Enhancing Women’s Peacebuilding Participation: Household Gender Norms Change in Post-Conflict Burundi

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I. Executive Summary

Ratification of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 represents landmark support for women’s participation in decision-making during all stages of conflict and peacebuilding. However, strong rhetoric has outshone weak implementation. Despite the growth of official recognition of Resolution 1325 by governments across the globe, political will, funding, UN and state bureaucracies, persistent gender structures and assumptions about the actors and methods of change continue to limit women’s space and influence during fundamental decision-making processes.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how women and men negotiate conflict resolution decision-making in their private lives, a largely overlooked aspect of gender norms processes within Resolution 1325 literature, and to investigate connections between such processes within the private sphere and Resolution 1325 implementation in the public sphere. If women are to share equitably in mediating conflicts and shaping post-conflict societies, it is essential that the underlying power structures that give meaning to gender norms transform not only in the public realm, but also in the private spaces where gender is most intimate and women face the most direct obstacles to equality.

A desk review of sociological literature on gender and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa and field research with community-level conflict resolution practitioners produced insight into the micro-processes of change in gender and decision-making in post-conflict Burundi:

Marital Conflict Resolution Practices

- Preserving the socio-economic gains associated with marriage is the primary motivation for using non-violent conflict resolution practices.
- Both men and women prefer interpersonal dialogue. However, while men use reconciliation to maintain the status quo, women utilize a range of conflict resolution processes that either reaffirm their subordinate positions in the home or facilitate renegotiation of household power.
- Changes to government and community structures that facilitate Resolution 1325 norms and recognize women’s rights provide women with an additional element of negotiating power that some women are using to contest subordination in their private lives.

Peacebuilding Roles

- Men and women are thought of as having peacebuilding roles based on their positions as protectors (men) and mothers (women) that are rooted in the bashingantahe institution, rural agricultural practices and the centrality of nuclear families in organizing social life.
- Since changes to the government structure in 2010, women have increased access to public space and confidence in their capacity as leaders.
- Women note increased support from their husbands for their leadership ambitions, as husbands conceive of women’s participation in public life as a new and important component of the value wives bring to the household.

Programming and Policy Implications
• Resolution 1325 implementation should occur holistically. Simultaneous state-level changes to laws and to government structure and community-level encouragement of gender role sharing and flexibility help to frame shifting roles as logical and beneficial to families and communities.

• Work with women and men to implement Resolution 1325. Men and women are gendered subjects, and their gender identities and roles, as well as rational self-interest, affect support for Resolution 1325 initiatives. When men’s perspectives and concerns are taken into account, they can enable gender flexibility.

• Use a variety of arguments, languages and cultural products to localize Resolution 1325 so that it makes sense in context.

This study begins to illustrate how changes to gender norms within public and private spaces influence each other and can act as both barriers or enablers to implementation of global gender norms. While significant gains have been made to state structures since ratification of Resolution 1325, such as legal and constitutional reform and the implementation of gender quotas, assumptions about masculinity and femininity and differential access to power and resources often inhibit acceptance of women as legitimate decision-makers. At the same time, participants from this study note a willingness to loosen strict gender norms when interventions help to frame gender flexibility as logical to both personal relations and socio-economic status. Therefore, greater engagement with local and interpersonal normative processes that mediate women’s participation in public life is a promising priority for implementation of Resolution 1325 norms.

II. Introduction

Adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000 represents a peak in the development of a global norm on women’s participation in peace and security processes. Transnational women’s rights activists, advocates within the United Nations and a group of member states came together and, for the first time, formally recognized women as active participants in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Because Resolution 1325 recognizes women’s experiences, perspectives and expertise as valid and essential to the creation of peaceful societies, it represents an unprecedented step in affirming women’s citizenship. Despite the incorporation of new actors into the community of advocates and practitioners, ratification of six resolutions that reinforce the

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mandate of 1325 and the establishment of implementation and monitoring frameworks,

scholars note the weaknesses of 1325 and problems with implementation and have begun to levy criticism of the assumptions and politics of the resolution itself. Criticisms of the content and politics of Resolution 1325 speak to the assertion that “the problem [with women’s participation] is not so much the absence of relevant international standards, but the lack of implementation and respect for them” and that barriers to implementation lie deeper than the practical-operational weaknesses that receive such great attention. Throughout the literature on Resolution 1325, certain assumptions about the actors, modes and directions of change persist, focusing on the international, national and community levels, while ignoring the household, interpersonal and micro-levels and the connections between private and public realms. By examining private gender norms and conflict resolution practices in post-conflict Burundi in the context of fifteen years of public-sphere advocacy and research surrounding Resolution 1325, this study illuminates connections between gender change processes in public and private realms and provides insight into an essential and undervalued dimension of women, peace and security.

This paper begins with analysis of Burundian women’s work with Resolution 1325 in advancing women’s rights and gaining space for women’s participation in peace processes and governance and proceeds with analysis of primary data collected for this study. The first section suggests that institutionally- and societally-embedded norms continue to counter macro-level gains within public institutions and argues that greater attention to the private sphere roots of gender structures is a significant gap in Resolution 1325 literature and advocacy. This study then presents findings from participant observation and focus group discussions with Burundian community leaders and workshop participants, detailing how private sphere masculinity and femininity norms, marital conflict resolution practices and gendered peacebuilding roles affect negotiation of Resolution 1325 norms. It offers insight into the processes of gender change and argues that, despite the persistence of traditional gender norms that disempower women, government- and NGO-led changes interact with micro-level adaptations in ways that support gender flexibility and Resolution 1325 localization. The final section presents implications for 1325 implementation and argues for greater inclusion of household gender relations and examination of the connections between public and private gender normative processes in the women, peace and security agenda.

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III. Research Questions and Methodology

So as to investigate perceptions of household and community norms around gender and conflict-resolution decision-making, several research questions guided this study:

a) How do participants resolve conflicts with their spouses? What enables non-violent and collaborative conflict resolution decision-making?

b) How do women and men practice conflict resolution in their communities? What are their different peacebuilding roles?

c) What effect have strengthened women’s rights legislation and gender quotas at the local level had on women and men’s participation in peacebuilding?

d) What are the implications for implementation of Resolution 1325 norms?

Research was conducted in partnership with Fontaine-ISOKO, a Burundian integrated development and good governance organization, from June through August 2013. Burundi is administratively organized into 17 provinces, 117 communes and 2,638 collines, or hills. Primary research took place in two provinces: Bubanza province, located in the plains just North-West of the capital, Bujumbura, and along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ngozi province, located in the mountains in the North of Burundi along the border with Rwanda.

This study utilizes a mixed-methods design, including a desk review of existing literature, participant observation and semi-structured focus groups. Participant observation during gender-based violence (GBV) and positive masculinities workshops provides men’s perspectives on gender inequality, GBV and cultural ideologies and practices that are conducive of gender inequality. Partners of Fontaine-ISOKO living in each community where workshops occurred identified a total of approximately 90 participants either because 1) they hold positions of influence in the community, such as teachers, government administrators, business-people or elders or 2) they are known to practice GBV in their daily lives, as identified by women community-members. For the men involved, these workshops provided a safe space for men to discuss their experiences, ambitions and fears concerning gender equality and nonviolence and to increase their skills and knowledge.

Four focus groups were conducted in Busiga and Mwumba communes in Ngozi province. One ninety-minute focus group with five women and one ninety-minute focus group with six men were held.
in each commune. As there were twenty-two participants total, conclusions are anecdotal, and all data analysis is qualitative. Participants included adult men and women who had previously or currently attended Fontaine-ISOKO’s gender equality and advocacy and/or masculinities workshops and were active in community-level development and conflict resolution projects. Perspectives and experiences of participants from Ngozi may not be generalizable to the rest of the country, as the president since 2005, Pierre Nkurunziza, is from Ngozi province, which has received an influx of economic development as well as disproportionate saturation of non-governmental organization (NGO) activities. However, this participant selection provides insight into the perspectives of middle-level community-based peacebuilders with relatively high access to international organization resources and programming.

This study examines the ideas of male and female community-level conflict resolution practitioners surrounding practices of and changes to gender and conflict resolution in post-conflict Burundi. Because of the methodology used and the small sample size, findings represent a particular population of middle-level community leaders. While this study aims to provide insight into women’s participation in conflict resolution decision-making, it examines gender, defined as the socially constructed differences between men and women and among women and among men. Thus, it understands men and women as both equally gendered and located within the same gendered power structure.

IV. Conflict and Resolution 1325 Advocacy in Burundi

Burundi is a multiparty constitutional republic in Central Africa that is currently recovering from over forty-five years of conflict. Since gaining independence from Belgium in 1962, Burundi has experienced cyclical ethnicized political violence, with large losses of life in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988 and 1993. Between the first coup d’état in 1965 and political liberalization in 1991, more than half a million people died during political violence, and more than 300,000 people have died since the 1993 assassination of Burundi’s first democratically-elected president, Melchoir Ndadaye.

Peace talks began in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1997, and Burundi entered the post-conflict period in 2006 when a ceasefire agreement was signed with the last rebel group. In 2005, the former leader of the rebel movement, the National Council for Democracy-Front for Democracy (CNDD-FDD), Pierre Nkurunziza, was elected president. He was re-elected in 2010 in elections that were “largely peaceful, generally free and fair, and generally well managed” but that were boycotted by the opposition parties and marred by restricted freedom of assembly and expression and alleged misuse of financial resources by Nkurunziza’s CNDD-FDD. Burundi is currently preparing for the 2015 presidential elections, and tensions have been

15 Niyongabo et al., “Civil Society,” 4
steadily rising as the government restricts Burundi’s famously liberal civil society and freedoms of expression, oppresses opposition parties and attempts to strengthen the power of the executive branch.\(^\text{17}\)

Several factors make Burundi an excellent setting for examining the effects of Resolution 1325 norm implementation on community-level women’s participation in conflict resolution decision-making. First, Burundian women’s organizations partnered with UNIFEM New York to lobby for inclusion in the Arusha peace process, and UNIFEM subsequently presented the Burundi peace process as part of their case advocating the adoption of Resolution 1325. Despite being excluded from the majority of meetings, Burundian women were present in the final stages of the peace process as observers and were able to mainstream gender throughout much of the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.\(^\text{18}\) Consequently, Burundi is one of the few cases that began work with Resolution 1325 even before its implementation. Second, Burundi is currently fourteen years past the Arusha Agreement and six years past the signing of the ceasefire with the last rebel movement.\(^\text{19}\) This means that research in Burundi may investigate both the direct implementation of peace process provisions and two election cycles of the government and society’s interactions with the gender equality norms that it inaugurated. Third, Burundi has yet to attempt a transition of power from one president or political party to another, and thus the vital stability of the new social contract among elites is unclear. As conflict in Burundi has historically been driven by political contest, consolidation of the post-conflict peace is also therefore tenuous. Consequently, implementation of Resolution 1325 in Burundi has traversed (or is currently traversing) all the major stages of conflict and peacebuilding.\(^\text{20}\) These factors, combined, position Burundi as an important case for the study of Resolution 1325 norm localization during reconstruction and stabilization.

**Women’s Rights and Participation**

Examination of women’s rights and participation today reveals mixed conclusions pertaining to 1325 localization. The statistics are relatively encouraging when only considering women’s representation within the government. In 2012, women composed 40.62 percent of political positions and 47.27 percent of technical positions within the National Assembly, 22.22 percent of the Office of the presidency, 40 percent of the National Independent Commission on Human Rights and 42.85 percent of the National Independent Electoral Commission.\(^\text{21}\) These statistics indicate that women’s representation has, in some venues, surpassed the 30% representation mandated by gender quotas. However, where no quota exists, such as at the colline, or hill level, which is the most local administrative unit through which the majority of Burundians – particularly women – interact with the government, women’s representation


\(^{20}\) Conflict management through peacekeeping, conflict resolution through official peace processes, conflict transformation through reconciliation and socio-political initiatives, reconstruction and, in the prelude to the 2015 elections, conflict prevention

\(^{21}\) Niyongabo et al., “Civil Society.”
is significantly lower. Though women represented 16.93 percent of the Territorial Administration in 2012 (up from 14 percent before the 2010 elections and electoral reform), this is still troublingly low in a country in which women compose over 50 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{22} Strikingly, women constitute only 4.9% of Colline Chiefs, the highest local leadership position. Additionally, women are 0.46 percent of the National Defense Force, 3.33 percent of the National Police, 5.26 percent of Peacekeeping Missions and 2 out of 5 members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, women’s participation in leadership and decision-making institutions remains highly dependent on legal assurances and otherwise follows traditional gender roles, with women excluded from ‘masculine’ and high-powered political structures.

The relationship between women’s human rights and their effective participation in decision-making is particularly pronounced concerning sexual and domestic violence. Willett poignantly writes: “The threat of sexual violence is acknowledged to preclude women’s participation in public life, and it is a powerful weapon to enforce subordination, to humiliate and degrade women and to enforce their victimization.”\textsuperscript{24} Numerous factors prevent the state from assuring women’s rights, especially relating to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The pact of impunity among many elected elites, who were participants in militias and party to political and gender-based violence during the various cycles of crisis, exacerbates the ineffectiveness of Burundi’s extremely weak state infrastructure to provide protection and services to the population.\textsuperscript{25} Because of the limited state and poor development, women’s needs often fall to local leaders and non-governmental actors, such as NGOs, churches and the family. Thus, women’s underrepresentation within local administration is of particular concern for women’s rights and ability to participate in decision-making structures. Women colline administrators play a central role in reducing and responding to SGBV and domestic violence,\textsuperscript{26} which are not only important barriers to women’s participation in public life but also strong ‘risk factors’ for future conflict.\textsuperscript{27} Though rape is criminalized under the 2005 Constitution and 2009 legislative reform, sexual, physical, psychological, economic and estate-related violence is widespread, and there is no law against SGBV broadly.\textsuperscript{28} As enforcement is inconsistent, the burden of “proof” remains high in rape cases, and the socio-cultural barriers to women’s use of the judicial system are profound,\textsuperscript{29} local efforts to address SGBV are essential in Burundi.

In addition to SGBV, other forms of GBV continue to substantially hinder women’s participation in decision-making. Burundi has one of the highest population densities in the world,\textsuperscript{30} a very weak economy, high inflation rates and shortages of key services such as water and electricity.\textsuperscript{31} The majority

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\textsuperscript{23} Niyongabo et al., “Civil Society.”

\textsuperscript{24} Willett, “Introduction,” 154.

\textsuperscript{25} Bundervoet, Verwimp and Akresh, “Health And Civil War;” Stef Vandeginste, “Power-Sharing, Conflict and Transition in Burundi: Twenty Years of Trial and Error,” \textit{Africa Spectrum}, 44, no. 3 (2009).

\textsuperscript{26} Sow, “Women’s Political Participation.”


\textsuperscript{28} Niyongabo, “Civil Society,” 12.

\textsuperscript{29} ibid, 13.


of the population relies on manual subsistence agriculture, undertaken primarily by women,\textsuperscript{32} and displacement, population growth and environmental instability have led to food shortages, rendering women’s work of feeding their families more demanding.\textsuperscript{33} Various studies have noted the impact of women’s disproportionate agricultural and domestic burdens on prohibiting their participation in public life.\textsuperscript{34} Increasing land fragmentation and strains as former refugees and internally displaced persons return has been used to justify women’s exclusion from inheritance despite legal provisions,\textsuperscript{35} and one study found that only 10.5 percent of all survey and interview respondents thought that women’s presence in political life had produced a positive effect on women’s access to land ownership.\textsuperscript{36} Additionally, 40 percent of Burundian women over the age of 15 years are illiterate, impeding their capacity to advocate for their rights and inclusion.\textsuperscript{37} Significantly, the 2000 report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Initial Reports of State Parties – Burundi, 2000) notes:

\textit{The traditional society is a patriarchal and patrilineal one, in which a woman is constantly under the protection of a father, brother, uncle, husband or family council. Women have more duties than rights and must subordinate themselves to the customs and practices governing the relations between men.} (p. 7)

This statement reveals the underlying assumptions about gendered rights and duties that enable unequal presence and influence in decision-making. Altering the underlying power relationships becomes even more important in contexts such as Burundi where the state and economy, possible checks on cultural or informal inequalities, are weak or collude with informal discrimination.

The effect of the multi-faceted influences on women’s daily lives and citizenship indicates that Resolution 1325 fulfillment lies beyond women’s numerical representation within decision-making. Rather, their qualitative capacity to affect policy-making is an important indicator of the acceptance of Resolution 1325 as a norm with impact on local power and ideology structures. Various signs suggest that the root causes of gender discriminatory systems continue to hinder women’s ability to affect decision-making despite their mandated presence. Falch,\textsuperscript{38} for example, notes that men almost exclusively lead Burundi’s political parties and that, despite party list quotas, decision-making within parties occurs primarily among small groups of elite men behind closed doors. Despite the presence of higher numbers of women in Burundi’s National Assembly, the presence of women parliamentarians has

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\textsuperscript{36} Ndikumana and Sebudandi, “A la Conquête,” 34.
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not led to systematic attention to women’s or gender issues.\textsuperscript{39} Niyongabo\textsuperscript{40} found that former women civil society leaders who are elected to political posts often loosen ties to women’s civil society organizations (CSOs) and strengthen allegiance to their party and its platform. Additionally, many women lack the legitimacy or resources to participate equally with men, even when the incentives to vote along party lines do not outweigh those to support women’s issues.\textsuperscript{41} Women’s presence within governing bodies is thus not sufficient to transform the unequal power relationships between men and women and often does not lead to the transformation of the institutional structures that would enable equal citizenship. Gender quotas have significantly increased women’s representation, sense of capacity and confidence and support for women’s freedom of speech.\textsuperscript{42} However, macro-level changes to gender role and power structures have yet to outweigh the range of institutionally- and societally-embedded norms and incentives that support inequitable gender differentiation.

\section*{Masculinities and the Household in Gender Analysis}

The majority of research on gender and conflict, globally and in Burundi specifically, centers on women’s experiences of victimization and activism and examines men and masculinities peripherally and predominantly as spoilers of post-conflict transformation. Consequently, gender analysis of men and boys’ experiences during the civil war and preceding political conflicts is a fundamental gap in the literature. This atomized focus on either men or women to the sacrifice of gender overlooks central aspects of the structures that (re)produce gender differential citizenship. Literature on masculinities, conflict and health has illustrated how masculinities and femininities are mutually-reinforcing, interactive, institutionally embedded, multi-dimensional, plural and changing.\textsuperscript{43} Because masculinities and femininities are relationally-constituted, creating space for women’s rights, empowerment and liberation is necessarily dependent on also shifting women and men’s expectations about men and masculinities. Thus, any gender analysis that examines only women is incomplete, for it makes women and assumptions about femininity visible while leaving men invisible and unproblematicized, thus maintaining half of the gendered power structure.

In the literature on Burundi, two primary accounts of gender and masculinities exist. The first, offered by Patricia Daley in \textit{Gender and Genocide in Burundi},\textsuperscript{44} offers a structuralist and post-colonial account of the effects of militarization in the Great Lakes Region on gender dynamics in Burundi. She describes how colonialism and decades of militaristic state-building and contestation normalized militaristic values that violently support traditional patriarchal divisions of rights and power. Arguing that militarism has facilitated the extension of state violence into private realms and shaped it according to

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Sow} Şow, “Women’s Political Participation,” 22.
\bibitem{Niyongabo} Niyongabo et al., “Civil Society.”
\bibitem{ibid} ibid; Ndikumana and Sebundani, “À la Conquête.”
\bibitem{Sow2} Şow, “Women’s Political Participation.”
\bibitem{Daley} Patricia O. Daley, \textit{Gender And Genocide In Burundi: The Search For Spaces Of Peace In The Great Lakes Region} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).
\end{thebibliography}
gendered and ethnicized ideologies, she asserts that deconstructing hierarchies of violent masculinities is a central question of post-conflict reconstruction. ⁴⁵

While Daley takes a macro-structuralist view, the other key account of gender and masculinities in Burundi looks at the micro-politics and lived experiences of Burundian youth to offer “a people’s story” of violence and recovery. ⁴⁶ Based on interviews with Burundian youth conducted by Peter Uvin in 2006 and Peter Uvin and Kimberly Howe in 2007, this account illustrates how young men and women make sense of and cope with violence, poverty and political instability. In contrast with Daley’s portrayal of militarized masculinities, Uvin, Sommers and Uvin ⁴⁷ and Peeters, Rees Smith and Correia. ⁴⁸ describe the centrality of the values of respect, collaboration and perseverance and support for gender role flexibility among young Burundian men confronting the constraints on attaining normative masculinity during the post-conflict period. Despite their contrasting approaches, both Daley and Uvin et al. stress the importance of gender relations in transforming conflict and creating an inclusive post-conflict society.

Uvin, Sommers and Peeters, Rees Smith and Correia offer insight into the multi-sited and changing construction of gender relations during reconstruction and support investigation of micro- and household-level dynamics. Their studies confirm the centrality of marriage as both a site for gender construction for men and for women and as a gatekeeping institution in sub-Saharan Africa. Silberschmidt ⁵⁰ similarly asserts that marriage is one of the primary mechanisms that shapes and communicates gender ideologies. In Burundi, where lives are lived locally and where homesteads, rather than villages, are the key social institution, ⁵¹ marriage and the family take on increasing importance. Urban and rural respondents of both genders reliably indicated that the pressure to marry and start a family is one of the greatest stressors and barriers to personal stability. ⁵² Marriage and childbearing are recognized as prerequisites for African women’s social legitimacy and key factors in their well-being, ⁵³ and female youth, particularly, noted marriage as an important determinant of their “economic status and social security.” ⁵⁴ Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, expectations that men build a home, marry and provide for their spouses, children and extended families mediate male youth’s ability to enter socially-validated manhood. ⁵⁵ In post-conflict contexts of displacement, insecurity, years of lost education and

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⁴⁵ Daley, Gender and Genocide, 34.
⁴⁷ Uvin, Life After Violence.
⁴⁹ Peeters, Rees Smith, and Correia, “Voices of Youth.”
⁵² Peeters, Rees Smith, and Correia, “Voices of Youth,” VIII.
collapsed economies and states, men’s inability to save enough money to marry serves to keep poor and marginalized men from attaining adult manhood. Gerontocracies, including most traditional African societies, exclude children from leadership positions. Consequently, marriage in such societies operates to both shape gender roles and to filter access to decision-making based on intersectional gender hierarchies.

These studies reveal how gender interacts with power dynamics across spheres to disproportionately prevent women and certain men from participating in shaping post-conflict society. As the household plays an essential role in molding gender dynamics and in gatekeeping men and women’s access to important institutions, it is a significant and missing component in Resolution 1325 localization literature in Burundi and elsewhere. The next section begins to explore the household as a site of Resolution 1325 norm negotiation, discussing findings from fieldwork for this study and placing it into dialogue with the literature presented by Uvin, Sommers and Peters, Rees Smith and Correia.

V. Key Findings

Masculinity and femininity norms

Several principle components of masculinity surfaced throughout field and desk research for this study. During masculinities workshops, facilitators asked the participants what it means when a father tells his son to ‘be a man,’ and many of the responses related to their roles as husbands, fathers and heads of households. They listed proverbs instructing them to ‘ensure their progeny’ and to ‘have many children, even outside of the marital bed if necessary,’ in addition to dictates of how to be a husband. For example, participants at every workshop mentioned Gishinga’mashiga, which means that a man must beat his wife quickly after the wedding in order to establish his dominance and gain respect from his wife and the wider community. While many men do not practice violence and may not accept normative masculinity that associates manhood with domination, participants overwhelmingly recognized that predominant messages that they receive about masculinity frame violence and control as desirable or acceptable and connect male domination with respect.

The idea of masculine dominance extended beyond physical or sexual violence to decision-making practices, suggesting that hegemonic masculinity in Burundi may pose a barrier to Resolution 1325 norm acceptance. One of the characteristics of a ‘real man’ is to uraba samurarwa, meaning to ‘be the one to take the leadership.’ Participants also discussed how a man should ‘hit your wife if she speaks standing up while you are seated;’ ‘never take your wife’s opinions seriously’ and ‘be dominant in the domain of decision-making.’ While these dictates – all of which contrast ‘real men’ with their wives – associate masculinity with exclusive decision-making, the imperative to ‘be responsible for decision-making’ was often connected to the instruction to ‘be a wise man, a model and give advice.’ The latter iteration of masculinity as leadership and decision-making derives from the bashingantahe, a council of mediators and arbitrators empowered to protect Burundian values and administer justice. While this serves as a non-violent form of masculinity, the association of masculinity with leadership (violent or non-violent)
serves as an obstacle to social norms change that poses women as legitimate decision-makers in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

This study did not collect systematic data on femininity norms. However, existing literature indicates that ‘obedience,’ ‘morality’ and ‘politeness’ are key elements of socially-valided femininity. Preliminary findings on hegemonic masculinities and femininities in Burundi indicate that understandings of what it means to be a man and to be a woman are discordant with Resolution 1325 norm localization. Association of manhood with leadership and dominance and of womanhood with obedience and respectfulness suggest that Resolution 1325 norms may meet significant resistance as they confront how women and men conceive of themselves and their place within the social order.

**Marital conflict resolution practices**

In order to explore the potential for localization of Resolution 1325 beyond formal structures, this section investigates how femininity, masculinity and gendered power dynamics manifest in inter-marital conflict resolution. It thus goes beyond how women and men define themselves to how they (re)negotiate their positions within social relationships and their roles in determining their realities.

Throughout group interviews, men and women shared a base understanding of marital conflict that reflects the importance of marriage in women and men’s social status and socio-economic security. Participants across sites proclaimed that preserving the socio-economic gains associated with marriage is the primary motivation for using non-violent conflict resolution practices. For example, a man from Busiga stated:

*If we engage in the destruction of our household, it’s our affair, and we won’t have development for our household. That’s why we decide without resistance from anyone to resort to dialogue to see how we can meet our goals.*

Similarly, a woman from Mwumba explained: *You tell yourself that when you use violence, you lose. You weigh the risks and you realize that it’s very dangerous [to use violence or intimidation to resolve marital conflicts].*

The central role of marriage as a gateway to important privileges and basic stability profoundly shaped how men and women approached marital conflict and resolution. Throughout discussions, participants repeatedly noted the figure of the ‘model’ or the ‘herder’ when discussing those with social power and influence. The idea of literally ‘being in front’ of others, leading physically and by ‘announc[ing] the projects to come’ reverberated as a paradigm of respected power-holders within governance and family- or community-level peacebuilding. Historically, un-married men were not permitted into the bashingantahe. Because “it was considered that single people did not have enough wisdom, did not know enough about life, and could not keep a secret,” unmarried men were regarded as unfit for participation in this fundamental decision-making institution. As the ability to maintain

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confidentiality is one of the key requirements of both married persons and members of the bashingantahe, participants discussed the imperative of preserving the husband and wife’s reputations by solving their problems in private:

*Another fundamental element to keep in spirit for spouses is to never violate conjugal secrets without having themselves exhausted all the other solutions.* (man from Mwumba)

Because it serves as a social signal, marriage in Burundi indicates acceptability for participation in decision-making, and it provides both men and women with social protections and status. Overwhelmingly, men and women thus preferred to protect their relationships through private communication and mutual forgiveness.

Nevertheless, women and men used different strategies for resolving conflicts with their husbands or wives, strategies that are reflective of gender norms and power distributions. While men discussed exclusively interpersonal dialogue and forgiveness, likely because this maintains the status quo while protecting the reputation of the household, women elaborated a variety of approaches to resolving household disputes. After dialogue and forgiveness, the second most commonly-mentioned conflict resolution practice for women was to withdraw, followed by other creative ways to appease their husbands, such as through sexual relations or performing domestic favors. While achieving non-violent conflict resolution, the majority of these practices ultimately affirm the husband’s position of greater power in exchange for reconciliation.

Not all women accepted their subordination to their husbands’ position within the household, however, and several women recounted negotiating with their husbands to change the power distribution in their conflict resolution practices. A woman from Busiga described confronting her husband’s ‘injustice:’

*It happens that we argue, for example, about a goat that is a familial property. He could sell it and manage the proceeds without keeping me up to date...But you know the husband is in the position of force in his home; he can say to himself that he has all the rights in his household...I explain to him the injustice behind it, and we understand each other. All of this, we didn’t do before the arrival of good governance. The man could dilapidate all the family’s wealth, and you didn’t have anything to turn to.*

This woman’s story reflects the emerging use of “a rights-based approach”\(^5\) to transform household decision-making structures. Men almost exclusively discussed interpersonal dialogue and forgiveness, and women clearly preferred interpersonal or familial solutions to dealing with marital conflict. However, women also regularly mentioned mediators and other authorities as elements in their conflict resolution repertoires. Thus, while resolving disputes within the household benefits couples in terms of their social status and economic security and encourages non-violent dialogue as a conflict-resolution approach.

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\(^5\) Richard Strickland and Nata Duvvury, “Gender Equity and Peacebuilding,” in *From Rhetoric to Reality: Finding the Way. Washington, DC: International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)*, 20. Strickland and Duvvury write that “a rights-based approach to development can provide the means to contest notions of unequal worth, demand that citizenship be extended to women on the basis of equality, and enhance women’s agency.”
method, it often also serves to enable gendered rights and duties that disproportionately harm women. Consequently, changes to the macro-level structure that facilitate Resolution 1325 norms and recognize women’s rights appear to provide women with a new element of negotiating power that at least some women are utilizing to contest subordination in their private lives. Though women noted expanded power and opportunity structures because of governance changes, they also confronted prominent informal barriers that encourage keeping dispute resolution within the private sphere and that privilege men’s decision-making authority. These findings reaffirm the importance of changing lived social norms in tandem with amending official normative structures if Resolution 1325 is to become an integrated aspect of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Burundi and elsewhere.

Peacebuilding roles

This section moves beyond household Resolution 1325 norm negotiation to community-level practices and further interconnections between the two spheres. When asked about men and women’s roles in consolidating peace in Burundi, participants overall confirmed traditional gender roles based on the family paradigm and the bashingantahe institution but also noted women’s emerging advocacy roles. Though similar responses were used to describe men and women’s roles, some expressed the assumption, likely deriving from the bashingantahe institution, that men have historically been the central figures in leading the country to peace, as a man from Mwumba explained:

Since long ago, we always said that if the country is doing well, we give credit to the men because it is they who have a dominant voice, and an honest country is made of men...if you are a man without integrity, your discourse is completely ignored. The technique to consolidate peace is to be a man of truth.

Despite women’s former exclusion from holding formal membership in the bashingantahe, women have historically been recognized for their roles as mothers and wives, and therefore as advisors to their bashingantahe spouses. The image of women mother-peacebuilders recurred throughout group discussions, particularly among men. For example, one man from Mwumba referred to women’s status as abonarugo, ‘she who is permanently in the home,’ saying:

A good woman first makes peace in the interior. She must have love and not seek trouble at the neighbors’...As they are always near to the house, they have a large role in promoting the consolidation of peace in the neighborhood.

Thus, participants stressed that motherhood and marital tranquility enable women to serve as examples and advisors in their communities and afford them the legitimacy to participate in conflict prevention and resolution.

As part of the governance transition, the bashingantahe are now required to include women as members. See: Philippe Ntahombaye, The Role Of Informal Justice Systems In Fostering The Rule Of Law In Post-Conflict Situations: The Case Of Burundi (Geneva: Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2005). Several informants for this study noted how women's investiture has resulted in decreased prestige and respectability of the institution.

In addition to drawing from familial archetypes that legitimate men and women’s differential peacebuilding roles, men thought of themselves as having particular peacebuilding roles because of their gender and sex. During masculinities workshops, men discussed a host of masculinity imperatives relating to their protector roles. Men in Bubanza noted that real men are ‘never afraid,’ and men in Gihanga recalled *umugabo airinda akaje*, meaning ‘A man must confront everything that happens in order to protect the home.’ These accounts imply that Resolution 1325 norm localization will involve contestation of a gendered division of leadership spaces and roles that disproportionately encourages men’s active and physical engagement in public life.

Though many responses conformed to traditional gender roles that construct a masculine/feminine protector/protected dichotomy, some women stressed roles unrelated to women’s status as mothers. For example, several women described a gender consciousness and women’s role in assuring equality and justice for all women and other people in need:

> *What I think, so that we can contribute to consolidation of peace, we must not be indifferent. We don’t have the right to pass in front of a woman in a problematic situation and to say that it’s her business. We must know that we are the same and show that we are solidary. We learn in associations how to advocate for women and all other people in distress. That’s the way that we will contribute to peace consolidation.* (woman from Busiga)

Numerous men and women observed that, since women have been participating in governance and the bashingantahe institution, women have largely ceased going to male leaders for help, particularly with gender-specific concerns. Many women also asserted that they consolidate peace through community associations, where they discuss conflict resolution and learn about the benefits of women’s empowerment and participation in leadership. These responses reflect the growing flexibility of gender roles that Uvin, Sommers and Uvin and Peeters, Rees Smith and Correia document among youth as well as a sense of women’s specific and important contributions to decision-making, suggesting local support for Resolution 1325 based on participants’ valued experiences with women leaders. The next section discusses changes to women’s participation in peacebuilding since the 2009 Constitutional and legislative reform initiated greater protections for women and gender quotas at the commune level and highlights the impact of associations on women’s peacebuilding participation.

**Growing space for women in conflict resolution**

In 2009, Burundi initiated reforms to the Constitution and legal code that increase protections against SGBV and expanded the gender quotas initiated during the peace transition to the commune level. Consequently, rural women have gained a new level of government support for their participation in civil administration. As the majority of the participants in this study engage in conflict resolution and leadership at the community-level, the 2010 elections offered to significantly affect gender and governance dynamics for the men and women involved in the study. In order to explore the effect of

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62 See Niyongabo et al., “Civil Society.”
these changes on community-level men and women, facilitators asked participants how women’s participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has changed since the 2010 elections.

Throughout discussions, participants noted the influence of associations and government reforms on redefining norms around rights and citizenship, suggesting areas of congruence between Resolution 1325 and local norms. One woman from Mwumba described how attending workshops helped her husband and her to respect each other’s political rights and to understand political choice as a right that applies to women as well as to men:

_Since 2010, there has been a large change. Before, women under-estimated themselves and didn’t frequent associations or leadership meetings for the country, but since the occurrence of a power that is re-elected by the people, associations have pulled women from anonymity. Women, just like men, have an important role to play in the administration of the country._

Women, and some men, overwhelmingly noted that women’s higher visibility in public spaces is a sign of these expanding rights and citizenship. Participants of both genders asserted that women are increasingly overcoming barriers in the home that prevent them from engaging in public life:

_We are engaged in pulling women from anonymity, and we know that sustainable development always begins in the home...we question the tradition that says: ‘Nta jambo ry’umugore; nta nkokazi ibika isake ari ho iri’ [The woman doesn’t have sharp senses in reasoning; a hen cannot sing in the presence of a cock]. (woman from Busiga)_

One man from Mwumba asserted that “Women can no longer be discriminated against. Before, we called them “_abanyakigo,”_ she who stays in the backyard; she who lives in anonymity.” When asked to define ‘political power,’ women both discussed visibility and voice in public space and noted that women’s presence in public space is one of the most significant and positive changes in women’s positions since 2010. These findings indicate that Resolution 1325 norms implementation at the state-level is meeting supportive local-level conceptions of citizenship and participation in governance.

Numerous women also described positive changes in their husbands’ perceptions of their participation in community leadership and political expression. Growing support from husbands for women’s electoral ambitions is a vital indicator of potential change, as women noted that women’s lack of access to resources, controlled by their husbands, to “buy voices” and the perseverance of husbands’ abusive behavior are major barriers to their participation. Participants also expressed their husbands’ growing support of their participation in traditionally male leadership roles and attributed these changes to the work of associations and the opening of formal space for women within governance:

_[Before 2010] It wasn’t rare that one’s husband threatened you, saying that if you go to a meeting for an association, you won’t return home. They have, little by little, realized that a woman who isn’t a member of an association isn’t good for anything and that her development is unforeseeable. (woman from Mwumba)_

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63 President Pierre Nkurunziza and the Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) were elected in 2005 and re-elected in 2010.
64 Woman from Mwumba during a focus group discussion with primary investigator
This woman’s description is reflective of the Burundian tradition of valuing social flexibility, adaptation and innovation. Through participation in associations, women discussed building their capacity and legitimacy as members of leadership institutions, challenging assumptions that women are in government because of gender quotas alone and that they are ill-equipped for the demands of leadership. Despite the persistence of barriers to women’s participation in peacebuilding leadership, particularly GBV, illiteracy, corruption and women’s lack of access to material resources, fear of running for election, lack of solidarity among women (or competition between women) and practices of polygamy or cohabitation without legal marriage, participants declared significant and positive changes in the opportunities for women and in men’s interpretations of these developments. As Sommers and Uvin assert, the norms around what it means to be a man or a woman have not necessarily changed, and perhaps nor has women’s ‘dynamism,’ but Burundians have proved willing to adapt in order to imperfectly fulfill unattainable expectations, resulting in increasing appreciation for women’s diverse roles.

**Conclusion**

Though traditional gender norms persist as a barrier to women’s freedom from violence and participation in conflict resolution decision-making, evidence from this study indicates that macro-level changes are in dialogue with micro-level adaptations in ways that support gender flexibility and Resolution 1325 localization. This study illustrates how various aspects of gender norms (identities, roles, power relationships, ideologies) respond and change differently. While gender identities seem to continue to reflect dichotomous archetypes that reaffirm women’s exclusion from public space and decision-making and men’s authority and access to violence, women’s gender roles are responding to structural and normative shifts more progressively. This is particularly true where changes to incentives structures in support of Resolution 1325 initiated by the government and by NGOs interact with adapting gender expectations at the micro-level. The result is increased support for women’s engagement in conflict resolution and decision-making in the home and community based on both normative, rights-based criteria and interest-based decision-making. Ultimately, this study suggests that, when implemented holistically across public and private spheres, Resolution 1325 norms may build congruence with local beliefs and practices, transforming women’s social capital and supporting equitable gender relations.

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65 For example, Ndikumana and Sebudandi note that, 72.7 percent of their respondents thought that gender quotas has produced a positive effect on male-female relations, while at the same time only 26.3 percent believed they had led to reduced violence against women. See Ndikumana and Sebudandi, “A la Conquête,” 31.

66 Numerous women stated that few protections against abuse or disenfranchisement exist for women who are in marriages that are not legally recognized, such as cohabitation and polygamy. They noted that anti-polygamy projects have been one of the main initiatives of elected men and women in Busiga commune.

67 Sommers and Uvin, *Youth in Rwanda*.

68 Peeters, Rees Smith and Correia, “Voices of Youth.”
VI. Implications for Resolution 1325 Implementation and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

As in many post-conflict countries, women’s advocacy groups and the Burundian government have made great strides to mainstream gender throughout the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation and subsequent legislative and constitutional reforms, leading to greater-than-ever gender equality within official decision-making structures. These steps have provided infrastructure that enables women to publicly make claims to the Burundian state and to physically occupy space within public institutions.

However, gender norms, poverty, corruption, weak state institutions, political competition and increasingly dictatorial tendencies of the executive branch\textsuperscript{69} dilute the substantive value of state-level reforms. As evidenced by the dearth of women holding influential leadership posts and positions not guaranteed by gender quotas, de facto discrimination and unequal social and economic capital limit the impact of official support for women’s participation in decision-making. Consequently, effective and lasting implementation of Resolution 1325 likely depends as much on transformation of informal structures as it does on official policy adaptation.

Findings from this study indicate that, especially in contexts where social institutions are stronger than state institutions, efforts at the community- and household-levels that help make practical and normative sense of gender equality may significantly improve integration of transnational gender norms into domestic beliefs and practices. By working with people’s daily, lived experiences as well as with macro-structures, Burundian women and men in this study expressed a willingness to see women’s greater participation in decision-making as a useful adaptation to changing political and economic contexts. Rather than assuming that interpersonal relations are divorced from public life, the processes of change that participants described indicate that community and government efforts to encourage gender equality both influence private gender norms and meet impactful resistance or support within households.

In light of the limitations of implementation of Resolution 1325 and the emerging criticism of the hegemonic tendencies of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda,\textsuperscript{70} greater attention to local and household normative processes may prove an important aspect of WPS growth and learning. Further research on the processes of gender and decision-making in private life and connections to public participation may help policy-makers to understand significant elements of substantive and lasting change, specifically: which women make it into decision-making positions, the factors that enable or hinder their success and the dynamics that enable them to do so without being co-opted into masculine normative structures. Women will best achieve the basic social power and freedom from violence necessary for vibrant participation in transforming conflicts and shaping peaceful societies by including the often sidelined familial roots of gender differentiation in the women, peace and security agenda.


\textsuperscript{70} See: Pratt & Richter-Devroe, “Critically Examining.”
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