

LEVERAGING THE PEACEBUILDING POTENTIAL OF CROSS-BORDER TRADER NETWORKS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

This fact sheet presents findings from the RESOLVE Network Policy Note "[*Leveraging the Peacebuilding Potential of Cross-border Trader Networks in Sub-Saharan Africa*](#)" by Maryam Rokhideh. Cross-border trade plays a prominent role in economic, social, and political life in Sub-Saharan Africa, contributing significantly to development, poverty reduction, and job creation. Across the continent, cross-border trade accounts for 43 percent of the entire population's income. As actors embedded in licit and illicit networks at local and regional levels, cross-border traders have the potential to fuel conflict or mitigate it. They can act as spoilers, supporting armed groups and war economies, or as peace intermediaries, negotiating peace deals and bridging conflict divides across communities. Given that most armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa are shaped by cross-border dynamics, cross-border traders present an underexamined yet critical point of entry for analyzing and addressing conflicts and should be included in new and ongoing peacebuilding programming. This policy note provides recommendations on how policymakers can leverage the untapped peacebuilding potential of cross-border traders and decrease their spoiling power.

For more, see: Rokhideh, Maryam. [*Leveraging the Peacebuilding Potential of Cross-border Trader Networks in Sub-Saharan Africa*](#). RESOLVE Network, 2021.

KEY POINTS & DEBATES



Recent policy initiatives underlining the importance of cross-border cooperation in mitigating conflict and violent extremism present an opportunity to incorporate cross-border traders in these efforts.



Despite their contributions to security governance and peace and development outcomes, cross-border traders have yet to be incorporated into local peacebuilding approaches.



Cross-border trade can indirectly contribute to peacebuilding by reducing unemployment, a factor leading to violent conflict and recruitment into armed groups.



In seeking to protect their investments, cross-border traders have established hybrid security arrangements that have indirectly contributed to peacebuilding.



Even if cross-border traders are not directly stepping into peacebuilding roles or are not necessarily driven by peace objectives, they nonetheless impact the political economy of conflict-affected areas and should be included as key actors in new and ongoing programming.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Invest in researching the constructive and destructive roles of cross-border traders in conflicts.

Cross-border traders are at the intersection of many conflict drivers. Assessing their roles as potential spoilers of conflict or as peace actors is key to successful peacebuilding programming. Policy initiatives should carry out context-specific assessments of the local private sector and cross-border traders.



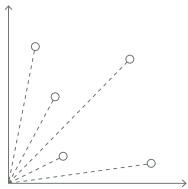
Leverage the information and intelligence networks of cross-border traders.

Cross-border trader networks are a potential resource for accessing critical information and intelligence at various levels. Cross-border traders often have the most up-to-date and accurate information on conflict drivers and community dynamics and as such should be utilized as a key resource. Policy initiatives should thus make concerted efforts to include cross-border traders in border security mechanisms.



Strengthen the peacebuilding potential of existing cross-border trader networks and associations.

Given the power of bridge-building networks in preventing and mitigating conflicts, cross-border trader networks offer a critical point of entry for community-led peacebuilding. Policymakers could facilitate inclusive trade policies that contribute to building trust and mutual interdependencies between communities, providing incentives for cross-border cooperation and collective action. Policy initiatives can support and strengthen the peacebuilding capacities of cross-border trader associations by providing trainings and platforms for dialogue and conflict resolution.



Incorporate peacebuilding components in current cross-border initiatives.

Current initiatives all support cross-border trade in some way but do not include peacebuilding components. By adding a peacebuilding lens to these initiatives, policymakers can identify context-specific conditions that are favorable for local peacebuilding and cooperation. Furthermore, linkages could be strengthened between local trader associations and regional organizations. Trainings should be provided to build the peacebuilding capacity of cross-border trader networks and associations.

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