilization in Colombia’s FARC and AUC” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2012).

African women have participated similarly in formal community security organizations across conflict zones, civil wars, and hyperlocal territorial disputes. Women were active in the Civil Defense Forces and, to a lesser extent, the Kamajor militia during the civil war in Sierra Leone, the pro-Gbago militias in Côte d'Ivoire and many vigilante and self-defense forces across time and space in Nigeria. This desk report, which focuses particularly on women's relationships to community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in West Africa, uses existing narratives and depictions in the literature to better understand women's work within these groups. This report draws heavily on evidence from Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria to show that women often work toward the provision of an important public good within their communities—security—often with little acknowledgement.

In this report, CBAGs are defined as non-state armed groups that are either aligned with or complementary to the state and are marked both by their local ambitions and ties to communities.⁷ According to Agbibo, CBAGs include security-oriented organizations such as hunter associations, vigilante groups, militias, and gangs that *protect* communities from “petty crimes to insurgencies.”⁸ While this report focuses mainly on CBAGs that mobilize against rebel or terrorist organizations, it also speaks to the ways in which these same groups function to fight local crime. Invariably, CBAGs emerge in contexts of pervasive insecurity, principally as a result of weak state institutions, and are particularly encouraged by insufficient, inept, malevolent, or absent state security forces.⁹

CBAGs are not always in competition with the state, however. They sometimes collaborate with the government to enhance local security.¹⁰ In Nigeria, for example, both the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and Islamic Hisba cooperate with counterinsurgency forces, as do self-defense militias in Mali.¹¹ In each of these cases, state security forces recognized that CBAGs' embeddedness in local communities offered them a distinct advantage over forces from the “outside.” These cases present the opportunity to assess whether and how women's participation plays a significant role in the “success” of CBAG efforts.

To date, few studies have examined women's participation in African community-based security organizations explicitly. Although this oversight is surprising, the intense scholarly interest in women's participation in rebellion suggests that there is a fertile research agenda to be implemented. While the explosion of research on female engagement with violent extremist organizations has been aided by advances in both theory and data, the study of gendered participation in CBAGs has been hampered by a dearth of data and a lack of theoretical inquiry. This report seeks to address at least one of these shortcomings and map a way forward for research on the gender dimensions of CBAGs.

7 Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*, Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.3>.

8 Daniel Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

9 Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 6.

10 Ibid.

11 Hisba is a structure responsible for enforcing Sharia law within Islamic communities in northern Nigeria.

This report makes three primary contributions. The initial objective of this report is to review the current state of literature on women’s participation in community security and propose a set of research questions that have yet to garner scholarly attention. Second, existing scholarly accounts of recruitment into CBAGs in four West African countries—Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Mali—are examined to generate preliminary explanations of women’s integration into community armed groups. This is not an exhaustive or geographically representative set of cases. Instead, this report focuses on several prominent cases where CBAGs have been operative to examine the formal and informal roles that women have played within these movements.

This study utilizes a process-tracing approach, which relies on the description and sequencing of events, to make inferences about the causal process by which women come to participate in CBAGs. An inductive exercise suggests a number of salient explanations that can prime the further study of gender in these groups. Future researchers may use cross-national, time-series data to examine the generalizability of the relationships proposed in this report. Third, in recognition that academic research may lag behind practice, this study proposes a set of preliminary policy recommendations, informed by the selected cases, for practitioners hoping to better understand how gender dynamics affect the behavior of West African CBAGs.

Given the lack of scholarly attention to women’s contributions toward the security of their communities, a number of questions about the scope and form of female participation in formal community-based armed groups remain. For example, we still do not know how frequently women join these organizations, the motives for their participation, or the impact their involvement has on communities. Moreover, a casual glance at contemporary CBAGs within West Africa shows that women’s involvement varies across groups and geographic regions, even within a single country. What explains such variation? Finally, how does women’s participation in CBAGs differ from or accord with their activities in dissident organizations? These questions should be examined in future research.

EXISTING LITERATURE ON WOMEN’S FORMAL PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

Existing research on women in violent political organizations (VPOs) provides a useful starting point for understanding the decisions that underlie women’s recruitment into CBAGs given the shared emphasis on the use of violence as the primary means to achieve a group’s political aims; the use of violence is likely to provide similar incentives and disincentives for the enlistment of women across types of violent political organizations. This body of literature has coalesced around two main classes of explanations for women’s formal membership in violent non-state groups: women’s recruitment is a function of supply and demand. Supply-side factors explain why women are attracted to violent politics, while demand-side explanations describe an organization’s (dis)incentives for recruiting women within their ranks. Supply-side arguments assert that women join violent organizations for personal, political, and strategic reasons.

Women become attracted to violent politics as a means to pursue revenge, redemption, and retribution;¹² to advance gender equality and other political goals;¹³ for protection;¹⁴ and because they are pulled into rebellion by pre-existing network connections.¹⁵

Interestingly, with few exceptions, women's motivations, especially those centered on practical concerns like protection and other material benefits, and those focused on political affinities and vengeance largely mirror the push factors for male combatants.¹⁶ That is, supply-side explanations describe why an individual is attracted to a particular organization, movement or cause, but cannot necessarily explain if or when they become members or the roles they adopt within those groups if they do.¹⁷ Moreover, since men and women share largely similar motivations, supply-side explanations alone are insufficient for explaining the tendency for men to participate in violence more frequently than women. Therefore, to better understand why women may not participate in political violence despite strong motivations to do so, scholars have looked to group decision-making or demand-side explanations.

Demand-side explanations, which attempt to explain when, why, and how organizations create space for female recruits, largely discuss gendered recruitment in terms of either the expected costs or benefits of women's inclusion. Violent political organizations are more amenable to women's recruitment when discord is unlikely to result from decisions to diversify. Groups with ideologies that incorporate gender egalitarian ideals, such as leftist organizations¹⁸ and those with positive gender ideologies¹⁹ will find the recruitment of women attractive and less costly. Such groups will also yield a greater number of voluntary female recruits. Similarly, organizations that are convinced of—or affirm rhetorically—women's capabilities will find female recruits more appealing.²⁰

12 Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003): 37–54; Yoram Schweitzer, "Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Reality Vs. Myth" no. 84 Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2006; Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-national Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

13 Karen Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas* (Ohio University Press, 2014); Jocelyn Viterna, *Women in War: The Microprocesses of Mobilization in El Salvador* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171–195; Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 227–54.

14 Dara Kay Cohen, "Dueling Incentives: Sexual Violence in Liberia and the Politics of Human Rights Advocacy," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 445–458; Irma Specht, *Red Shoes: Experiences of Girls-Combatants in Liberia* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2006); Miranda, *Women and Political Violence*, 2009.

15 Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "'Like Going To A Fiesta'—The Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (2008): 609–634; Viterna *Women in War*, 2013; Chris Coulter, "Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?" *Feminist Review* 88 (2008): 54–73.

16 Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 539–661; Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

17 Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 3488–506.

18 Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46; Reed M. Wood, *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War* (Columbia University Press, 2019); Alexis Leanna Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

19 Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," 2015.

20 Jakana L. Thomas and Reed M. Wood, "The Social Origins of Female Combatants," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 3 (2018): 215–232.

Women's recruitment is also a function of a group's strategic and tactical decision-making.²¹ Organizations that face manpower shortages or other resource constraints will be more inclined to incorporate women.²² Organizations that rely on coercive recruitment will be more likely to draft any able bodies, including women's.²³ Groups that rely on stealth are also likelier to open membership to women to capitalize on gender stereotypes that women are more pacific, harmless, and innocent in an effort to exploit their targets.²⁴ Militants concerned about their images are expected to diversify their ranks as well, given the legitimacy boost expected from women's participation.²⁵ Additionally, groups may rely on female recruits to encourage men to take up violence and shame those who choose not to.²⁶ Finally, women's participation may be most likely when supply and demand factors intersect. Women are most attracted to organizations that offer women-specific benefits (e.g. gender equality, political power, skills) as well as autonomy and clear channels for female influence, while groups already providing women-specific benefits find it easier to embrace gender diversity in their ranks.²⁷

This literature provides a useful framework for understanding women's membership in violent rebellion. However, most of this work draws inferences from data on rebel and terrorist organizations.²⁸ The exclusive focus on groups engaged in contention with the state and the lack of systematic research on other non-state armed groups has led scholars to generalize these findings to all armed groups. Thomas and Bond, an exception, examine women's participation in a sample of African violent political organizations which includes community-based self-defense organizations.²⁹ However, even this study does not examine whether women's participation differs across groups organized for and against the state. This may be an important oversight, however, as women's motivations for engaging in anti-state contention may not correspond to those mobilized to maintain the status quo. For example, research argues that women who intend to maintain the status quo are often less attracted to rebel and terrorist organizations, which tend

21 Pheobe Donnelly, "The Interactive Relationship between Gender and Strategy," *Global Society* 32, no. 4 (2018): 457–476.

22 Wood, *Female Fighters*, 2019; Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, "Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's Suicide Bombers" Combating Terrorism Center, 2017.

23 Dara Kay Cohen and Amelia Hoover Green, "Sexual Violence in Liberia and the Politics of Human Rights Advocacy," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 445–458.; Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations"; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*; Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline"; Thomas and Wood, "The Social Origins of Female Combatants."

24 Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "What's Special About Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 681–71; Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism"; Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations"; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*; Wood, *Female Fighters*.

25 Elise Barth, "Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa," International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, August 2002; Judith Steim "The Effect of Myths about Military Women on the Waging of War" in *Women and the Military System*, ed. Eva Isaksson (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); Devorah Manekin and Reed M. Wood, "Framing the Narrative: Female Fighters, External Audience Attitudes, and Transnational Support for Armed Rebellions," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, forthcoming, 2020.

26 Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Alisa Stack, "Zombies versus Black Widows: Women as Propaganda in The Chechen Conflict" in *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, eds. Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Barth 2002.

27 Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*; Shelli Israelsen, "Women in Charge: The Effect of Rebel Governance and Women's Organizations on Karen Women's Political Participation," *Civil Wars* 20, no. 3 (2018): 379–407.

28 See, for example, Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline"; Thomas and Wood, "The Social Origins of Female Combatants"; and Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*.

29 Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations."

to be subversive. Status quo-oriented women, however, may be more attracted to CBAGs that work to reinforce existing political structures and policies that sustain communities. Relatedly, although women are less likely to participate in religious rebel organizations,³⁰ religion and religious motivations may push women into CBAGs. As a result, understanding the similarities and differences between recruitment to CBAGs and subversive VPOs is consequential.

While there are likely key differences between rebel organizations and community-based armed groups, some of the motivators of women's participation are likely to be consistent across different types of armed groups, especially when considering supply-side explanations. For example, women are likely to seek protection from violence, whether that violence is used by groups armed to support or oppose the government. Revenge and retribution motivations may also explain women's desire to participate in violence against predatory rebels and states alike. On the demand-side, organizations with manpower shortages and those that generally have non-discriminatory recruitment policies are likely to draft women. Therefore, forced recruitment should explain women's participation across armed group types. Also, if CBAGs prioritize covert action, they may find the use of women to be helpful. This report examines the validity of some of these demand-side explanations for understanding patterns of female participation in CBAGs.

Focusing on the aforementioned cases in West Africa yields a number of novel insights. First, this report demonstrates that women are often motivated to participate in community-based security organizations for many of the same reasons that women join rebel organizations. Personal motivations often intersect with practical and political incentives to determine the supply of women to CBAGs. Women in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Sierra Leone joined community-based organizations to ensure their own protection as well as that of their communities. For some women, revenge and retribution were as potent a driver as politics. Second, demand-side explanations are largely consistent with those uncovered in research on violent political organizations. In particular, community-based vigilante and paramilitary groups recruit women to fill manpower shortages, to score unique tactical advantages, and when women's participation is largely compatible with community norms. Where women's involvement in security provision and politics is incompatible with a community's ideology, female participation is likely to be less formal.³¹

The subsequent sections discuss women's participation in CBAGs from both supply- and demand-perspectives and offer insights on a few of the unique ways women have gendered community-based armed organizations. Finally, this report examines implications for policy and practice at the nexus of security and development and offer recommendations.

30 Women do participate in some religious organizations, but are more likely to gain membership in secular organizations. Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline."

31 Dyan Mazurana, "Women, Girls and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups," in *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*, ed. Carol Cohn (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 164.

EXISTING ACCOUNTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN WEST AFRICAN CBAGS

Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali have seen significant CBAG activity in recent years. In Mali, militias like the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GAITA) and the Ganda Koy, which have operated for decades, have become increasingly important since the crisis in Northern Mali flared up in 2011.³² The rise in Mali's self-defense militias has resulted from the lack of protection and security afforded by the Malian government.³³ Similarly, Nigerian vigilantes have long been filling the gaps left by weak policing and a decline in government services, particularly in rural areas.³⁴ These militias have been raised by communities left defenseless by absent, corrupt, or politicized security forces that have "failed to protect Nigeria's territorial integrity."³⁵ Nigerian civilians have mobilized for protection against militants and counterinsurgency forces alike.³⁶ Invariably, community defense in northeast Nigeria has been shaped by a lack of trust in the state.³⁷

The Yoruba Oodua People's Congress (OPC), an ethno-nationalist group, which emerged as a pro-democracy protest movement in Nigeria in the 1990's, transitioned into militia activity as a response to the rising corruption and repression of the security forces and burgeoning crime in Yorubaland. The Islamic Hisba, an informal security structure formed in northern Nigeria in the late 1990s, began as a community-based vigilante organization but has become more institutionalized in some Nigeria states, namely Zamfara and Kano in the northwest.³⁸ The need for such an informal policing body emerged as a reaction to the perceived ineptitude of the local state authorities in enforcing moral codes as dictated by Islamic law; hisba justice has been perceived as impartial and less corrupt than that provided by the state police.³⁹ The Pan-African Congress of Young Patriots (Young Patriots) was founded in 2001 to support Côte d'Ivoire's President Laurent Gbagbo due to the weakness of his armed forces and pervasive threats to his leadership.

In the absence of strong central institutions that exert power and provide security, communities have been forced to rely on localized security solutions, which has increased the number of armed actors and

32 Helené Lackenbauer, Helené, Magdalena Tham Lindell, and Gabriella Ingerstad, "If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will: A Gendered Analysis of the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali," FOI-R, November 2015.

33 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight"; Marc-André Boisvert, "Failing at Violence: the Longer-lasting Impact of Pro-government Militias in Northern Mali Since 2012," *African Security* 8, no. 4 (2015): 272–298.

34 Georgia Holmer, "Nigeria's Double-Edged Front Line," *Foreign Policy*, December 2014; "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram," International Crisis Group, no. 244, February 2017.

35 Mustapha Muhammad and Chris Kay, "Vigilantes Fight Battle for Nigeria Against Boko Haram," *The Leader-Post*, December 18, 2014.

36 "Watchmen of Lake Chad," International Crisis Group; Alexis Okeowo, "The Women Fighting Boko Haram," *The New Yorker*, December 22, 2015.

37 Oluwaseun Bamidele, "Civilian Joint Task Force'(CJTF)—A Community Security Option: A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach of Reducing Terrorism," *Journal for Deradicalization* 7 (2016): 124–144.

38 Fatima L. Adamu, "Gender, Hisba and the Enforcement of Morality in Northern Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 136–152.

39 Adamu 2008; Ernest Ogbzor, "Understanding the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria," Special Report 391. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2016.

fanned the flames of conflict in Mali, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire. Yet despite these negative externalities, state forces have recognized the value of civilian defense. Mali has become reliant on local militias to repel the separatist Tuareg (MNLA) and Islamist rebel groups (e.g., Ansar Dine, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)) operating with impunity in Mali, while Borno State's CJTF has been deemed essential in the Nigerian government's counterterrorism efforts against Boko Haram. In both cases, the CBAGs were able to leverage their connections with local communities to provide superior security, which has been largely tolerated and sometimes exploited by the state. This suggests negotiated relationships with both states, according to Van Metre's typology.⁴⁰ The OPC, on the other hand, provides a variety of local governance functions, including combating crime, taking on criminalized state institutions, and resolving local disputes.⁴¹ Though noted for its challenges to and contention with the Nigerian state and local security forces, the OPC has also engaged in national politics, which has, in some ways, legitimized the state.⁴² Thus, the OPC can be considered a CBAG with both a coerced and negotiated relationship with the Nigerian state consistent with Van Metre's typology.

HOW HAVE WOMEN PARTICIPATED IN CBAGS?

When their communities were forced to mobilize for security provision, Malian, Nigerian, and Ivoirian women were present. West African women have made clear contributions to CBAGs; yet, the form and frequency of their participation has varied significantly across communities, cultures, and regions. Across West Africa, women have taken on formal and informal roles in CBAGs with the intention of both waging war and sowing peace. They have been inducted as formal members in some CBAGs, while attaining status as only supporters or associates in others. In the Malian conflict, women have most frequently participated as informants; they helped pass on information to rebels and have secured their communities by outing suspected criminals to militia members.⁴³ Women have also acted as suppliers of material goods and economic services and have supported the conflict by marrying fighters.⁴⁴ Women from across the country have participated formally as well. Women in the center of Mali were most likely to hold formal membership in militias and violent dissident movements, while Northern women were least likely to do so.⁴⁵

40 See Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

41 Insa Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed': Yoruba Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008):84–106.

42 Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed.'"

43 Zoe Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand': A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali," *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*, 2019/6.

44 While some Malian women were forced into these relationships with combatants, others were consensual (Gorman and Chauzal 2019). Likewise, in Nigeria, betrothed women were often forced into marriage by Boko Haram, although in some cases families opted to give their daughters to be married in exchange for generous dowries. Some girls choose to marry fighters themselves for financial gain.

45 Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand.'"

Women’s participation in the Ganda Koy militia in Northern Mali, for example, was significant, even if infrequent.⁴⁶ Some women gained military training which enabled them to serve in combat, while others were among the militia’s leadership, which afforded them the means to transcend their domestic roles.⁴⁷ Despite any equality of opportunity, however, women were still expected to do much of the support work for the militia, including cooking and cleaning.⁴⁸ Malian women also served in the self-defense oriented Patriotic Resistance Forces (FPR), a coalition of half a dozen militias including the Front for the Liberation of the Northern Regions (FLN), which formed in 2012 to combat the armed insurgents in the north.⁴⁹ FLN’s female recruits receive military training and are expected to engage in combat against the insurgents terrorizing the north. While Tuareg women also contributed to security provision in Northern Mali, they did so in different ways. Women figured prominently in the propaganda of Tuareg rebel organizations, which suggests they may have participated as combatants in those groups.⁵⁰ They also offered logistical support to rebels, largely in the form of information gathering.⁵¹ It appears, however, they were generally less active in self-defense militias, at least as formal members.

Nigerian women have also participated in a number of community-based armed groups across multiple conflicts and time-periods. Anioma women volunteered for the Biafran civil defense militia in the late 1960’s to help maintain local security during the Nigerian-Biafran War and were generally viewed as indispensable to the war effort.⁵² According to Amadiume, “women formed a strong core of the militia” but also ensured that the entire nation was fed and that the Biafran economy remained solvent.⁵³ Thus, while women held formal membership within the militia, their support work was equally vital. Nigerian women have also been active in the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC) and Islamic Hisba. Women have been among the founding members and leaders of the OPC; they are believed to constitute up to 20 percent of the organization’s 3 million members.⁵⁴ Though female OPC members are typically discouraged from active participation in violent vigilante activities,⁵⁵ they still play a prominent role in the organization’s

46 Andrew Hernandez, “The Ganda Koy Militia: Ethnicity, Politics and Mobilisation in Northern Mali,” *Identités sahéliennes en temps de crise: Histoires, enjeux et perspectives* eds. Baz Lecoq and Amy Niang, LIT Verlag Münster, 2019.

47 Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight, We Will,” 46; Hernandez, “The Ganda Koy Militia.”

48 Starkey, “Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali.”

49 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Mali: The Front for the Liberation of the Northern Regions (Front de libération des régions du Nord, FLN) [also called Forces for the Liberation of the Northern Regions (Forces de libération des régions du Nord), Front for the Liberation of the North (Front de libération du Nord) and National Liberation Front (Front de libération nationale)], including activities; links to the Songhai; treatment of group members and of people of Songhai origin by the state (2014-July 2016), 5 July 2016, MLI105562. FE, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/598c71074.html>, accessed 14 April 2020.

50 Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight.”

51 Gorman and Chauzal, “‘Hand in Hand’”; Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight.”

52 Ifi Amadiume, “Women’s Political History,” *West Africa* 1839–1838 : (1988) 10; Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007); Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey, “Militarism, Conflict and Women’s Activism in the Global Era: Challenges and Prospects for Women in Three West African Contexts.,” *Feminist Review* 101, no. 1 (2012): 97–123; Judith Van Allen, “Aba Riots or the Igbo Women’s War? Ideology, Stratification and the Invisibility of Women,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 11–39. Jane Bryce, “What is the Country? Reimagining National Space in Women’s Writing on the Biafran War” in *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, eds., Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, Boydell and Brewer, 2016.

53 Amadiume, “Women’s Political History”; Van Allen, “Aba Riots or the Igbo Women’s War?”

54 Nolte, “‘Without Women, Nothin Can Succeed’”; Guichaou (2010) suggests that only around 10 percent of the organization is made up of women.

55 Nolte, “‘Without Women’”; Guichaoua 2010.

security functions.⁵⁶ In hisba, women's roles have been largely confined to the enforcement of morality within Muslim communities.

In recent years, scores of Nigerian women have also joined CBAGs to combat Boko Haram's insurgency in northeast Nigeria. In 2017, more than one hundred female militia members were registered in the CJTF, though many more women are believed to maintain informal ties with the group.⁵⁷ Other estimates suggest that the CJTF may have double that number of women among its ranks.⁵⁸ Women serve in both support and active military capacities. In addition to their combat participation, women have been employed to guard camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) and have been used frequently to frisk female suspects at checkpoints. This latter role is particularly important in light of the large number of women used by Boko Haram as suicide bombers. Women have also engaged in formal intelligence gathering and worked unofficially as informants.⁵⁹ Kungiyar marhaba, a longstanding multiethnic, mixed-gender militia in Nigeria's Borno State, also counts women among its ranks. Kungiyar marhaba has for generations been charged with securing food for community consumption as well as protecting traditional political leaders and borders from outside incursions. In this group, female militia members are assigned similar duties as men, including those related to hunting and community defense.

Finally, women have participated in both the Ivoirian pro-government militias (i.e., Young Patriots)⁶⁰ and rebel organizations (i.e., the army of the New Forces (FAFN)),⁶¹ though significantly less is known about their participation in Côte d'Ivoire's CBAGs. Existing studies have been clear, however, that Ivoirian women's contributions to both conflict and security have been important.

WHEN DO WOMEN PARTICIPATE IN CBAGS?

It is evident that women were formal and informal participants in many Nigerian, Malian, and Ivoirian CBAGs, but what explains the degree and form of their involvement? Overall, variation in women's participation across CBAGs appears to have been motivated by several salient supply- and demand-side factors. On the supply side, desires for protection, retribution, gender parity, and the attempt to defend one's homeland are particularly important explanations. On the demand-side, strategic concerns as well as gender norms and participatory institutions at the community and group levels help explain women's presence and roles in CBAGs. Each of these explanations are discussed in turn.

56 Nolte, "Without Women."

57 "Watchmen of Lake Chad," International Crisis Group; Orji Sunday, "The Brave Women Fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria," *Al Jazeera*, July 10, 2019.

58 Sally Hayden, "Nigeria's self-styled Warriors: Meet the Vigilante Army Taking on the World's Deadliest Terror Group," *Vice News*, April 28, 2016; "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group, no. 242, December 2016.

59 "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group; Warner and Matfess 2017.

60 Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast's 'Young Patriots' Volunteer To Fight," NPR, 2011.

61 Kamina Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion: The Ex-Fighters from Ivory Coast," 2017.

Supply-side explanations

Consistent with existing cross-national research on women's participation in violent political organizations, female militia members appear to be motivated by similar factors as their male comrades, even though they do not always do the same work or face the same barriers to participating.⁶² Few uniquely female reasons for seeking membership in CBAGs are apparent, with the pursuit of gender equity as one notable exception. For instance, a sense of responsibility for one's community or duty to one's homeland has motivated many men and women to join CBAGs. In Côte d'Ivoire, men and women joined both rebel organizations and pro-government militia organizations in a bid to defend their homeland.⁶³ One pro-Gbagbo recruit, Jo Nicole rationalized her participation in the Young Patriots militia by arguing that "Our country has been attacked by rebels and terrorists. We need to free this country. I'm not afraid. I'm going to carry a Kalashnikov and liberate my country." This outlook is consistent with the rallying cry ("let's free our country") of the Young Patriots who vowed to "die for their motherland."⁶⁴ Female (and male) rebels in the Forces Nouvelles (New Forces) have similarly invoked ideals of nationalism and claimed to be acting in defense of their country.⁶⁵ This is unsurprising given that the current running through the Ivorian crises since the 1990's has been issues of citizenship and national identity, often referred to as Ivoirité; politicians and their supporters on both sides of the conflicts have claimed to be fighting for the nation.

Malian women also joined militias out of a sense of duty. Aminata, a member of Mali's Ganda Koy militia asserted that she was compelled to join the group after witnessing the treatment of her people and the army's unwillingness to do anything about it.⁶⁶ Another recruit, Mariam, offered the following explanation for her presence in the Ganda Koy: "My family is from the north. It was my duty to join. Here, I am not a woman. I am a man. There is no woman here."⁶⁷ Her claims suggest that responsibility for one's country may be gender-blind. Another potential female recruit asserted she was "ready to go and fight" because Mali was her country and she had nowhere else to go.⁶⁸ FLN member Fatoumata Toura from Niafunke took up arms against Ansar Dine out of a duty to her country and in rejection of the oppressive customs thrust upon the areas under its control.⁶⁹ Finally, "Mrs. A," an OPC vigilante in Nigeria, suggested that participation in vigilantism is part of a women's obligation since "[a] mother is responsible for her children. If one of them goes astray, she has to punish him."⁷⁰

A desire to avenge loss and protect oneself from future violence is also a common supply-side factor motivating women to join militias. Barka Dicko joined the Ganda Koy after witnessing her niece's rape

62 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 169; Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion."

63 Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion"; Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast's 'Young Patriots' Volunteer To Fight."

64 Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast's 'Young Patriots' Volunteer To Fight."

65 Diallo questions the sincerity of these motives, proposing that combatants are merely adopting rebel discourse to justify their participation in violence.

66 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 169.

67 Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 282.

68 Tamasin Ford and Bonnie Allen, "Mali Civilians Vow to Take Up Arms Against Islamist Extremists," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2012.

69 Adam Nossiter, "Saying Mali 'Is Our Country,' Militias Train to Oust Islamists," *The New York Times*, August 6, 2012.

70 Nolte, "Without Women," 98.

at the hands of the Tuareg MNLA rebels.⁷¹ Another female Ganda Koy member confessed to joining only after her brother had been killed by rebels.⁷² Among the most cited reasons for female participation in Nigeria's CJTF has been the pursuit of revenge and the search for personal protection. Lami, a female CJTF member in Borno, offered up her reason for joining the civilian defense force explaining, "We decided to join this fight to end [Boko Haram] because our relations, brothers, sisters and parents are being killed by [Boko Haram]. Peace has eluded us and we are fed up. We want to sanitize our city to what it used to be."⁷³ Another, Fatima Muhammed, joined the militia in Maiduguri to protect herself from Boko Haram's violence as she explained that "they will kill you, they will kill everyone you know."⁷⁴ Her initial decision to work against Boko Haram came after a close family member was killed by militants. Similar to Muhammed, Komi Kaje joined CJTF after both her brother and boyfriend were killed by Boko Haram in quick succession, while Aisha Bakari Gombi was motivated to join the militia by Boko Haram's attack on her village.⁷⁵ In Aleita, a village outside of Abuja, Janet Oyebade, took part in community defense for her own protection, explaining that her husband lived far away and therefore could not make sure she was safe.⁷⁶ Notably, protection and revenge are also common justifications proffered by rebel recruits. Badmus finds that many of the Ivoirian women that volunteered for rebellion did so "as a matter of kill or be killed."⁷⁷ A displaced Malian living in Bamako indicated she might join the liberation movement to hasten her return to her home in Gao.⁷⁸

Many Malian women also viewed participation in ongoing hostilities as a way to boost the country's defense and ensure their own personal security. Security is viewed as a more encompassing issue than just the severity of violence in their communities though.⁷⁹ As Mackenzie notes, "'security' always already depends on the construction and reconstruction of normal, domestic and peaceful politics."⁸⁰ As such, some Northern women noted that if the Malian government continued to fail at providing key public services it would push more women into violence, with one affirming that "[she] will personally take up arms if nothing changes."⁸¹ In Northern Mali, food security and employment were also seen as priorities.⁸² This is largely consistent with research showing that material inducements help mobilize reluctant individuals for violence.⁸³

71 Jerome Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali," *The Times*, November 23, 2012.

72 Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

73 "Civilian Vigilante Groups Increase Dangers in Northeastern Nigeria," *IRIN Africa Service*, December 12, 2013.

74 Okeowo, "The Women Fighting Boko Haram."

75 Rosie Collyer, "Aisha: Boko Haram Huntress," *Al Jazeera*, April 12, 2018.

76 "Nigeria; Women Join Vigilante Groups in Aleita."

77 Isiaka Badmus, "Explaining Women's Roles in the West African Tragic Triplet," *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2009): 823.

78 Ford and Allen, "Mali Civilians Vow to Take Up Arms Against Islamist Extremists."

79 Lackenbuger et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight"; Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand.'"

80 Megan MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-conflict Development* (NYU Press, 2015), 8.

81 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight," 56.

82 Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand.'"

83 Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, Matthew, "How 'Free' is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem," *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 177–216; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436–455.

Like with rebellions, a range of practical concerns have spurred women's participation in militias. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the main factors encouraging both male and female participation in the crises were "identity, material needs and security" along with social ties.⁸⁴ In the aftermath of the contested 2010 Ivorian elections, important motivators for both male and female supporters of Alassane Ouattara's presidential bid were the prospect of a career in the new government, including in the security forces, and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) benefits.⁸⁵ Participation in violence appears to have been driven by opportunism as well; some women who joined pro-Ouattara forces had previously fought for the pro-Gbagbo self-defense groups, while others switched their loyalty from Ouattara to Gbagbo. The importance of material inducements and the fluidity of membership across violent organizations suggests it is not always possible to separate the types of women who join rebellions from those who enlist in self-defense militias.

There is also evidence that women join CBAGs to transcend their traditional roles. While this does not appear to be a primary impetus for male participation in CBAGs, it is a reason that many women have joined rebellions. For instance, many Biafran women joined militias for personal emancipation, and though their participation was accepted, they were commonly considered "stubborn girls who rebelled against the norm by doing what they were not asked to do."⁸⁶ According to Uchendu, the exceptional actions of militia women flouted traditional gendered expectations of women in Igboland and challenged ideas of what women were capable of.⁸⁷ Similarly, a female Ganda Koy member noted more recently that the militiawomen's participation showed that "a woman can do anything a man can do, while another reveled in the notion that they do in fact "do everything the men do."⁸⁸

While female participants offer the search for gender equality as a primary motivator for their recruitment,⁸⁹ it is also evident that local and group gender norms have a substantial effect on whether organizations create space and extend opportunities for women's formal participation in CBAGs. That is, CBAG norms, which are often informed by local rules and traditions, determine whether women are *able* to participate if they wanted to. For instance, Gorman and Chauzal's survey indicates that nearly three-quarters of Malian women expressed a deep interest in being included in community security provision, a much larger proportion than male respondents.⁹⁰ Yet, women participate in Mali's CBAGs far less frequently than their male counterparts, suggesting that women's lack of involvement may result from suppression rather than disinterest.

84 Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion."

85 Ibid.

86 Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 121; It is likely that Igbo women were not prevented from participating in the infantry despite being discouraged by Biafran men since traditional Igbo culture did not bestow any institution the power to issue commands. Instead, "only within a family compound could an individual demand obedience to orders." See Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?" 18.

87 Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*.

88 Anne Look, "Malian Militias Train to Retake the North," *Voice of America*, October 8, 2012; Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

89 In some cases a search for gender equality is on an individual basis, and about personal emancipation. In others women participate in effort to change perceptions and policies about women's capabilities and rights.

90 Gorman and Chauzal, "Hand in Hand," 20.

Women throughout Mali have practical incentives to concern themselves with the security realm given their increased vulnerability during conflict; most Malians have named young girls as the most likely to be victimized by rebel groups and jihadists, followed closely by older women.⁹¹ Malians have also noted that women are the group most prone to domestic and gender-based violence.⁹² This increased risk of victimization constitutes a pathway by which women are recruited into armed groups, as Gorman and Chauzal found that the need for physical protection was the most significant driver of women’s recruitment into Mali’s rebel organizations.⁹³ Despite these pragmatic reasons for women to join, the path to formal CBAG membership is harder for some women, namely those from Northern communities, given the immutability of women’s roles and the strength of gender hierarchies. Northern women have been most engaged, however, when their communities created inclusive participation structures to facilitate their participation.⁹⁴

Demand-side explanations

Among the most important demand-side factors determining women’s work in community-based armed groups is a community’s gender relationships, which can either facilitate or hamper women’s roles in security matters. Local gender norms have an outsized effect on the scope and structure of women’s engagement with CBAGs. In contrast to rebel organizations, which do not often shy away from subverting status quo norms and dictates, CBAGs tend to adhere more closely to the ideals and values of the localities in which they are embedded. This makes sense given CBAGs’ often-extensive ties to local political structures, which frequently mobilize, sanction, and legitimize these armed groups. Thus, malleable local gender norms allow women to participate in security matters formally, while more rigid traditions can limit women’s roles in public life, politics, and security, leading them to adopt less overtly security-oriented roles. Where local traditions already make space for women’s participation, CBAGs are more apt to recruit women. Moreover, when women are already involved in local security provision, CBAGs are also likely to employ women in security roles. On the other hand, CBAGs tend to adopt more restrictive membership requirements in societies that are more restrictive. This rarely leads to the wholesale absence of female participants, though it does suggest less formalized, and possibly less overtly violent, female participation. Importantly, local institutions and values—not state-wide norms—appear to undergird this process.

In Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, alignment with traditional all-male or all-female initiation societies or hunter societies, for example, shape women’s participation in CBAGs given their pervasive political salience. Women are less likely to participate in CBAGs when a group’s membership is aligned strongly with all-male associations.⁹⁵ By contrast, when armed groups have drawn from or maintain strong relationships with women’s organizations, CBAGs are more permissive of female members. Women’s wings

91 Gorman and Chauzal, “‘Hand in Hand.’”

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., 15.

94 Ibid.

95 Ama Mazama, “Ogboni Society,” in *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, eds. M. K. Asante & A. Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2009), 479.

and associations promote female participation in CBAGs and communities more broadly. For example, institutionalized women's associations (i.e., ogbo and inyemedi/mikiri) facilitated women's political roles in the Biafran community by organizing their demands and enabling collective action. These traditional associations gave women the ability to craft community legislation that affected men and women alike.⁹⁶ Similarly, women's participation in the OPC was facilitated by the organization's Women's League,⁹⁷ while the Sande and Poro initiation societies enabled women in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone to influence local politics and traditional institutions. These dynamics emphasize the intersections between traditional and CBAG politics.

In both the Nigerian Biafran militia and Odua People's Congress, gender norms were permissive of women's active contributions in security functions, while local gender norms suppressed women's formal participation in the Tuareg militias in Mali and in Hisba and some CJTF sectors in Nigeria. The significant variation in women's participation and roles across CJTF and OPC chapters shows that group recruitment patterns are not necessarily determined endogenously. For example, despite substantial female participation in CJTF overall, women were considered supporters but not formal members in some sectors despite performing essential duties for the militia, including frisking, disarming and interrogating female terror suspects. In other sectors, however, they attained full membership.⁹⁸ This appeared to be motivated by differences in community norms. Similarly, the depth of women's participation and the roles that they adopted within the OPC were circumscribed by local gender norms and hierarchies.⁹⁹ While OPC women play a prominent role in security institutions in Lagos and Ibadan, they are largely sidelined in some Ijebu and Remo communities in Nigeria's Ogun state. In the latter communities, security is viewed as the purview of men because OPC militia operations overlay with the activities of the traditional all-male Oró associations.¹⁰⁰ Given women's inability to participate in Oró activities, their involvement in vigilantism is proscribed.¹⁰¹ This can be juxtaposed with women's activities in Ibadan where tradition accords reverence to participation in war and thus encourages militancy, even among women.¹⁰²

In Biafra, Igbo women were traditionally politically active, with strong delineations between male and female roles in the community. While this demarcation often left women with less overt political power, Igbo women were not considered subordinate to men. Instead, the existence of separate roles for men and women bestowed by tradition, afforded women an "autonomous sphere of authority" that facil-

96 Women's associations were instrumental in the organization of the so-called Aba riots that the Igbo women staged against the British colonial administration in the early twentieth century. This example of women-led collective action generate significant reforms in the colonial administration, although they were primarily enjoyed by Igbo men (Van Allen 1975).

97 Nolte, "Without Women."

98 Wale Odunsi, "Women Civilian JTF Emerges in Borno, Targets Female Boko Haram members," *Daily Post*, August 24, 2013.

99 Nolte, "Without Women."

100 The Oró is a secret all-male group within the mixed-gender Ogboni secret society, which is prevalent among the Yoruba across West Africa. Ogboni, which dates back to pre-colonial times, has acts as councilor to traditional rulers, protects the community from the excesses of political leadership and upholds law and order in society. The Oró acts as Ogboni's enforcer (Mazama, "Ogboni Society," 479).

101 Nolte, "Without Women."

102 Nolte, "Without Women"; Watson (1999) offers that women held vital roles in the militarized civic society of pre-colonial Ibadan. Masculinized women directed and supported the city's war economy. Moreover, she argues that political ascendancy for both men and women was based on participation in battle.

itated their political engagement.¹⁰³ For instance, Igbo tradition considered women significant players in community conflict resolution efforts. As such, they were typically consulted as informal arbitrators and charged with promoting order in their communities.¹⁰⁴ Though traditionally, women used non-violent means of coercion, including demonstrations and strikes, singing and dancing, and ridicule to wield power and influence over their villages, the existence of a set of customs that provided for women's influence in politics enabled them to also have a deeper role in the Biafran war.¹⁰⁵ This is similar to the types of power and structures embedded in Yoruba culture, which likely explains their active roles within the OPC.

Like Igbo women, Yoruba women had a reserved seat in political institutions, even if their traditional roles were not clearly related to performing security functions.¹⁰⁶ It is important to note, however, that even though Yoruba convention provided a clear pathway for women's participation in politics, it sometimes also restricted their roles. This was especially so in places where security was more strongly associated with male power. Again, in communities where militia activity aligned with the all-male hunting societies, women's formal participation in security activities was rare. Here, parallels can also be seen with women's relationships to the traditionally all-male Kamajor militia in Sierra Leone.

Although it is accepted that women participated in the Sierra Leonean Civil Defense Forces (CDF) umbrella group to repel the Revolutionary United Front (RUF),¹⁰⁷ few women were associated with the Kamajor militia, which formed the backbone of CDF military operations.¹⁰⁸ Though a small number of women engaged with the group both formally and informally,¹⁰⁹ they participated less in this group than in other CDF militias because of the strong link between membership in the Kamajors and Mende male tradition.¹¹⁰ Traditionally, a kamajor (*kamajoi*) is an elite *male* hunter charged with protecting his community.¹¹¹ According to Hoffman, [t]he kamajoi as hunter operates in an expressly male domain. The gun in the kamajoi hunter's hand is both linguistically and symbolically phallic."¹¹² Thus, it is unsurprising that a militia that recruited among the kamajoi would not actively encourage female participation. This point is further underscored by a militiaman who asserted that "Kamajor business is for men and I have never

103 Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?" 19.

104 Ibid.

105 Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?"; Matfess (2020) argues informal and symbolic displays of power by women are frequently performed to influence the behavior of East African CBAGs as well.

106 Nolte, "Without Women."

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

108 Cohen suggests that only 2 percent of CDF members were women; Ned Dalby, "In Search of the Kamajors, Sierra Leone's Civilian Counter-insurgents," *International Crisis Group*, March 2017.

109 Mazurana and Carlson, *From Combat to Community*; MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone*.

110 Muana, "The Kamajoi Militia."

111 According to both Hoffman and Muana, in Mende tradition a Kamajoi is most closely charged with establishing new Mende communities. Ferme and Hoffman (2004) and Muana (1997) suggest that most of the Kamajor's recruits during the war had no prior experience with hunting. Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Duke University Press, 2011); Dalby, "In Search of the Kamajors."

112 Hoffman, *The War Machines*, 64.

seen a woman.”¹¹³ Despite this rhetoric, the militia did ultimately incorporate a small number of women into their ranks, but only after experiencing significant manpower constraints due to the ongoing war.¹¹⁴ Similar to the Biafran case, the Kamajor leadership never tacitly acknowledged their female recruits.¹¹⁵ In fact, one former cadre noted that the Kamajors prevented her from participating in the formal demobilization process due to a “taboo that they do not touch or come close to a woman,” which in her account was a “lie to fake self-praise.”¹¹⁶ She added “[a]ll of us were combatants but treated as housewives and sex slaves.”¹¹⁷ The disregard of women’s participation is a recurrent theme among CBAGs and other non-state groups and is not exclusive to formal participation in violence.

The Kamajor illustration shows that many CBAGs encourage women’s direct participation only reluctantly. Across almost every case examined, women’s participation was encouraged or tolerated only after CBAGs recognized the potential for tactical or strategic gains. In CJTF, many women joined the militia after Boko Haram shifted their strategy toward using female militants. Since it was controversial for men to search women’s bodies or their homes, female militia members were genuinely needed. Nagarajan proffers that CBAGs that have incorporated women have been more effective against insurgents because of the unique benefits female members can provide, including their ability to search and interrogate suspected female militants and the ease in which they are able to extract information from other civilian women.¹¹⁸ In many cases, women were encouraged to seek information or transport and smuggle contraband because they were less likely to be suspected of complicity with CBAGs. The Biafran militia also exploited stereotypes of female innocence to secure food rations from the Nigerian federation, which were later distributed to other militia members. In the OPC, women engaged in violent vigilante activities as a “second line of defense” only when men were unable to fulfill their duties, suggesting that women are mainly deployed for violence to fill manpower shortfalls.¹¹⁹ In other instances, OPC women are used to encourage men’s violence and help to inspire their bravery.

These examples suggest that demand-side factors drive gender diversity within CBAGs. Groups employ female recruits when strategic, tactical, or material concerns dictate they open their membership to women. However, the reluctant inclusion of women has consequences for demobilization and reintegration as well as the potential for long-term transformation of women’s roles and advancement of their interests. If CBAGs are only willing to incorporate women reluctantly, they may be less inclined to promote women’s needs. If groups fail to acknowledge female participants officially during conflicts, they may also be unlikely to encourage their enrollment in demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs, which often connotes tacit acknowledgment of their activities. Consequently,

113 “Sierra Leone: Presidential Spokesman Refute Claims that Kabbah’s Late Wife Transported Arms to Kamajors,” *Africa News*, October 3, 2003.

114 Pressure from the RUF rebellion also caused another Sierra Leonean militia, the Gbethis, to recruit women into their self-defense organization (Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community”).

115 Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Individual Biafran soldiers did commend the achievements of women militia members, though the organization refused to publicly recognize their activities.

116 Mackenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 94.

117 Ibid.

118 Chitra Nagarajan, “To Defend or Harm? Community Militias in Borno State, Nigeria, Center for Civilians in Conflict,” April 2020.

119 Nolte, “Without Women.”

exclusion from DDR programs can mean that women are not extended the same post-conflict opportunities as men, which leaves open the possibility that women will remain vulnerable to the recruitment appeals of armed actors.

Among the most universal and significant civic associations across West Africa are the all-female Sande, sometimes referred to as Bondo/Bundu, and generally all-male Poro masquerade societies that are particularly active in the Upper Guinea Coast region, which covers parts of Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Liberia.¹²⁰ These societies may offer us key insight into gendered participation in CBAGs across West Africa given their command of local political power, especially in rural areas and their influence on community gender relations. Both the male and female variants are inextricably linked to traditional political power, where initiation into one can be required for ascension to high-level political positions, such as chieftancies.¹²¹ The institution of female chieftancy, in particular, has strong links to initiation societies.¹²²

While some politically savvy women have used their participation in all-female societies to amass political power and influence, often through brokering politically expedient marriages of Sande women,¹²³ others have pursued political clout through all-male societies. In Sierra Leone's Mende communities, for example, female (and male) aspirants needed to first attain the support of the all-male initiation society to ascend to the position of chief, which often meant pursuing formal membership. Where there were strong prohibitions on female members, women could be barred from achieving this important position of power. Conversely, female chiefs were installed in places where the male initiation societies were more tolerant toward female members.¹²⁴ While Poro sometimes inducted women, the Wunde association, which held currency among Sierra Leone's Kpaa Mende, barred women's initiation entirely which disqualified women as chiefs. As Wunde lost influence over local politics however, women had greater access to local power.¹²⁵

Like other women's wings and associations tied to West African CBAGS such as the Yoruba OPC, the various initiation societies such as Poro and Sande have been built around and work to advance ideas of gender complementarity in societal and political affairs.¹²⁶ Sande and Poro organizations maintain separate authority structures and functions, with responsibilities delegated along gender lines. Despite the near-perfect gender divide, the female unit is not necessarily subordinate; on the contrary, it has been suggested that Sande is,

120 Since these societies operate across different ethnic groups and countries, the names of the groups vary from community to community with the all-female association being most often referred to as Sande/Sandogo or Bondo/Bundu, but also sometimes Poro. The all-male society is typically known as Poro, though it is also called Ragbenle; Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

121 Lynda Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone: Women Chiefs of the Last Two Centuries* (Springer, 2012); Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.

122 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

123 Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (University of Michigan Press, 2019).

124 Although several instances of women taking part in all-male societies are recorded, much allure, secrecy and skepticism still surrounds the discussion of women's participation in these traditional male prerogatives, not unlike other organizations.

125 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

126 Rosalind Hackett, "Women in African Religions," in *Religion and Women*, ed., Avind Sharma (SUNY Press, 1994); Laura S. Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke: Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics in West Africa* (Duke University Press, 2018). Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

at times, more powerful than the male-only society.¹²⁷ While Poro enforces and instills within its initiates the traditional responsibilities of a male member of his community, Sande defines what it means to be a woman in society.¹²⁸ Both generally seek to advance traditional values but, depending on the specific community's value-set, chapters could offer flexibility with respect to gender norms, allowing women to step out of their circumscribed roles.¹²⁹ Poro's female initiates are considered gender-ambiguous and socially men, which accords them with the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of any other male Poro initiate at their rank. Thus, future research might investigate further whether there is a correlation between female membership in all-male initiation societies and women's formal participation in violence and matters of security.

The importance of these cultural institutions to communal security cannot be overstated. Among Sierra Leone's Mende, for example, Poro was the "primary arbiter of civil and political relations ... and the key institution supporting chieftancy."¹³⁰ The organization also dominated issues of public welfare and security, with the reach of Poro transcending specific chiefdoms. An injunction issued by Poro, for example, would be considered binding across chapters, while a call to war by a Poro chapter would generate inter-community alliances that would mobilize across communities, ethnic, and language groups.¹³¹ Most relevant is the fact that Poro exercises dominance over matters of war and peace and initiates are charged with serving as warriors and protectors of their communities.¹³² In fact, historically, in order to enter into the warrior society in Liberia, one first needed to be initiated into Poro, as the latter stood as a gatekeeper.¹³³

Sande also maintains an important role in West African society and commands a great deal of respect. Among the matrilineal Senufo, for example, Sande unites the various households and kinship groups of the entire village and is responsible for setting social controls.¹³⁴ Senufo women are also essential to the formation of a new male Poro society, as the ritual that governs that process requires both a man and a woman.¹³⁵ Sande also provides individual female members with a path for political attainment. Most apparently, women are able to mobilize widespread support among their Sande networks for their political pursuits. The institutional structure also delegates clear roles for women in traditional politics. For instance, among the Mende, Sande is consulted on all local matters requiring the consensus of community, with the head of a Sande chapter earning a particular pride of place. Among the Senufo, she was responsible for maintaining harmony between the human and spirit worlds.¹³⁶ Mende Sande leaders are considered to be high-priestesses and warriors and are accorded both the same respect as male warriors and the privileges of a chief.¹³⁷ This suggests an alternative pathway for women's influence in security matters outside of joining Poro directly. Women's

127 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

128 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

129 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*. Also see Donnelly (2018) on how armed groups use traditional gender norms instrumentally, applying their rules selectively.

130 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*, 38.

131 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

132 Ibid.

133 Utas, Mats. 2003. *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War*. Uppsala University Dissertations in Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University (Sweden), 115.

134 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 96.

135 Ibid.

136 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.

137 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

roles in Sande tend to be largely spiritual and ritual, but these roles are not unimportant for the conduct of war and peace. According to Hackett, Sande was vested with the power to “apprehend and punish transgressors” even if the offending behavior was done in secret.”¹³⁸ Additionally, although women are generally prevented from attaining formal membership in Wunde, they are accorded an important role. While Wunde men are considered the warriors, women are delegated the public role of peacemaker. This is consistent with their traditional roles in many West African societies.

HOW DO WOMEN INFLUENCE CBAGS INDIRECTLY?

Despite tactical or strategic benefits that may accrue from women’s integration, a subset of CBAGs actively proscribe women’s direct participation in violence. This does not imply that women will have no impact on security-related matters or that they do not influence the execution of violence or the establishment of peace in their communities. Instead, women may influence these processes in less direct ways. Even the most gender-restrictive societies provide opportunities for women’s activism, even if informally. Matfess argues that women’s informal participation within CBAGs can be construed as an attempt to gain legitimacy by appealing to traditional gender norms, as women play important roles in upholding cultural values.¹³⁹ Thus, in groups where tradition is central to a CBAGs legitimacy and identity, women may be more likely to adopt supportive and symbolic roles. In the cases examined for this report, women have used traditional sources of influence to compel younger generations into action or constrain their use of violence. They have leveraged long-established gendered norms regarding gerontocracy and “matrifocal morality,” and traditional institutions, including civic associations and customary societies, to indirectly influence CBAG behavior.

Across West Africa, women have utilized their traditional roles as arbiters of morality to influence the conduct of conflict. Elder women in West Africa hold great weight in domestic affairs and are believed to exercise substantial power over their households. This has important consequences for security. For example, Tuareg women, especially older ones, have used their traditional roles as elders to encourage the younger generations within their families to either further the cause of war or work toward peace.¹⁴⁰ According to Poulton and ag Youssouf, Tuareg “women may not be visible at public meetings, but no decision may be taken, let alone implemented, without their consent.”¹⁴¹ This reverence allows women immense influence over both domestic and communal decision-making. Thus, it is erroneous to conclude women play a marginal role in CBAGs business when they lack formal affiliations.

138 Hackett. “Women in African Religions.”

139 Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy*.

140 Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight, We Will.”

141 Robin Edward Poulton and Ibrahim ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking* (NY: United Nations, 1998).

In Mali, Northern women have been most active in peacebuilding activities, but have also stoked tensions between communities.¹⁴² Some women have mobilized young men to engage in both violent and nonviolent contention, when older men were reluctant.¹⁴³ Tuareg, Songhai, and Fulani women have also engaged in repeated physical altercations within the UN-sponsored Women’s Peace Huts and during peace conferences—spaces for women to unite across ethnic lines and foster peace between groups. Women have also mobilized in opposition to the various policies implemented by Islamist groups that have taken control in areas such as Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, within the confines of their traditional roles;¹⁴⁴ in some cases they expressed their dissent through poetry and song. Malian women have also acted as focal points where allegations of sexual and gender-based violence could be reported and potentially relayed for judicial review.¹⁴⁵

In Côte d’Ivoire, women have engaged in genital cursing or acts of defiant disrobing to express anger and desperation at the violence plaguing their communities.¹⁴⁶ Grillo considers these acts of contention an appeal to *Female Genital Power (FGP)*, a spiritual power believed to be possessed by elder women in traditional African societies that can be used to issue a collective “rebuke of immoral and injudicious governance” or to check abuses of political power.¹⁴⁷ Here, authority is vested in older women in societies structured around ideas of gerontocracy, or the elders’ right to rule over younger generations. Ivorian women are believed to be endowed with “matrifocal morality,” the authority to legitimize political leadership, punish societal threats on traditional values and norms, and intercede in violent conflict.¹⁴⁸ This power has been embodied in several traditional rituals that appeal to distinctly female sources of power. Invocations of female genital power, which draws on the mysticism of (nude) female bodies, can be seen in the Egbiki ritual of the Abidji and Adiokrou, the Adajanou ritual of the Baoulé, and the Gbona Api (fokwé) ceremony among Akyé communities of Côte d’Ivoire.¹⁴⁹ In these explications of traditional power, women weaponize their nakedness as a “curse” against opponents and as an amulet that extends protection to their communities. Since older women’s nakedness is considered taboo, female participants are able to demonstrate the seriousness of the perils they face when they disrobe. These rituals have also been held to protect and boost the morale of male fighters. Notably, female genital power has also been the centerpiece of customary rituals that initiate a community’s youth into full citizenship and induct a new generation of “patriot warriors.”¹⁵⁰ Women’s centrality to the initiation of a community’s new political leadership and new cadre of protectors demonstrates their weight in traditional politics.

142 Poulton and ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu*; Gorman and Chauzal 2019.

143 Many West African communities function as gerontocracies, including in Mali. That is, power is delegated by age. Thus, older women often have more influence and power over younger women and even younger men.

144 Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight, We Will.”

145 Gorman and Chauzal, “Hand in Hand.”

146 According to Naminata Diabate, genital cursing refers to the belief that the power in women’s bodies can cause harm to those to whom it is exposed. Insurgent nakedness and defiant disrobing refer to instances where women exploit the taboo of the nude female body as a form of political protest. See Diabate, *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa* (Duke University Press, 2020).

147 Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid., 36.

150 Ibid.

Given the belief that female power can help end conflict, Ivoirian women performed Adajanou at the outset of the 2002 rebellion after being implored by the leader of the Young Patriots militia, Charles Blé Goudé, to resist attacks against then-President Laurent Gbagbo.¹⁵¹ After performing the “genital cursing” ceremony to stave off upheaval, rebels kidnapped and murdered the elderly female performers, which has only deepened the belief in the potency of these interventions for some Ivoirians. Ivoirian women also made appeals to female genital power in 2008 to protest living conditions and again in 2010 to register their displeasure with Gbagbo during the post-election crisis. The 2010 women’s revolt denounced the government’s attacks on their children and the rape of their women.¹⁵² Unfortunately, like women’s naked protest in 2002, this campaign ended in violence, as pro-Gbagbo forces intentionally fired upon the crowds of peaceful female protestors, killing a number of them.¹⁵³

COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN CBAGS

The overall effect of CBAG participation on female participants is not straightforward. While some women have experienced long- and short-term benefits of their activities with CBAGs, this is far from a universal experience. Some women have been able to realize their individual goals for liberation, yet it is not obvious that this outcome is representative or can be generalized to the broader female population. Plainly, women’s participation in CBAGs appears to have failed in producing large-scale, sweeping changes for women, writ large.

Scholars have argued that war has the potential to transform gender relations.¹⁵⁴ When women participate directly in war, they have the ability to experience roles they were never before exposed to and become aware of their own political agency. Existing literature asserts that war can alter women’s positions in society even when they do not take on active positions within violent organizations. This is because women often adopt new responsibilities in their households and are sometimes thrust into the formal labor market for the first time.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, war can create new opportunities for women. Scholars are careful to note, however, that post-war reversions to the status quo are common. For instance, at the conclusion of the Biafran conflict, there was a return to “community politics in which everyone knew... their appropriate status.”¹⁵⁶ This caused women to largely fade into the background after the war. According to Van Allen, “women will end up where they have always been: invisible except when men, for their own purposes, whether personal or political, look for female bodies.”¹⁵⁷ In this vein, the

151 Ibid; Diabate, *Naked Agency*.

152 Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

153 Diabate, *Naked Agency*.

154 Aili Mari Tripp, Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga, and Alice Mungwa, “African Women’s Movements,” in *Changing Political Landscapes* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

155 T. David Mason, “Women’s Participation in Central American Revolutions: A Theoretical Perspective,” *Comparative Political Studies* 25, no. 1 (1992): 63–89.

156 Amadiume, “Women’s Political History,” 1839.

157 Van Allen, “Aba Riots or the Igbo Women’s War?” 30.

post-conflict period in Côte d'Ivoire has also been marked by a return to the status quo for women, as their participation in conflict did little to overturn gender roles and norms.¹⁵⁸

Not only has female participation often failed to yield meaningful social and political change for women at the society level, individual participants have struggled to gain acknowledgement for their activities. The discount of women's contributions appears to be a consistent theme across West and East African CBAGs.¹⁵⁹ Mazurana suggests this is because "some armed opposition groups' religious, cultural and social identities are so militarized and masculinized that the existence of females inside their ranks has to be handled in ways that do not destabilize a central component of their ideology, recruitment, organization and identity—that of the male fighter/warrior/martyr, the male who is powerful and in control."¹⁶⁰ Subsequent research should examine two related questions: First, why is women's work acknowledged in some cases, but consistently downplayed in others? Second, why does women's participation so often fail to materialize into post-conflict rewards for women when it is recognized?

There are reasons to believe that reversions to the status quo may be particularly common for women involved in community-based armed groups. Rebels, especially those with revolutionary aims, often work against the status quo and encourage women to circumvent traditional gender expectations. Conversely, CBAGs, by definition, work within existing community structures and are shaped by local or traditional norms. Thus, women's potential for transformation within CBAGs is bounded by a community's gender norms. As Lackenbauer et al., argue, women's influence within CBAGs is often episodic; when the needs that prompted their recruitment evaporate, opportunities for expanded gender roles and responsibilities are also likely to dissipate. Donnelly contends, however, that armed groups are not just shaped by local gender hierarchies but may also shape them. Thus, researchers should pay closer attention to the ways in which women's participation in CBAGs restructures a community's gender norms as well as the mechanisms by which women are able to cement gains that allow them greater participation in post-conflict politics. For example, displaced Tuareg women have noted they have already experienced significant transformations in their roles and have had to become more independent. In being dislodged from their homes, Tuareg women have been exposed to other cultures, which has encouraged them to consider ways in which their political roles might be expanded in the future.¹⁶¹ This begs the question: will Tuareg women be able to retain these gains in peace time? If so, by what means?

It is crucial to note that even if positive changes emanate from war, CBAG participation will not always constitute a net benefit for female participants or the broader community. First, women assume substantial risks by joining CBAGs. While Tuareg women in Mali risk their social standing by participating in security provision formally, other women compromise their physical security and well-being.¹⁶² Many female vigilantes have died or been injured while conducting their duties for CBAGs. In the CJTF in particular, a

158 Diallo, "When Women Take Part in Rebellion."

159 See Matfess (2020) for a discussion of women's roles in East African CBAGs.

160 Mazurana, "Women, Girls and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups," 166.

161 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will," 58.

162 Gorman and Chauzal, "Hand in Hand."

non-trivial number of female vigilantes have been killed by female suicide bombers during the course of their operations.¹⁶³ Additionally, many female providers of local security have been chided by neighbors and/or threatened by armed groups. Female OPC members have been targeted by the state, arrested, and imprisoned, in connection with the group's activities.¹⁶⁴ On at least one occasion, female OPC cadres were killed because of their affiliation with the organization.¹⁶⁵ Even women exercising peaceful resistance to violence have been subject to retribution, as seen in Côte d'Ivoire.

Additionally, some CBAGs are vehicles for women's subjugation.¹⁶⁶ Bagayoko et al. suggest that security organs affiliated with traditional political institutions do not always work to benefit women and can be regressive.¹⁶⁷ Posel argues that the South African Mapogo has emerged to re-establish men's traditional authority over women in response to pervasive calls for female empowerment,¹⁶⁸ while Hisba has actively sought to retract women's freedoms. Thus, it is unclear how adding women to a CBAG with such an agenda would yield progressive outcomes for women. Further, women in both Ganda Koy and CJTF have made clear that expanding their political roles has not necessarily transformed their everyday lives. Many militia women struggle to balance their CBAGs activities with their care responsibilities at home.¹⁶⁹ Finally, the notion that some former female combatants have tried to cast their behavior and roles within violent organizations as largely conforming to gendered expectations to avoid stigma from their communities suggests that wartime transformations can actually hurt women during times of peace.

There is also overwhelming evidence that militia activity can actually exacerbate violence in communities, which inordinately affects women. According to Strauss, the Ganda Koy has been implicated in some of the worst massacres against civilians.¹⁷⁰ In Nigeria, it is widely reported that the security forces, including the state military, CJTF, and Bakassi Boys militias have all worsened violence. Although the CJTF has done much to combat militants' violence, they have also invited reprisal attacks from the insurgents and been implicated in their own human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and the rape and abuse of women and children.¹⁷¹ Task force members have also been accused of forcing transactional sex on those detained unlawfully.¹⁷²

163 "Suicide Bomber Kills 15 in Yobe," *The Nation (Nigeria)*, July 25, 2015 Saturday; "Nigeria; 12 Killed in Suicide Attacks in Yobe, Borno," *Africa News*, February 18, 2015; "Two Killed in Boko Haram Raid on Army Chief's Village: Residents," *Agence France Presse – English*, July 22, 2015.

164 "Nigeria: Reports of Women Being Arrested in Connection with the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) (January 2000–February 2001)," Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 14 February 2001.

165 "Nigeria: The O'odua People's Congress: Fighting Violence with Violence," *Human Rights Watch* 15, no. 4, February 2003.

166 Given the dearth of data on women's participation in CBAG-type groups, this paper does not discuss prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated on women who are part of these groups. However, there is evidence of civilian women being violated by CBAGs.

167 Niagale Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin Luckham, "Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the Foundations of Security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority," *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–32.

168 Deborah Posel, "Afterword: Vigilantism and the Burden of Rights: Reflections on the Paradoxes of Freedom in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Africa Studies* 63, no. 2 (2004): 231–236.

169 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 170; Collyer, "Aisha: Boko Haram Huntress."

170 Scott Strauss, *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

171 "2017 Trafficking in Persons," U.S. Department of State; Holmer, "Nigeria's Double-Edged Front Line."

172 Adbulkareem Haruna, "Soldiers, CJTF Make Us Give Sex for Food – Wives of Detained Boko Haram Suspects Write Buhari," *Premium Times*, March 12, 2018.

Yet, there may be some cause to be (cautiously) optimistic that CBAG women could play a role in quelling human rights violations. Nagarajan argues that militiawomen can play a direct role in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse of civilian women.¹⁷³ To wit, in 2017 over two thousand women involved with Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), a semi-official community policing organization, were trained to detect and report abuse against women and children, including sexual violence and human trafficking.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, some female CJTF members report that their presence and vigilance has led to a reduction in sexual exploitation and abuse by military officers in the IDP camps where they were stationed.¹⁷⁵ If more women within militias received such training, they could potentially prevent some atrocities, though it is unclear if it would avert more violations than are caused by the groups themselves. Additionally, if CBAGs encouraged women to use their connections and influence within communities to convince latent violent actors to turn away from violence, they could foster peace in their communities. The evidence shows, however, that women do not all have such power or more importantly, such a disposition.

The assumption that women will always play a pacific role in conflicts is perhaps too strong, as available evidence does not support this contention. Mature Tuareg women in Mali and OPC women in Nigeria, for example, have instigated violence in their communities directly. Matfess details similar roles among the Turkana women of Kenya and the Ugandan Karamojong.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, incidents among Malian women in the context of UN brokered peacebuilding events demonstrates that women sometimes carry on inter-ethnic feuds, advance grudges and actively work against peace even when there is infrastructure in place. While women within these communities have the capacity and leverage to promote peace in their communities,¹⁷⁷ it is important that their potential for aggravating violence is not overlooked. If one considers women's dual predilection for supporting both conflict and peace, it is obvious that a "add women and mix" approach to peacebuilding cannot not always yield peace. Instead, understanding women's orientations toward peace or conflict is vital for understanding their impact and requires policymakers to consider women's incentives for joining CBAGs in the first place.

In this report, revenge and retribution was found to be a common supply-side motivator of female recruits. If women are frequently motivated by vengeance, peacebuilding efforts that do not include measures to alleviate conflict-induced grievances are likely to be ineffective. For instance, one militiawoman with the Ganda Koy asserted that "even if there are negotiations, even if everybody agrees to peace, if I get my hands on one of [the rebels] I won't just slit their throat, I will chop their heads off."¹⁷⁸ Ideas of retribution are not necessarily specific to women. This concern is largely consistent with historian Gregory Mann's contention that "there was a risk that militias would pursue their own objectives and 'open the Pandora's box of conflict; a set of grudges and grievances that have been difficult to contain in the past."¹⁷⁹

173 Nagarajan, "To Defend or Harm?"

174 "Vigilantes Empower Members Against Rape," *Weekly Trust*, April 8, 2017; Jan Beek, Mirco Göpfert, Olly Owen, and Jonny Steinberg, Jonny, *Police in Africa: The Street Level View* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

175 Ene Osang, "Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls, Women From Rape," *Global Sentinel*, April 22, 2019.

176 Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy*.

177 Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy*.

178 Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

179 Ford and Allen, "Mali Civilians Vow to Take Up Arms Against Islamist Extremists."

Therefore, policymakers should consider integrating peace and justice mechanisms that may alleviate such concerns and facilitate the rehabilitation of society.

Additionally, as noted above, the leadership of armed groups are apt to devalue women's participation within CBAGs. There is an impulse to label women's work within security organizations as supportive or informal; some women's activities may be labeled as informal even if identical tasks are assigned to formal members. These labels diminish the importance of women's work to CBAGs, but more importantly cast doubt on whether they qualify as combatants worthy of resources, support and accolades. The policy community has embraced the term *women associated with armed groups* (WAAGS) to identify informal participants within armed groups. Yet, there are unintended consequences of such a delineation, especially for peace. In the CJTF, for example, spouses of male CJTF members are not considered members in their own right despite being deployed to the front lines. They are instead considered "wives," which carries the connotation that they engage in these actions to support their husbands. It is important to consider whether being married to a CJTF member makes women any less involved, invested in the outcome, or central to an organization's efforts? Additionally, if women's blessings are required for men to go off to battle or to sit at the peace table, do women not constitute important veto players that should be included in the resolution process?

Finally, this report shows that practitioners should not always place great stock in claims that women do not participate formally—even if from armed group leaders—given their strong impulse to overlook, belittle and render invisible, women's contributions to security.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This report examines women's participation in community-based armed groups and finds that across West Africa, women play a number of vital roles that sustain CBAGs and influence important conflict processes. The key findings from this report are that women participate formally and informally in CBAGs for many of the same reasons they participate in rebellion and often express similar motivations as men. The report also proposes a number of fruitful avenues for scholarly research and offered a number of key policy prescriptions.

This manuscript dialogues with the "EMT" framework, which proposes strategies for responding to the emergence of CBAGs, emphasizing the *engagement, management, and transformation* of such groups.¹⁸⁰ With regard to *engagement* and *management*, stakeholders should consider whether incorporating women could blunt an armed organization's edges. Women are often seen as bridges to their communities and can help CBAGs build trust and gain legitimacy from the wider community. In this regard, their recruitment can have important consequences for a community's relationship with armed groups and

180 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019) <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.1>.

violence, more broadly. In the short-term, women may have the ability and will to prevent atrocities against other women as well as election-related violence. Thus, promoting women may mitigate the effect of CBAG violence on community members and outside actors.

The *transformation* of CBAGs is likely to be more difficult, however, especially if recommendations propose the decommissioning of armed groups. Since many of the CBAGs examined here are rooted in local traditions with seemingly inseparable connections to preexisting cultural and political institutions, it may not be possible to retire CBAGs without severe damage to communities themselves. The West African initiation societies provide one example of the firm connection between traditional and security politics, while hunter associations provide another. While hunters have fought on the front lines of conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria, their organizations have enjoyed broader political, social, and moral standing in their societies.¹⁸¹ According to Leach they have “always done much more than just hunt;” they have informed society of “the governance of proper conduct between people, and between people and animals, plants and other forces of the ‘bush.’”¹⁸² Thus, disbanding such groups to improve security outcomes would likely deprive communities of their moral and social grounding as well as the informal mechanisms for conflict resolution that these groups promote. Such a policy would also deprive women of important sources of political legitimacy and influence. Work on hybrid-security governance in Africa suggests it is possible for states to coexist and interact with security producing non-state actors. Moreover, research finds that such arrangements can provide both safety and public services to hard-to-reach populations that have been historically neglected by the state.¹⁸³ While these efforts are likely to be most germane to rural areas on the periphery, they may also matter to centrally located communities as well.¹⁸⁴ In this context, policymakers and practitioners must consider the following in any efforts to prevent or reduce violence in areas where gender diverse CBAGs are active.

LOCAL NORMS DETERMINE PATTERNS OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

The findings of this report suggest that, in contrast to rebel organizations, recruitment practices of CBAGs are often prompted and informed by local norms. This report, however, was unable to determine which specific sources of local norms were most relevant across cases. Agbiboa argues that CBAGs may be legitimized by different, sometimes competing, local institutions including traditional, communal, religious, and political bodies. Thus, a first recommendation from this report is that *policies should be crafted around specific communities, taking into account local dynamics, rather than being formulated at the country-level. Interventions should identify and target CBAGs’ local sources of political legitimacy and power.*

181 Melissa Leach, “Introduction to Special Issue: Security, Socio-ecology, and Polity: Mande Hunters, Civil Society and Nation-States in Contemporary West Africa,” *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): VII-XVI. <https://doi.org/10.1353/at.2004.0052>.

182 Leach 2004, VIII.

183 Bagayoko et al., “Hybrid Security Governance in Africa.”

184 Ibid.

NOT ALL WOMEN ARE OR CAN BE PEACEMAKERS

Women's participation in CBAGs may produce both positive and negative outcomes. Where women are working for peace both formally and informally and position themselves as protectors of their communities, they may be able to curb group violence. When women are working against peace, they have the potential to add further instability to already volatile situations. In Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, women are revered in most communities; they carry with them legitimacy and the ability to persuade their fellow community members. Thus, they have the potential to be important veto-players that can either support or destroy the prospects for peace. Policymakers should avoid relying on essentialist notions of women's preferences and avoid assumptions that all women have incentives to work toward peace. *Practitioners should recognize that women may at different times work toward both peace and conflict with equal fervor. Practitioners should identify and elevate specific women in communities with known predilections for peace. Since women's roles, centrality, and importance to their communities vary by age cohort, policymakers should carefully consider age when formulating recommendations on how to engage with and manage CBAGs.* In gerontocratic societies such as Mali, older women have more influence than younger women, and certainly more biographical availability. In the Ganda Koy, for instance, older, financially secure women with the means to balance domestic responsibilities and outside activities were most likely to participate in CBAG activities.¹⁸⁵ This carries with it the potential for elder women to impact matters of peace and conflict in different ways than their younger counterparts. *Paying attention to the intersection of age and gender is all the more important given that efforts to quell violence are often focused on younger males.*

ADDRESSING CONFLICT-INDUCED GRIEVANCES MAY MATTER

Since so many female CBAG members appear to be motivated by the desire for retribution, it is important that mechanisms are in place to alleviate some of the individual-level grievances that promote recruitment. Without such efforts, women have the potential to undermine community security. In Sierra Leone, for example, women actively engaged in spoiling activities in an attempt to stoke violence between the RUF/AFRC and Kamajor factions by spreading false stories of the armed groups' intentions to break ceasefires and engage in sneak attacks during the demobilization stage of the Lome peace process.¹⁸⁶ Not attending to the preferences and interests of such women during the peace process could have real consequences for peace and stability.

It is also crucially important to consider and address the fact that the root causes of CBAG recruitment may be peripheral to the conflicts themselves. This often requires the state to step up social service provision, including but certainly not limited to protection. Additionally, feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment have been potent drivers of women's interest in violence. Therefore, efforts to address the grievances that prompt such feelings may go a long way in reducing the appeal of violence as well as

185 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 169.

186 Sulaiman Momodu, "Sierra Leone: Woman War-Monger Executed in Panguma," Africa News, January 7, 2000.

attempts at spoiling peace. Short of boosting state capacity, *policymakers should make efforts to address conflict-induced grievances by promoting and supporting relevant transitional justice mechanisms.*¹⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

Women's participation in CBAGs is complex. There is not a common pathway for women's involvement nor is there a single way in which women participate in community-based armed groups. Women interact with CBAGs through both formal and informal channels, yet the overall consequence of their engagement does not appear to rest upon this distinction; women may impact peace and security through their support roles as well as through formal membership ties. Further, women's formal participation should not be considered more efficacious automatically. While in some cases women's active roles in security organizations challenge conventions about women's capabilities and deepen female political engagement, in others, women see no long-term, broad changes in their own statuses or the standing of women in their communities after conflict. At the same time, women are able to act as agenda setters and veto-players without wielding weapons or attaining official standing within an armed group. As a consequence, future research should attempt to better understand the differential impact of women's participation and how it relates to the ways in which they interact with CBAGs .

Relatedly, the report suggests that enduring gendered social changes rarely emanate from women's participation in CBAGS. However, when one considers that several of the primary drivers of female participation are practical and personal (e.g., protection, revenge, material) and not necessarily aimed at broader social change, it raises the question of whether significant revisions to the status quo should be expected. Further, although many scholars argue that conflict can create windows of opportunity to produce sweeping changes in women's rights and freedoms, these arguments have not considered the heterogeneity in women's interests and how the type of violent groups women support influence what they are able to get out of conflict. Many West African CBAGs are associated with traditional political institutions and maintain symbiotic or cooperative relationships with the state. If armed groups are not revisionist and work to preserve the status quo, should their activities be expected to facilitate changes to existing political and social orders? Scholars should examine the circumstances under which CBAGs are able, interested and willing to be socially progressive. While the report uncovered many similarities between rebel groups and CBAGs in terms of supply and demand for women participants, these different types of armed movements are notably dissimilar when it comes to their aims and interests. These deviations are nontrivial, as they likely influence a group's orientation toward broad social change.

Finally, questions about whether CBAGs are "good" or "bad" and whether they should be supported or disbanded continuously emerge. The preliminary evidence suggests that there is no simple answer. CBAGs often have laudable aims and produce positive public goods. They also offer women important

187 Cyanne Loyle and Benjamin Appel, "Conflict Recurrence and Postconflict Justice: Addressing Motivations and Opportunities for Sustainable Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2017): 690–703.

opportunities for political engagement and can facilitate community building and cohesion. Some CBAGs also work hard to establish peace with women at the forefront. However, in their quest to “secure” their communities, some CBAGs also work extrajudicially, mete out gross abuses on civilians and exacerbate tensions with other non-state actors. Interpreting their impact requires nuance and a recognition that CBAGs, like women, are heterogenous. For instance, the Benkadi, raised by the dozos in Mali and Côte d’Ivoire, appear to maintain benevolent and productive relationships with their communities, while Burkina Faso’s Mossi dozo militia, the koglwéogo, are viewed as both defending and menacing the communities in which they operate.¹⁸⁸

Future research should focus not on how to rid states of all CBAGs entirely, but how to manage them at the conclusion of these conflicts. Moreover, since West African women have played important roles as moral arbiters and peacemakers in many conflicts, one must ask what role women could play in helping to mitigate CBAG violence. Preliminary evidence suggests their participation can constrain violent actors. However, this should only be expected when participating women have the will to constrain. Scholars should attempt to uncover when and why women make the choice to advocate for peace over violence. In this vein, peace and conflict can be viewed as instruments; when it is considered necessary to achieve a desired outcome, women are likely to promote violence. When conflict has reached its productive limits, women may pursue peace with equal fervor. Identifying when one strategy is viewed as superior to the other is crucial.

188 Margaret Ariotti and Kevin Friday, *Informal Governance as a Force Multiplier in Counterterrorism: Evidence for Burkina Faso*, JSOU Report 20-3, Joint Special Operations University, 2020.

REFERENCES

- Agbibo, Daniel. *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.
- Alison, Miranda. "Cogs in the wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam." *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003): 37–54.
- Alison, Miranda. *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-national Conflict*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Amadiume, Ifi. "Women's Political History." *West Africa* 1984 (10).
- Ariotti, Margaret and Kevin Friday. *Informal Governance as a Force Multiplier in Counterterrorism: Evidence for Burkina Faso*. JSOU Report 20–3. Joint Special Operations University.
- Badmus, Isiaka. "Explaining Women's Roles in the West African Tragic Triplet." *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2009): 808–839.
- Bagayoko, Niagale, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin Luckham. "Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority." *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–32.
- Barth, Elise. "Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa." International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, August 2002.
- Beek, Jan, Göpfert, Mirco, Owen, Olly and Steinberg, Jonny. *Police in Africa: The Street Level View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Boisvert, Marc-André. "Failing at Violence: the Longer-lasting Impact of Pro-government Militias in Northern Mali Since 2012." *African Security* 8, no. 4 (2015): 272–298.
- Cohen, Dara Kay. "Dueling Incentives: Sexual Violence in Liberia and the Politics of Human Rights Advocacy." *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 445–458.
- Cohen, Dara Kay and Amelia Hoover Green. "Sexual Violence in Liberia and the Politics of Human Rights Advocacy." *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 445–458.
- Coulter, Chris. "Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?" *Feminist Review* 88 (2008): 54–73.
- Cunningham, Karla J. "Cross-regional trends in female terrorism." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171–195.
- Dalby, Ned. "In Search of the Kamajors, Sierra Leone's Civilian Counter-insurgents." *International Crisis Group*, March 2017.
- Day, Lynda. *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone: Women Chiefs of the Last Two Centuries*. Springer, 2012.
- De Pauw, Linda Grant. *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.
- Diabate, Naminata. *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa*. Duke University Press, 2020.
- Diallo, Kamina. "When Women Take Part in Rebellion: The Ex-Fighters from Ivory Coast. Noria, 2017, <https://www.noria-research.com/the-local-roots-of-violence-burkina-faso/>.
- Donnelly, Phoebe. "The Interactive Relationship between Gender and Strategy." *Global Society* 32, no. 4 (2018): 457–476.
- Ferme, Mariane C. and Danny Hoffman. "Hunter Militias And The International Human Rights Discourse In Sierra Leone And Beyond." *Africa Today* (2004): 73–95.
- Gomez, Michael. *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Gorman, Zoe and Chauzal, Grégory. "'Hand in Hand': A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali." *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*, 2019/6.
- Hackett, Rosalind. "Women in African Religions" in *Religion and Women*, Avind Sharma Eds. SUNY Press, 1994.
- Henshaw, Alexis Leanna. *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*. Taylor & Francis, 2016.

- Hernandez, Andrew. "The Ganda Koy Militia: Ethnicity, Politics and Mobilisation in Northern Mali." In *Identités sahéliennes en temps de crise: Histoires, enjeux et perspectives*, edited by Baz Lecoq and Amy Niang. LIT Verlag Münster, 2019.
- Herrera, Natalia, and Douglas Porch. "'Like Going To A Fiesta'—The Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (2008): 609–634.
- Hoffman, Danny. *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Human Rights Watch. "Nigeria: The O'odua People's Congress: Fighting Violence with Violence." 15, no. 4, February 2003.
- Humphreys, Macartan and Weinstein, Jeremy. "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436–455.
- Israelsen, Shelli. "Women in Charge: The Effect of Rebel Governance and Women's Organizations on Karen Women's Political Participation." *Civil Wars* 20, no. 3 (2018): 379–407.
- Kalyvas, Stathis and Matthew Kocher. "How 'Free' is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem." *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 177–216.
- Kampwirth, Karen. *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas*. Ohio University Press, 2014.
- Lackenbauer, Helené, Magdalena Tham Lindell, and Gabriella Ingerstad. "If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will: A Gendered Analysis of the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali." FOI-R, November 2015.
- Leach, Melissa. "Introduction to Special Issue: Security, Socio-ecology, and Polity: Mande Hunters, Civil Society and Nation-States in Contemporary West Africa." *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): VII–XVI. <https://doi.org/10.1353/at.2004.0052>.
- Loyle, Cyanne and Benjamin Appel. "Conflict Recurrence and Postconflict Justice: Addressing Motivations and Opportunities for Sustainable Peace." *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2017): 690–703.
- MacKenzie, Megan. *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-conflict Development*. NYU Press, 2015.
- Manekin, Devorah, and Reed M. Wood. "Framing the Narrative: Female Fighters, External Audience Attitudes, and Transnational Support for Armed Rebellions." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Forthcoming.
- Mason, T. David. "Women's Participation in Central American Revolutions: A Theoretical Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 25, no. 1 (1992): 63–89.
- Matfess, Hilary. *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>
- Muana, Patrick. "The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency." *Africa Development* 22, no. 3/4 (1997): 77–100.
- Mazama, Ama. "Ogboni Society." In *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, edited by M. K. Asante & A. Mazama, 479, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2009.
- Mazurana, Dyan. "Women, Girls and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups." In *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*, edited by Carol Cohn. Malden: Polity Press, 2013.
- Mazurana, Dyan and Kristopher Carlson. "From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone." Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004.
- Méndez, Andrea. "Militarized gender performativity: Women and demobilization in Colombia's FARC and AUC." PhD diss., Queen's University, 2012.
- Miran-Guyon, Marie. "The Côte D'ivoire Armed Forces: Portrait Of A Fragile System: Interview with BrunoClément-Bollée." *Afrique Contemporaine* 263/264, no. 3 (2017): 281–306.
- Molyneux, Maxine. "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua." *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 227–54.
- Mougoué, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta. *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon*. University of Michigan Press, 2019.
- Nacos, Brigitte L. "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 435–451.

- “Nigeria: Reports of Women Being Arrested in Connection with the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC) (January 2000 - February 2001).” Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, February 14, 2001.
- “Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency,” International Crisis Group, no. 242, December 2016.
- Nolte, Insa. “‘Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed’: Yoruba Women in the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), Nigeria.” *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 84–106.
- O’Rourke, Lindsey A. “What’s Special About Female Suicide Terrorism?” *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 681–718.
- Osang, Ene “Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls, Women From Rape.” *Global Sentinel*, April 22, 2019.
- Popkin, Samuel. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1979.
- Posel, Deborah. “Afterword: Vigilantism and the Burden of Rights: Reflections on the Paradoxes of Freedom in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” *Africa Studies* 63, no. 2 (2004): 231–236.
- Poulton, Robin Edward and Ibrahim ag Youssouf. *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*. NY: United Nations, 1998.
- Schuberth, Moritz. *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.1>.
- Schweitzer, Yoram. “Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Reality Vs. Myth.” Memorandum No. 84. Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, 2006.
- Sjoberg, Laura and Caron Gentry. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books, 2007.
- Sjoberg, Laura and Caron Gentry. *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- Sidibé, Kalilou. “Security Management in Northern Mali: Criminal Networks and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms.” IDS Research Reports 77 (2012): 1–103.
- Specht, Irma. *Red Shoes: Experiences of Girls-Combatants in Liberia*. International Labour Office, Geneva, 2006.
- Stack, Alisa. “Zombies versus Black Widows: Women as Propaganda in the Chechen Conflict.” In *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, edited by Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, 83–95. University of Georgia Press, 2011.
- Stein, Judith. “The Effect of Myths about Military Women on the Waging of War.” In *Women and the Military System*, edited by Eva Isaksson. New York: St. Martin’s, 1988.
- Straus, Scott. *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa*. Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Tamaru, Nanako and Marie O’Reilly. “How Women Influence Constitution Making After Conflict and Unrest.” Inclusive Security, January 2018.
- Trisko Darden, Jessica, Alexis Henshaw, and Ora Szekely. *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars*. Georgetown University Press, 2019.
- Thomas, Jakana L. and Kanisha D. Bond. “Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 488–506.
- Thomas, Jakana L. and Reed M. Wood. “The Social Origins of Female Combatants.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 3 (2018): 215–232.
- Tripp, Aili Mari, Casimiro, Isabel, Kwesiga, Joy and Mungwa, Alice. “African Women’s Movements.” In *Changing Political Landscapes*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Tripp, Aili Mari. *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- United States Department of State. “2017 Trafficking in Persons.”
- Uchendu, Egodu. *Women and conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007.
- Utas, Mats. “Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War.” Uppsala University Dissertations in Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University, 2003.
- Van Metre, Lauren. *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.3>.

- Van Allen, Judith. "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War? Ideology, Stratification and the Invisibility of Women." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 11–39.
- Victor, Barbara. *Army of Roses: Inside The World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*. Perseus Books Group, 2003.
- Viterna, Jocelyn. *Women in War: The Microprocesses of Mobilization in El Salvador*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Warner, Jason and Hilary Matfess. "Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's Suicide Bombers." Combating Terrorism Center, 2017.
- "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram," International Crisis Group, no. 244, February 2017.
- Watson, Ruth. "'Ibadan—A Model of Historical Facts': Militarism and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City." *Urban History* (1999): 5–26.
- Wood, Elisabeth Jean. "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 539–661.
- Wood, Reed M. *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War*. Columbia University Press, 2019.
- Wood, Reed M. and Jakana L. Thomas. "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion." *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46.

GENDERED SECURITY SECTOR REFORM: THE CHALLENGE OF STATE-BACKED INTERNAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: CONSIDERATIONS FOR AMOTEKUN

JAKANA THOMAS

COMMUNITY BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“Women’s participation in CBAGs holds important implications for the national security of conflict-affected states.”

FAST FACTS

- » That women have been active in local security can serve as a point of reference for states seeking to integrate more women into security institutions.
- » For many African states pursuing gender integration in military institutions, public support has remained elusive.
- » Key inhibitors of women’s integration into armed forces are concerns about potential consequences for national security when militaries become gender diverse.
- » While concerns that women will be abused, harassed and mistreated within military institutions are valid, greater scrutiny should be placed on those who engage in bad behavior.

CONTEXT

West African women are frequently absent from discussions of community security, despite their substantial contributions to local defense. Women are often viewed primarily as beneficiaries of attempts to reduce local violence, such that their roles in community-based security are typically overlooked. Yet, West African women have long been on the front lines providing protection for their communities from internal and external threats. In 18th Century Whydah, now part of modern-day Benin, contingents of royal wives were tasked with interrupting conflicts between communities and enforcing the kingdom’s laws.¹ Dahomean women also served as royal palace guards and, more infamously, as feared warriors on the battlefield. A century later, Biafrian women

¹ Stanley Alpern, *Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

participated in community-based militias to protect their communities during the Republic's war with Nigeria. These trends are not anachronistic. Women have attained formal membership in many modern African community-based armed groups (CBAGs), including Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Oodua People's Congress and Hisba militias, Sierra Leone's Civilian Defense Forces, as well as the Malian Ganda Koy and Patriotic Resistance Forces (FPR) coalition. CBAGs, which include security organizations as varied as hunter associations, vigilante groups, militias and gangs, engage in the important work of protecting their communities from everything from "petty crimes to insurgencies."²

Though these forces are often portrayed as necessary vessels to defend vulnerable women and children, scarce attention is given to the women that join these organizations to protect their communities and themselves. Yet women's participation in CBAGs holds important implications for the national security of conflict-affected states. Understanding women's participation in community-based armed groups matters for successful demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs and for states' implementation of the global Women, Peace, and Security agenda, particularly gendered security sector reform. That women have been active—and in some cases instrumental— in establishing and maintaining local security can serve as a point of reference for states seeking to integrate more women into security institutions. States can use the gender dynamics of CBAGs as models to better understand the benefits and consequences of creating more gender-inclusive military institutions. Moreover, since CBAG politics are often governed by local norms and practices, understanding how women have become integrated into these local security structures can suggest means of achieving gendered security sector reform that are consistent with and respectful of local customs. This policy note briefly outlines and expounds upon some of the main insights of my recent study on women's participation in West African CBAGs.³ It proposes a set of considerations for states and stakeholders to structure efforts around gendered security sector reform.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Women's increased involvement and integration into the security sector is an important way to improve women's security and well-being. In a recent digest, USAID proffered that "the security sector must include women and girls in decision-making roles in security institutions to ensure their services benefit women and girls as much as they benefit men and boys."⁴ Integrating women into security forces has been shown to decrease violence against civilians—especially women—support peacebuilding efforts, and shore-up civil-military relations.⁵ Therefore, a bedrock of successful security sector reform has been the integration of women into vital security institutions.

2 Daniel Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub Saharan Africa*, (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

3 Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community Based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

4 Chemonics International Inc., *Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit* (Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, 2021), <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/documents/gender-and-security-sector-reform-toolkit>.

5 See, for example: Nina Wilén and Lindy Heineken, "Regendering the South African Army: Inclusion, Reversal and Displacement," *Gender Work Organization* 25, no. 6 (2018): 670-686, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12257>; Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

African states have been at the forefront of embracing the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the attendant calls for gendered security sector reform. At the end of 2019, 50 percent of the states in the African Union had already integrated parts of the WPS agenda into national action plans. Implementation of such plans has continued to prove challenging, however.⁶ Nigeria, for example, has attempted to make good on its commitments to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 by integrating parts of the agenda into its domestic law.⁷ Despite progress, including the creation of its first Army Women's Corps in 2018, improvements have been inconsistent across its security sector with substantial heterogeneity across Nigerian states.⁸ To wit, fewer than half (14) of Nigeria's 36 states have implemented the country's National Action Plan (NAP) into domestic law.⁹ Benue State, for instance, has recently adopted a WPS Action Plan but still has far to go in getting "public buy-in on the importance of engaging women in decision-making" in the security sector.¹⁰

For many African states pursuing gender integration in military institutions, public support has remained elusive, in part due to persistent stereotypes alleging that women do not belong or will not thrive in the security realm.¹¹ Bineta Diop, Senegal's Special Envoy to the African Union (AU) Commission on Women, Peace, and Security, has asserted that implementation is being stymied by "the patriarchal attitudes on the continent and the strong discrimination against women in the security world."¹² Ultimately, these beliefs lead critics to conclude that security work is not appropriate for women, resulting in resistance to change when gendered security sector reform is attempted.¹³

In South Africa, for example, even after the integration of a substantial number of female members in the armed forces, women are still confronted with the charge that they are not well-suited for security work. Despite a constitutional mandate and gender mainstreaming policy—which has helped propel female participation in the military to about 31 percent of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), including 33 percent in leadership positions—sexual harassment, denigration, and an overall lack of consideration of their specific needs are still regular experiences for women in South Africa's military institutions. In an interview with a female Lieutenant, Adrian Van Breda revealed that "the men feel

6 Brigitte Hugh and Deekshita Ramanarayanan, "Africa in Transition: The Role of Women in Peace and Security," *Wilson Center*, October 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/africa-transition-the-role-women-peace-and-security>.

7 "Placing gender at the center of security sector reforms in Nigeria," UN Women: Africa, April 30, 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/04/news---placing-gender-at-the-center-of-security-sector-reforms-in-nigeria>.

8 Ibid.

9 Idris Ibrahim, "Nigeria Launches National Action Plan on Women, Peace, Security," *Premium Times*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.peace-women.org/resource/nigeria-launches-national-action-plan-women-peace-security>; "Women, Peace and Security Agenda Takes Centre Stage in Benue State, Nigeria," UN Women: Africa, July 1, 2021. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/07/benue-state-sap-launch>.

10 Ibid.

11 Salem Solomon, "African Women Surmount Obstacles to Redefine Their Countries' Militaries," *Voice of America*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/african-women-surmount-obstacles-to-redefine-their-countries-militaries/4802120.html>; Wilén and Heinecken, "Regendering the South African Army."

12 "APSACO 2021: Women, Peace and security in Africa Press Release," African Peace and Security Annual Conference, June 22, 2021, <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/SummaryAPSACO2021day1.pdf>.

13 Fiona Pearce, "Why are So Few Women Deployed in UN Peacekeeping?," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-are-so-few-women-deployed-in-un-peacekeeping/>; Karim and Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping*.

as though women are inferior: only there to cook, clean and even expect sexual favours.” A female Sergeant in South Africa’s Air Force articulated that “most of [sic] women are harassed by senior ranks and don’t want to come forward about it, because they’re scared of their future.”¹⁴ Even in leadership roles, women soldiers struggle to make male subordinates respect their authority. Men have also expressed incredulity about their female colleagues’ emotional and physical capabilities, despite women persisting in the forces for decades and men facing similar challenges.¹⁵

Policymakers around the world have voiced concerns that their state’s national security will be placed at risk when women are unprepared for security challenges they are likely to face on battlefields.¹⁶ They question whether adding women will imperil unit cohesion or distract their male comrades to disastrous effects¹⁷ and agonize about the prospect that female soldiers will be abused in the field.¹⁸ They also wonder whether their citizens are ready to embrace women in these untraditional roles.¹⁹ Some have suggested gender integration wait until gender norms and civilian attitudes become more receptive.²⁰ These attitudes, as with all cultural and gender norms, are difficult to change and remediate, however. Without buy-in—or demands for greater inclusion of women—from the public, states have incentives to slow-walk the reform process.²¹ Yet, one way to generate greater acceptance of women’s roles in security would be to demonstrate they would do well in security environments. An even better way to engender public support would be to show that women have already thrived in military institutions. Every day, women take on important security roles across the world, including in African states. This work continues to go unnoticed or ignored.²²

Women make up significant proportions of the UN peacekeeping forces contributed by African states, including Ghana and Ethiopia.²³ Women have also gained recognition for their often-extensive roles in

14 Adrian Van Breda, “Women Claiming Space in the Military: The Experiences of Female South African Soldiers,” *Journal of Human Ecology* 53, no. 1 (2016): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09709274.2016.11906952>.

15 For instance, motherhood is often invoked as a barrier to women’s participation in the military, while fatherhood is not. Similarly, male soldiers frequently highlight women’s fear in the field to disparage female participation, even in instances where male colleagues are also fearful and emotional. Wilén and Heinecken, “Regendering the South African Army.”

16 Lindy Heinecken, “Conceptualizing the Tensions Evoked by Gender Integration in the Military: The South African Case,” *Armed Forces & Society* 43, no. 4 (2016): 202-220, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X16670692>.

17 Anna Simons, “Here’s Why Women in Combat Units is a Bad Idea,” *War on the Rocks*, November 18, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/11/heres-why-women-in-combat-units-is-a-bad-idea/>; “Women in Combat Pros and Cons,” *Sisters in Arms*, n.d., <https://sistersinarms.ca/history/women-in-combat-pros-and-cons/>; Leeanne K. Simpson, “Eight myths about women on the military frontline – and why we shouldn’t believe them,” *The Conversation*, April 1, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/eight-myths-about-women-on-the-military-frontline-and-why-we-shouldnt-believe-them-55594>.

18 Wilén and Heinecken, “Regendering the South African Army.”

19 Yomi Kazeem, “Nigeria’s army has considered not admitting female combatants for training,” *Quartz Africa*, November 14, 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/1128815/nigeria-will-block-female-combat-soldiers-as-eritrea-ethiopia-algeria-boost-theirs/>.

20 “APSACO 2021: Women, Peace and security in Africa Press Release,” African Peace and Security Annual Conference.

21 “Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness, Says Secretary-General, as Security Council Holds Open Debate on Women in Peacekeeping,” *United Nations*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13773.doc.htm>.

22 Thomas discusses several cases where significant numbers of West African women participated in CBAGs, yet women’s participation was eventually erased or downplayed. Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

23 Pearce, “Why Are So Few Women Deployed.”

non-state armed groups by both policymakers and academics.²⁴ They have participated as supporters and combatants in rebel organizations and have long made contributions to community-based security organizations.²⁵ Within these armed groups, women have worked alongside men, making important contributions to vital conflict processes. In states with hybrid-security arrangements, where local defense is provided by local security actors, women's participation amounts to a proof of concept. Women's contributions are already essential for the provision of security in these highly insecure environments. Thus, arguments suggesting the implausibility of gendered security sector reform at the national-level have less merit.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following section provides insights and considerations for policymakers and practitioners when devising integrated efforts for gendered security sector reform.

Leverage women's unique contributions

Key inhibitors of women's integration into armed forces are concerns about potential consequences for national security when militaries become gender diverse. These reservations often reflect worst-case scenarios about what may go wrong when national security is vested in women's hands. While these concerns are foreboding, the lessons from CBAGs demonstrate the potential benefits for security organizations that effectively embrace gender diversity.²⁶

There have been improvements in multiple domains when women were integrated into CBAGs. Women's participation in risky counterterrorism efforts has enhanced national security. Their integration into militias has led to decreased violence against civilians in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and disruptions to terrorist activities.²⁷ In Nigeria, militia women have been used to search and interrogate female suspects, which has preempted attacks by Boko Haram's would-be female suicide bombers. Nigerian female militia members have also leveraged their interpersonal connections to extract and share pertinent security information with militia and military members, which stymies violence by male militants as well.²⁸

24 Ibid.

25 Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 3488–506, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313>; Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343316675025>; Alexis Leanna Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (London: Routledge, 2016); "U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict," U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues, February 13, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-strategy-to-support-women-and-girls-at-risk-from-violent-extremism-and-conflict/>.

26 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

27 Chitra Nagarajan, *To Defend or Harm? Community Militias in Borno State, Nigeria* (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2020), https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CommunityMilitiasFINAL_June2020lowres.pdf; Ene Osang, "Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls, Women From Rape," *Global Sentinel*, April 22, 2019.

28 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

These are countering violent extremism (CVE) successes that can be attributed directly to women’s formal involvement in CBAGs. They are also benefits that directly scale up from the community to the national level. Some of the dangerous missions and assignments female CBAG members have been tasked with are on par with the types of duties members of national armed forces and international peacekeeping missions may face in conflict zones. As Fiona Pearce, gender advisor at the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, put it: “Women are as capable as men to perform military roles, and diversity in any organization makes that organization better.”²⁹

Women have also used their informal connections with other women to deter young men’s recruitment to Boko Haram and dissuade community members from supporting these violent actors.³⁰ The unique positioning of Nigeria’s Igbo women and Mali’s Tuareg women in their communities, informed by local gender norms, has enabled them to influence the uptake of violence or peace in their local areas.³¹ Women in security forces are also sometimes able to serve as bridges to the civilian population, which can improve civil-military relationships.³² Female peacekeepers in states as varied as Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo, and Afghanistan have in some instances been able to play a vital role where—unlike their male counterparts— they have been able to gain “access to 100 percent of the population, not 50 percent.”³³ Likewise, the UN Female Engagement Teams and U.S. Special Operations Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), have also been able to engage with parts of the population (e.g., women, children) that might be inaccessible to male soldiers.³⁴ Improved relationships with the local population are essential for information gathering, trust-building, dispersal of conflict, and the implementation of early warning systems, all important ingredients for successful peacekeeping.³⁵ In addition to increasing access to hard-to-reach populations, studies have also shown that women are able to form greater interpersonal connections with other women and are viewed as more trustworthy than men in similar positions.³⁶ These attributes can facilitate high-level peace negotiations, local peacebuilding efforts, and operational or tactical counterinsurgency missions.

29 Pearce, “Why Are So Few Women Deployed.”

30 Orji Sunday, “Hajiya Hamsatu Allamin is One of the Most Powerful Conflict Mediators with Boko Haram, So Why Won’t Anyone Listen?” *The Establishment*, September 13, 2018, <https://medium.com/the-establishment/hajiya-hamsatu-allamin-is-one-of-the-most-powerful-conflict-mediators-with-boko-haram-so-why-wont-2a4927a39f26>; Orji Sunday, “The Brave Women Fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria,” *Al Jazeera*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/7/10/the-brave-women-fighting-boko-haram-in-nigeria>.

31 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*; Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington DC: RESOLVE Network, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

32 Wilén and Heinecken, “Regendering the South African Army.”

33 Alexandra Ivanovic, “Why the United Nations Needs More Female Peacekeepers,” *United Nations University*, July 9, 2014, <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/why-un-needs-more-female-peacekeepers.html>.

34 Terri Moon Cronk, “Cultural Support Team Women Serve with Distinction,” *U.S. Army*, April 30, 2015, https://www.army.mil/article/147493/cultural_support_team_women_serve_with_distinction; Ivanovic, “Why the United Nations Needs More Female Peacekeepers.”

35 Ibid.

36 Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Tamra Pearson d’Estree and Eileen F. Babbitt. “Women and the Art of Peacemaking: Data from Israeli-Palestinian Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops,” *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1998): 185–209, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3792121>.

Women also provide stability for peace processes and stop abhorrent behavior by armed actors, including state and local forces.³⁷ The reduction of civilian victimization when women are integrated into military forces has been noted with respect to UN peacekeeping forces by both practitioners and academics.³⁸ Reporting of sexual and gender-based incidents also increases when women are more prevalent among peacekeeping contingents.³⁹ Similarly, in Nigeria, Female CJTF members have reported that their presence and vigilance has led to a reduction in sexual exploitation and abuse by military officers in IDP camps.⁴⁰ Thousands more women in the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) have been trained to detect and report abuse against women and children, such as sexual violence and trafficking.⁴¹ Recognizing these potential benefits of women's inclusion, military forces should concentrate their attention on providing support, training, incentives, and encouragement for female soldiers to protect other women. It is vital, however, to be cautious about overstating the responsibility for—and ability of—women to prevent abuses against civilians. Men in the military, armed groups, and the general population must also be held accountable for their actions.⁴² Efforts that change attitudes and set consequences for bad behavior must be a part of the process of security sector reform.⁴³

Even in states reluctant to allow women to participate in overt combat or in roles considered “men's work,” women's unique positions can be leveraged by engagement teams. Further, states should not allow arguments about women's fitness to hold them back from allowing women to be integrated in the military. In instances where women have participated in conflicts willingly, they have demonstrated their ability to operate efficiently and effectively under pressure.⁴⁴ Most important, however, is that in conflict zones, women's lives are already at great risk regardless of their overt participation in conflict. Thus, restricting female participation in the military over fears women will be harmed in conflict⁴⁵ overlooks the everyday dangers women endure and manage in conflict-affected states, while simultaneously preventing them from being a part of the solution.⁴⁶

37 Solomon, “African Women Surmount Obstacles to Redefine Their Countries' Militaries.”

38 Karim and Beardsley, Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping; “Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness,” *United Nations*.

39 “Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness,” *United Nations*.

40 Osang, “Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls.”

41 Hussein Yahaya, “Vigilantes Empower Members Against Rape,” *Daily Trust*, April 3, 2017, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201704030209.html>.

42 For example, see: Christopher Isike, “Change What South African Men Think of Women to Combat their Violent Behaviour,” *The Conversation*, October 4, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/change-what-south-african-men-think-of-women-to-combat-their-violent-behaviour-167921>.

43 Ernest Hersh, “Security reform key to protecting women,” *Africa Renewal*, 2012, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-women-2012/security-reform-key-protecting-women>.

44 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

45 Heineken, “Conceptualizing the Tensions Evoked by Gender Integration in the Military.”

46 Women often join violent political organizations to protect themselves and other women within their communities from sexual and gender-based violence. Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

Recognize women’s contributions to replicate lessons learned

Despite women’s substantial contributions to the initiation, maintenance, and termination of conflicts, their participation has been frequently ignored, overlooked, and diminished.⁴⁷ Governments, local political figures, and armed groups have denied women’s involvement and centrality to local security activities. For instance, even though the Kamajor militia drafted female recruits at a crucial point during the civil war in Sierra Leone, they not only denied that women were ever among their ranks but also prohibited female members from taking part in the demobilization process.⁴⁸ Tuareg and Biafran women’s contributions to security provision were similarly downplayed, even though in both cases their involvement was vital for the execution and sustenance of their communities’ war efforts.⁴⁹

Failing to recognize women’s contributions to security not only renders the work women have done invisible, it also makes it difficult to replicate any success attributed to women’s participation. If women make specific, meaningful contributions to security at the community and national levels, but those contributions are overlooked or denied, they cannot be leveraged in the future. By downplaying women’s historical activities, especially as it relates to counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and peacebuilding, practitioners who hope to learn lessons that can be transposed onto other contexts will miss key ingredients responsible for success. Moreover, if women do not receive recognition contemporaneously for their contributions, they are unlikely to be credited later, which could convince well-meaning actors there is little merit to investing in women’s integration into CBAGs or military institutions. On the other hand, by acknowledging what women do on the frontlines and behind the scenes, political actors may have a greater impetus to prioritize women’s inclusion in the future. Also, seeing women thrive in these positions may empower other women to pursue new opportunities in security, which may help boost female recruitment in cases where too few eligible women seek out these roles.⁵⁰

47 Ibid.

48 Megan MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-conflict Development* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 8.

49 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*; Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 121; Zoe Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, “‘Hand in Hand’: A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali,” *SIPRI*, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/hand-hand-study-insecurity-and-gender-mali>. Although it is alleged that Tuareg women have little involvement with conflict, they do offer support to the fighters and have unique power to sanction conflict in their homes or communities.

50 Women are more likely to seek out combat roles in militaries when they observe other women joining as well. See, for example: Douglas Yeung, Christina E. Steiner, Chaitra M. Hardison, Lawrence M. Hanser, and Kristy N. Kamarck, “Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military Views from the Field,” *RAND*, 2017. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1538/RAND_RR1538.pdf; Jena McGregor, “Getting More Women into Army Leadership,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2014/06/03/getting-more-women-into-army-leadership/>; “Military Women Discuss Taboos and Stigmas They Face in UN Peace Operations,” *International Peace Institute*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/woman-first-soldier-second-taboos-and-stigmas-facing-military-women-in-un-peace-operations#2>.

Include women in DDR programs

Gendered demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) is an essential pillar of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. UNSC 1325 implores all stakeholders to consider gendered perspectives, including female ex-combatants' unique needs, when designing and implementing DDR programs in conflict-zones. This provision recognizes that peace and stability cannot be achieved, if women are systematically excluded from the benefits of DDR. To this end, it is important to consider the range of violent actors that need to be demobilized and reintegrated after a conflict. While rebel women's exclusion from DDR programs has garnered significant attention recently, DDR programs' omission of women from pro-government, self-defense, and civil defense forces has evaded the spotlight. Yet, concerns about gender equity in DDR are also likely to exist among militias and have similarly dire consequences if left ignored.

A sizeable challenge of demobilizing women within rebel groups has been gleaning which women constitute legitimate combatants and which are attempting to gain benefits they are not entitled to. While gaining access to DDR programs is problematic for some male combatants as well, women—as a group—are often excluded from participating in DDR programs, while this is never the case for men. In other words, while DDR equity is a problem for both men and women, these programs are often biased against women as a group, while only unfair to some specific men. Those overseeing DDR programs are hesitant to assume that “all women or girl ex-combatants should be considered soldiers; a hesitation that does not exist with respect to male ex-combatants, even though some men and boys also fill support rather than combat roles.”⁵¹ Armed groups and DDR programs often adopt terms that distinguish women's participation (i.e., women associated with armed forces/groups, war wives) from men's, even when women take on active and risky roles in conflicts.⁵²

The 22,000 women that signed up for Liberia's demobilization process were registered as “women associated with the fighting forces” (WAFF), despite more than two-thirds of these women self-identifying as combat soldiers.⁵³ A similar distinction was not made of male soldiers. Moreover, although the program was supported by a peace process with a clear gender perspective and a mandate to take the needs of women seriously, women were incorporated into the program at a far lesser rate than their actual participation in the conflict.⁵⁴ Amnesty International suggests this discrepancy may have resulted from the program being led by a group of men who believed women should not be involved in the DDR process, poor information disseminated specifically to women, commanders' gender discrimination, and the stigma of

51 Kathleen Jennings, “The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia: A Gendered Critique,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 475-494, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903345770>; See also: Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences* (Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2008), <http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:241304/FULLTEXT01>.

52 Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process discriminates against women and girls*, March 31, 2008, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/afr340042008eng.pdf>.

53 Jennings, “The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia,” 482.

54 Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process*.

being branded a WAFF.⁵⁵ Women’s activities were similarly vital to the Mozambican, Sierra Leonean, and Indonesian civil conflicts, but women were largely overlooked as candidates for demobilization in these conflicts, even where compensation was afforded to civilian women.⁵⁶

Determining whether women qualify for DDR programs is likely to be similarly difficult when it pertains to community-based armed groups. This is because CBAGs, particularly those raised by conservative communities, often downplay women’s contributions, even when significant and indispensable. These militias tend to recruit women reluctantly and only when their needs are great, which makes them less keen to admit how central or important women were to their efforts. Some groups go so far as to deny that any women ever participated, even when clear evidence confirms the contrary.⁵⁷ In more traditional or conservative communities, arguments about women’s place in security drives this sleight-of-hand. But these denials do more than undercut women’s achievements; they also make it difficult to justify including women in DDR processes, which creates incentives for women to seek alternative means of recouping the material benefits they lose out on when they are excluded from DDR.

In the past, DDR programs have promoted the idea that reintegrating male combatants into society is a more important goal, since only idle men are believed to threaten stability.⁵⁸ However, research on civil conflict makes clear that most individuals join armed groups to gain and maintain material benefits, and the importance of these selective incentives as a recruitment tool appears to be consistent across genders.⁵⁹ In Cote d’Ivoire, for example, some women and men that initially joined pro-government militias switched to the rebel side when the expected costs and benefits of supporting a given side changed. Likewise, male and female former rebels joined militias when pro-government activism appeared more beneficial.⁶⁰ This supports arguments that conflict actors can be swayed by pecuniary incentives during conflicts. Thus, if only men are enticed away from violence by promises of the rewards they will receive during demobilization, women have few incentives to turn away from violence and return to society. Moreover, women in armed groups often face higher barriers in assimilating back into society after conflicts, given societal attitudes about women’s involvement in violence.⁶¹ Thus, it may be easier for women to return to violence than to their communities when they lack the tools and support that DDR programs can offer.

55 Ibid.

56 Wenche Iren Hauge, “Gender Dimensions of DDR – Beyond Victimization and Dehumanization: Tracking the Thematic,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 2 (2019): 206–226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2019.1673669>.

57 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

58 Jennings discusses that in Liberia providing for male employment and re-entry into the workforce is more important than women’s, as only unemployed men would pose a threat to peace. With women, they are only concerned about prostitution. Jennings, “The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia.”

59 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

60 Ibid.

61 Alexis Leanna Henshaw, “Female Combatants in Postconflict Processes: Understanding the Roots of Exclusion.” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 63–79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz050>.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, from a practical standpoint, to achieve long-term peace and stability, robust DDR programs must acknowledge and accommodate the full range of conflict actors. Three practical recommendations follow.

- » DDR programs should have specific provisions for militias, groups that are often left out of DDR and related peace processes, despite strong incentives and ability to continue fighting.⁶² This is consequential, since research shows that when militias act as counterinsurgents, conflicts are significantly more likely to recur.⁶³
- » Policymakers and practitioners that oversee the implementation of DDR programs should be skeptical of pronouncements like those in Mali, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria that women writ large are absent from a war effort. Program officers should recognize the broad array of contributions that women make to armed groups, including those in militias, and should avoid minimizing or trivializing the types of participation women more frequently engage in. To ensure that more women have access to DDR benefits, practitioners, funders, and stakeholders should avoid making distinctions between women fighters and women supporters, ensure that DDR applications of male and female recruits are similarly scrutinized, and understand how male commanders' biases uniquely disenfranchise women applicants to DDR programs.⁶⁴
- » Policymakers should not prioritize men's participation in DDR over women's based solely on assumptions that men's buy-in is more essential to peace and stability. Both men and women's participation contribute to war, so both men and women should be offered the same incentives to make the transition to peace attractive and feasible.

CONCLUSION

The many examples provided in this report indicate that even when female fighters have been integral to armed groups' success, they have been excluded disproportionately from post-conflict benefits, includ-

62 Christoph Steinert, Janina I. Steinert, and Sabine C. Carey, "Spoilers of peace: Pro-government militias as risk factors for conflict recurrence," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 249–263, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343318800524>.

63 Steinert, Steinert, and Carey, "Spoilers of peace."

64 As in the case of Liberia, women are often left out of DDR processes when commanders provide false information about women's participation to DDR officials, intentionally misinform women about whether they are qualified for demobilization, and confiscate women's weapons for their own personal monetary gain. Thousands of UNIMIL applicants incorrectly received benefits, often at the expense of women and girls who should have qualified. See, for example: Dyan Mazurana, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré, "Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Reviewing and Advancing the Field," in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, eds. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199300983.013.35>; Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process*.

ing participation in their states' post-conflict militaries.⁶⁵ Conflict experiences, however, have been sufficient to qualify men for recruitment into post-conflict armed forces.⁶⁶ Therefore, after demonstrating their ability to engage in security work in armed groups and militias, there are few justifiable reasons for women to be barred from state militaries writ large.

If states, including those with ambitious WPS state action plans, hope to move forward with gendered security sector reform, there are familiar models they can reference that could guide this process. In particular, non-state armed groups, including community-based militias, have already leveraged West African women's participation successfully. States can look to these experiences for a better understanding of the consequences or benefits of gender diversity.

While concerns that women will be abused, harassed and mistreated within military institutions are valid, greater scrutiny should be placed on those who engage in bad behavior, rather than potential victims of abuse. Moreover, it is important to remember that civilian women are not safe from abuse in war zones, as the recent crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region demonstrates.⁶⁷ Preliminary evidence suggests, however, that sexual exploitation and abuse decrease when militaries integrate women, and even more progress can be made when institutions prioritize gender equality.⁶⁸

65 Mazurana, Krystalli, and Baaré, "Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration"; Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process*. For example, female soldiers were excluded from Eritrea's and South Sudan's militaries, despite substantial contributions to rebels' wartime armies.

66 Steinert, Steinert, and Carey, "Spoilers of peace."

67 Civilian women endure many types of violence during conflicts, including increased rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, and intimate partner violence. Jocelyn T. D. Kelly, Elizabeth Colantuoni, Courtland Robinson, and Michele R. Decker, "Quantifying the Ripple Effects of Civil War: How Armed Conflict Is Associated with More Severe Violence in the Home," *Health Human Rights* 23 no. 1 (2021): 75–89, <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2021/06/quantifying-the-ripple-effects-of-civil-war-how-armed-conflict-is-associated-with-more-severe-violence-in-the-home/>.

68 Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, "Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions: The Role of Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality in Contributing Countries," *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 1 (2016): 100–115, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343315615506>.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

On Community Based-Armed Groups

Agbiboa, Daniel. *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub Saharan Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

Van Metre, Lauren. *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.3>.

On Gender Politics of CBAGs

Matfess, Hilary. *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

Thomas, Jakana. *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

On Gender and Security Sector Reform

Bastick, Megan, and Tobie Whitman. *A Women's Guide to Security Sector Reform*. Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Inclusive Security and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2013. <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/WGTSSR-Web.pdf>.

Chemonics International Inc. *Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, 2021. <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/documents/gender-and-security-sector-reform-toolkit>.

On Women in DDR

Hills, Christopher, and Megan MacKenzie. "Women in Non-State Armed Groups after War: The (Non) Evolution of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration." In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, edited by Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson, 455-471. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-51677-0_28.

Mazurana, Dyan, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré. "Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Reviewing and Advancing the Field." In *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, edited by Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199300983.013.35>.

Vastapuu, Leena. "Not Enough Soldier, Not Enough Civilian: The Continuing Under-Representation of Female Soldiers in Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) Programmes." In *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, edited by Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, and Catia Cecilia Confortini, 231-239. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024160-25>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "APSACO 2021: Women, Peace and security in Africa Press Release." *African Peace and Security Annual Conference*. June 22, 2021. <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/SummaryAPSACO2021day1.pdf>.
- "Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness, Says Secretary-General, as Security Council Holds Open Debate on Women in Peacekeeping." *United Nations*, April 11, 2019. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13773.doc.htm>.
- "Military Women Discuss Taboos and Stigmas They Face in UN Peace Operations." *International Peace Institute*, October 20, 2020. <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/woman-first-soldier-second-taboos-and-stigmas-facing-military-women-in-un-peace-operations#2>.
- "Placing gender at the center of security sector reforms in Nigeria." *UN Women: Africa*, April 30, 2021. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/04/news---placing-gender-at-the-center-of-security-sector-reforms-in-nigeria>.
- "U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict." *U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues*, February 13, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-strategy-to-support-women-and-girls-at-risk-from-violent-extremism-and-conflict/>.
- "Women in Combat Pros and Cons." *Sisters in Arms*, n.d. <https://sistersinarms.ca/history/women-in-combat-pros-and-cons/>.
- "Women, Peace and Security Agenda Takes Centre Stage in Benue State, Nigeria." *UN Women: Africa*, July 1, 2021. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/07/benue-state-sap-launch>.
- Agbibo, Daniel. *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.
- Alpern, Stanley. *Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey*. New York: NYU Press, 2011.
- Amnesty International. *Liberia: A flawed process discriminates against women and girls*. March 31, 2008. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/afr340042008eng.pdf>.
- Babcock, Linda, and Sara Laschever. *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Chemonics International Inc. *Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, 2021. <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/documents/gender-and-security-sector-reform-toolkit>.
- Coulter, Chris, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas. *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2008. <http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:241304/FULLTEXT01>.
- Cronk, Terri Moon. "Cultural Support Team Women Serve with Distinction." *U.S. Army*, April 30, 2015. https://www.army.mil/article/147493/cultural_support_team_women_serve_with_distinction;
- Gorman, Zoe, and Grégory Chauzal. "'Hand in Hand': A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali." *SIPRI*, 2019. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/hand-hand-study-insecurity-and-gender-mali>.
- Hauge, Wenche Iren. "Gender Dimensions of DDR – Beyond Victimization and Dehumanization: Tracking the Thematic." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 2 (2019): 206-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2019.1673669>.
- Heineken, Lindy. "Conceptualizing the Tensions Evoked by Gender Integration in the Military: The South African Case." *Armed Forces & Society* 43 no. 4 (2016): 202-220. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X16670692>.
- Henshaw, Alexis Leanna. "Female Combatants in Postconflict Processes: Understanding the Roots of Exclusion." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 63-79. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz050>.
- Henshaw, Alexis Leanna. *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Hersh, Ernest. "Security reform key to protecting women." *Africa Renewal*, 2012. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-women-2012/security-reform-key-protecting-women>.
- Hugh, Brigitte, and Deekshita Ramanarayanan. "Africa in Transition: The Role of Women in Peace and Security." *Wilson Center*, October 2019. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/africa-transition-the-role-women-peace-and-security>.
- Ibrahim, Idris. "Nigeria Launches National Action Plan on Women, Peace, Security." *Premium Times*, May 10, 2017. <https://www.peace-women.org/resource/nigeria-launches-national-action-plan-women-peace-security>.
- Isike, Christopher. "Change What South African Men Think of Women to Combat their Violent Behaviour." *The Conversation*, October 4, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/change-what-south-african-men-think-of-women-to-combat-their-violent-behaviour-167921>.

- Ivanovic, Alexandra. "Why the United Nations Needs More Female Peacekeepers." *United Nations University*, July 9, 2014. <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/why-un-needs-more-female-peacekeepers.html>.
- Jennings, Kathleen. "The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia: A Gendered Critique." *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 475–494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903345770>.
- Karim, Sabrina and Kyle Beardsley. *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Karim, Sabrina, and Kyle Beardsley. "Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions: The Role of Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality in Contributing Countries." *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 1 (2016): 100–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343315615506>.
- Kazeem, Yomi. "Nigeria's army has considered not admitting female combatants for training." *Quartz Africa*, November 14, 2017. <https://qz.com/africa/1128815/nigeria-will-block-female-combat-soldiers-as-eritrea-ethiopia-algeria-boost-theirs/>.
- Kelly, Jocelyn T. D., Elizabeth Colantuoni, Courtland Robinson, and Michele R. Decker. "Quantifying the Ripple Effects of Civil War: How Armed Conflict Is Associated with More Severe Violence in the Home." *Health Human Rights* 23, no. 1 (2021): 75–89. <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2021/06/quantifying-the-ripple-effects-of-civil-war-how-armed-conflict-is-associated-with-more-severe-violence-in-the-home/>.
- MacKenzie, Megan. *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-conflict Development*. New York: NYU Press, 2015.
- Matfess, Hilary. *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>
- Mazurana, Dyan, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré. "Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Reviewing and Advancing the Field." In *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, edited by Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199300983.013.35>.
- McGregor, Jena. "Getting More Women into Army Leadership." *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2014/06/03/getting-more-women-into-army-leadership/>.
- Nagarajan, Chitra. *To Defend or Harm? Community Militias in Borno State, Nigeria*. Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2020. https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CommunityMilitiasFINAL_June2020lowres.pdf.
- Pearce, Fiona. "Why are So Few Women Deployed in UN Peacekeeping?." *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, May 29, 2020. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-are-so-few-women-deployed-in-un-peacekeeping/>.
- Pearson d'Estree, Tamra, and Eileen F. Babbitt. "Women and the Art of Peacemaking: Data from Israeli-Palestinian Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops." *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1998): 185–209. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3792121>.
- Simons, Anna. "Here's Why Women in Combat Units is a Bad Idea." *War on the Rocks*, November 18, 2014. <https://warontherocks.com/2014/11/heres-why-women-in-combat-units-is-a-bad-idea/>.
- Simpson, Leeanne K. "Eight myths about women on the military frontline – and why we shouldn't believe them." *The Conversation*, April 1, 2016. <https://theconversation.com/eight-myths-about-women-on-the-military-frontline-and-why-we-shouldnt-believe-them-55594>.
- Solomon, Salem. "African Women Surmount Obstacles to Redefine Their Countries' Militaries." *Voice of America*, February 24, 2019. <https://www.voanews.com/a/african-women-surmount-obstacles-to-redefine-their-countries-militaries/4802120.html>.
- Steinert, Christoph, Janina I. Steinert, and Sabine C. Carey. "Spoilers of peace: Pro-government Militias as Risk Factors for Conflict Recurrence." *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 249–263. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343318800524>.
- Sunday, Orji. "Hajiya Hamsatu Allamin is One of the Most Powerful Conflict Mediators with Boko Haram, So Why Won't Anyone Listen?." *The Establishment*, September 13, 2018. <https://medium.com/the-establishment/hajiya-hamsatu-allamin-is-one-of-the-most-powerful-conflict-mediators-with-boko-haram-so-why-wont-2a4927a39f26>.
- Sunday, Orji. "The Brave Women Fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Al Jazeera*, July 10, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/7/10/the-brave-women-fighting-boko-haram-in-nigeria>.
- Thomas, Jakana L., and Kanisha D. Bond. "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations." *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 3488–506. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313>.
- Thomas, Jakana. *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.
- Uchendu, Egodi. *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007.

- Van Breda, Adrian. "Women Claiming Space in the Military: The Experiences of Female South African Soldiers." *Journal of Human Ecology* 53 no. 1 (2016): 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09709274.2016.11906952>.
- Wilén, Nina, and Lindy Heinecken. "Regendering the South African Army: Inclusion, Reversal and Displacement," *Gender Work Organization*, 25 no. 6 (2018): 670–686. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12257>.
- Wood, Reed M., and Jakana L. Thomas. "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion." *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/022343316675025>.
- Yahaya, Hussein. "Vigilantes Empower Members Against Rape." *Daily Trust*, April 3, 2017. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201704030209.html>.
- Yeung, Douglas, Christina E. Steiner, Chaitra M. Hardison, Lawrence M. Hanser, and Kristy N. Kamarck. "Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military Views from the Field" *RAND*, 2017. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1538/RAND_RR1538.pdf.

About the Note

Author: Jakana Thomas

***Jakana Thomas** is Associate Professor in the School of Global Policy and Strategy at the University of California, San Diego. She is an expert on political violence with an emphasis on the behavior of violent non-state actors. Her research examines women's participation in rebel, terrorist and community-based violent organizations and the determinants of successful peace processes. She is associate editor of the H-DIPLO/ International Security Studies Forum and a member of the RESOLVE Research Advisory Council.*

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



2016–2018

National Action Plan

for the Implementation
of the United Nations
Sustainable Development
Goals

Photo adapted from: Photo courtesy of the U.S. Institute of Peace. Kenya (2019).