



CENTER STAGE OR BEHIND THE SCENES?

Measuring and Supporting Women's Contributions to Peace in Central Mali

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Introduction

The Women, Gender, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has been a fixture in peace and conflict discussions with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000. The goal of this agenda is to ensure women's active participation in peacebuilding efforts, and matters of peace and security overall, since peacebuilding is more sustainable with women's inclusion.¹ The larger vision of WPS, and Gender, Peace, and Security (GPS), is intersectional and aims for women and girls of all ages and backgrounds to contribute to peace and security. Ultimately, this process should include marginalized groups and not be limited to elite and privileged women and girls.²

¹ UNSC, 2000.

² Sifris and Tanyag, 2019.

However, there are propositions in the WPS agenda that require further analysis. Specifically, to fully achieve the underlying commitments of the Women/Gender, Peace, and Security (W/GPS) agenda, stronger adherence should be made to peacebuilding efforts at the community level, not solely at the international or national levels.³ Much of the existing literature on W/GPS focuses on formal peace processes at the international and national levels that are attached to interstate war and civil wars. Far less attention is given to supporting inclusive, gender-sensitive peacebuilding at the local level, particularly in the context of localized inter-communal conflicts along lines of ethnicity, livelihood, or religion. This lack of focus on the local makes concrete W/GPS programmatic work challenging at community levels, since linkages among community, national, and international levels are often not strong or well-articulated. Such efforts will also aid in helping diminish power hierarchies among the different community, national, and international W/GPS actors. Through community-grounded efforts, women and girls themselves can be the agents of change necessary to enhance peace and security because of their contextual expertise and awareness. In order for W/GPS programs to do this, it is important to understand women's diverse and individual experiences, which are dependent on their contexts and unique circumstances.⁴

A consistent challenge for the W/GPS agenda is the use of evidence to evaluate local-level W/GPS programs. This is especially prominent for change that is inherently difficult to measure, such as the *nature* of women's involvement with peace negotiations.⁵ At the request of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), in 2010 an interagency working group developed a list of 26 global indicators for WPS, composed of both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The indicators measure three main areas: women's inclusion, justice for women, and women's security.⁶ However, there has been criticism of these indicators. First, these indicators tend to focus on peacebuilding efforts at the national level (such as measuring women's representation in ministerial positions) and do not include indicators specifically addressing WPS at the sub-national or community level. Second, these indicators are essentially monitoring indicators for the UN to assess its implementation of the WPS agenda and are not conducive to comparing certain WPS criteria (like peace talks) across different country contexts. And lastly, since WPS has different meanings in different conflict settings, these indicators may not be appropriate for all contexts worldwide. For example, the indicator "battle-related deaths" only includes deaths resulting from armed conflict, and not those resulting from other forms of conflict like gang violence.⁷

In addition to challenges evaluating and measuring W/GPS at the community level, greater understanding is needed about how to effectively use evidence to design W/GPS programs. At the national level, countries develop their own National Action Plan (NAP) that details their WPS strategy. As of October 2022, 104 countries have adopted a NAP on WPS; however, 33% of them expired in 2021.⁸ Overall, NAPs have a high-level focus and lack attention to the needs and concerns of local communities. NAPs also often lack implementation mechanisms, do not have resources for implementation, or are not prioritized for implementation. Additionally, many NAPs from western countries often lay out strategies for achieving WPS outcomes in other countries rather than their own.⁹

³ UNSCR 1325 provides the guiding framework for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and gave momentum to broader programming and advocacy on Gender, Peace, and Security (GPS). In this report, we use WPS when speaking about 1325 and W/GPS when speaking about the broader space of women, gender, peace, and security.

⁴ Mazurana, et al, eds., 2013.

⁵ Goetz, 2018.

⁶ United Nations, 2010.

⁷ Goetz, 2018.

⁸ WILPF, 2022.

⁹ Aroussi, 2017.

Considering the gaps in the measurement and design of W/GPS programs, this report uses evidence from a research study conducted in central Mali to meet two objectives: 1) to advance knowledge about the role of women in community-level peacebuilding, and 2) to understand how norms and power dynamics shape the measurement, research, and evaluation of W/GPS programs. The research project that is the source of data for this report was conducted alongside a Mercy Corps program called Ben ni Baara (BnB). BnB is a peacebuilding program implemented by Mercy Corps Mali and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), which aims to address the root causes of conflict between communities living in the buffer zones of the Ségou and Mopti regions in central Mali.¹⁰ With many in Ségou and Mopti engaged in agriculture as their main form of livelihood, conflicts over land and natural resources threaten the population's human security, particularly given shocks from climate change and resource scarcity. Additionally, due to the lack of a state security presence, some communities have even created their own self-defense groups for protection, though some locals view these groups as instigators of violence rather than mechanisms for stability.¹¹

The research that forms the basis for this report aimed to understand women's roles in community-level conflicts and local-level peacebuilding in Ségou. In June 2022, the data collection team conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with community members in Ségou and key informant interviews (KIIs) with subject matter experts in Bamako.¹² Five villages (Flabougou, Mion, Touna, Nampasso, and Kampolosso) held four FGDs in each village – three with only women, and one with only men – for a total of twenty FGDs. All of the FGDs included youth (defined as ages 15 to 35 years old) and elders (over 35 years old) to ensure age diversity. The first half of each FGD included time with all of the mixed-age participants together, and the second half had age-differentiated breakout sessions for elders and youth to ask age-specific questions. Additionally, the data collection team held ten KIIs (nine men, and one woman) in Bamako with subject matter experts knowledgeable about the peace and conflict dynamics in the study population.¹³



Figure 1. Segou, Mali (Source: UNOCHA, 2013)

The study sheds light on several findings about how women participate in peace and conflict within these communities in central Mali. Reflecting on these findings, this report presents lessons learned from the research process about how to effectively conduct research within W/GPS programs. Considering these lessons learned, the report then provides recommendations for a diverse set of stakeholders, including implementation teams, donors, and researchers, on conducting quality W/GPS research as well as recommendations for designing W/GPS programs.

¹⁰ Ben ni Baara means “work and peace” in Bambara.

¹¹ Mercy Corps Mali, 2022.

¹² The quotes used throughout this report are translated paraphrases and may not reflect direct wording by participants.

¹³ The academic study that produced the data for this report also included a survey of 866 community members. While the broader academic research is a mixed methods study, this report only discusses the findings from the qualitative methods (FGDs and KIIs) because the survey speaks to a different set of substantive questions and themes.

Main Findings on Women’s Roles in Community-Level Conflicts

The study identified valuable information about women’s roles in peace and conflict in Ségou. These findings support other Mercy Corps research in Mali, which found that women are active participants in conflict settings. They are not solely victims but intentionally strategize steps to protect themselves, their families, and their communities.¹⁴

It is important to note that this study’s findings cannot be generalized to the entire female population in Mali. Given the country’s diverse population, these findings are specific to the communities who participated in this study and may not capture important dynamics present in other contexts.

The findings reveal the influence of women’s identities and roles in the community and family sphere on their ability to participate in peace and conflict. Specifically, the findings show that: 1) women use their interpersonal relationships to influence peace and conflict; 2) women implement “backstage” efforts to influence peace and conflict; and 3) women with certain identities related to their family history and lineage are bestowed greater authority in peacebuilding efforts.

Women’s Interpersonal Relationships

Women in these communities often use their interpersonal relationships, particularly within the home, to engage in peace and conflict matters. While the home can be an influential space, it is important to note that this report does not aim to reinforce gender stereotypes about women’s roles in peacebuilding being confined to traditional spaces like the home. Instead, this section of the report aims to present what emerged from the data and the study participants themselves, both men and women.

Participants discussed how women often use their interpersonal relationships to influence the actions or decisions of their husbands and children. A woman in a FGD explained that in addition to women’s caretaking duties in the home, “women play a big role here in the village in peacebuilding [because they]... play the role of adviser to [their] husbands.”¹⁵ So while women in these communities assume the traditional roles and responsibilities of wives and mothers, they use these familial relationships to contribute to peacebuilding, even in an indirect manner, by influencing the decisions of the conflict’s primary actors (who are often men). As one woman explained, overall “if there is a problem in the community, [the] women sensitize men first in private.”¹⁶



“Women play the role of peacekeeping in the family and even in the community.”

— Focus Group Discussion, Female Participant, Kampolosso

Several male participants in this study also supported this observation about the role of women’s interpersonal relationships in peacebuilding. A male key informant explained that wives play an advisory role

¹⁴ Inks, Veldmeijer, and Fomba, 2017.

¹⁵ FGD 3, Women, Nampasso.

¹⁶ FGD 3, Women, Touna.

in their homes: “When men have a problem, they take it to their wives who usually calm them down.”¹⁷ Another male key informant explained that “women exercise their influence in the community by talking to men.”¹⁸ This key informant did not provide specifics about the relationship between women and men in these instances (such as a husband and wife, or mother and son), but the influential role of women still remains clear. As illustrated by these observations, **men are not only aware of the influence of their wives and other women on decisions around peace and conflict, but men often intentionally turn to women for support in such situations.**

While several study participants recognize the way in which women use their relationships to influence peacebuilding efforts, one key informant observed that some women’s roles as mothers in particular could encourage them to become involved in peace efforts “because it is their children fighting.”¹⁹

In addition to promoting peace and conflict resolution, several study participants - specifically, male key informants - observed that women may at times use their interpersonal relationships to advocate *for* conflict. Multiple key informants described how women may appeal to their husband’s masculinity to encourage their participation in conflict or violence. For example, one key informant said women may insult or shame their husbands to influence them to fight on their family’s behalf.²⁰ Another key informant gave an example of a group of women from a few years ago who told their husbands to “give us your pants and take our skirts and go in the home, and we will go and fight,” illustrating how men’s lack of aggressive action in itself is emasculating.²¹



“Give us your pants and take our skirts and go in the home, and we will go and fight.”

— Women in Mion, as relayed by a Key Informant, Male, Mion

Women’s “Backstage” Peacebuilding Efforts

Formal Mechanisms

Before discussing women’s “backstage” efforts to peacebuilding, it is important to highlight that several participants discussed specific public committees and formal conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly related to land and natural resource conflicts, that involve women. Such comments often emerged when asked about changes over time regarding women’s peacebuilding activities. The Land Commission (COFO), for example, was one such sub-national mechanism discussed by multiple male and female participants. A young woman explained that “there have been changes [in women’s peacebuilding activities] through the intervention of [the] COFO; if there is a land problem, now it is the COFO that manages [it].”²² Along with land conflicts, water conflicts often occur, particularly when accessing water points. A young woman in a

¹⁷ KII 9, Man, Fablougou.

¹⁸ KII 1, Man, Kampolossa.

¹⁹ KII 9, Man, Fablougou.

²⁰ KII 3, Man, Namposso.

²¹ KII 6, Man, Mion.

²² FGD 3, Women, Touna.

focus group explained that Water Management Committees involving women can intervene in these conflicts, like when a woman does not wait for her turn at the water point.²³

In addition to committees focusing specifically on natural resource conflicts, conflict resolution mechanisms addressing other forms of conflict also involve women. For example, the Conflict Resolution Committees (CRCs) within communities include women members and address many types of conflicts, not just natural resource conflicts. A man in a focus group explains that “women are now involved in decision-making because they are represented in all the committees that have been created recently [like the]... COFO... [and] CRC,”²⁴ illustrating the progress in women’s participation in formal peacebuilding committees.

“Backstage” Peacebuilding Efforts Through Other Channels

Along with these formal mechanisms, women also engage in peace and conflict through certain “behind the scenes” or “backstage” efforts that are implemented through certain formal, public entities. An older man in a FGD explained that women “have set up women’s groups to bring social cohesion within the community.”²⁵ While these groups are publicly well-known, their intended purposes are not for peacebuilding, yet women often use them for peacebuilding.



Photo Credit: Amadou Diallo/Mercy Corps

Women’s savings and loan groups (often referred to as *tontines* and *Tèkèrè Ni*), for example, can help financially resolve community disputes. As explained by one key informant, if an animal damages property and the animal owner is unable to pay for the damages, this mechanism can help resolve the dispute.²⁶ Additionally, these groups also provide a venue in which women can discuss conflict resolution. An older woman explained that in the tontine, “on days when all the women can meet, the meeting certainly allows [them] to find solutions to the difficulties in their household by exchanging ideas.”²⁷ While it is unclear the specific difficulties this woman is referring to, this could

allude to intrahousehold conflicts, finances, childcare, and other challenges. While these groups primarily serve a financial purpose, they are also a forum through which women can openly discuss personal and community issues.

Along with savings and loan groups, women also engage in inter-communal initiatives that contribute to peacebuilding, including among youth. For example, a young woman in a FGD explained that “we participate in football matches between the young people of our villages and other young people by bringing water and supporting them.”²⁸ Such activities help foster relationships and a greater sense of understanding among youth from different communities who may have had a history of conflict. Initiatives like these also aim to enhance intra-communal peace. An older woman in a FGD in Flabougou explained how efforts to promote public health also serve a peacebuilding purpose: “Every Friday, we organize health days and every woman participates [and so] this activity allows us to strengthen the links” and connections among their community members.²⁹ Women in Touna and Nampasso also discussed how health days strengthen

²³ FGD 1, Women, Mion.

²⁴ FGD Men, Nampasso.

²⁵ FGD Men, Touna.

²⁶ KII 6, Man, Mion.

²⁷ FGD 2, Women, Touna.

²⁸ FGD 2, Women, Touna.

²⁹ FGD 2, Women, Flabougou.

the ties within their communities.³⁰ Through such activities, these women’s groups are fostering relationships between and within their village and other villages, and ultimately reinforcing the foundations for peace by strengthening social cohesion.

Women’s Identity and Power

Along with the use of groups and initiatives as mechanisms for peacebuilding, certain women in these communities are considered more influential in peacebuilding efforts than others. Many of the study participants overall considered women leaders and older women to be the most influential. Both FGD participants and key informants highlighted how women who lead certain groups and initiatives, such as tontines, have a stronger peacebuilding influence. When asked about the type of women who are more influential in peacebuilding, a woman from a focus group explained that “it is the president of the women’s group and her deputy who intervene” in conflict situations.³¹ One man even said that “women [are] more powerful in decision-making regarding peacebuilding than men [because] women’s [groups] have more civility [and] they tend to listen to each other more [which] is not the case with men.”³² This observation could speak to the even greater influence a woman could have on peacebuilding, compared to a man, if she is both a leader and someone with strong interpersonal relationships through her role as a wife, mother, grandmother, and/or mother-in-law.

Along with women leaders, older women, compared to younger women, are also considered influential in peacebuilding efforts given their past experiences and historical knowledge about their communities.³³ An older woman in a FGD explained that “older women [have a better understanding] than young women [because] to resolve conflicts, we act gently with people and in private,” which also illustrates the use of “backstage” peacebuilding efforts.³⁴ Another woman explained that older women “are very respected and listened to,” compared to younger women.³⁵ Given the influential role of older women, it is important for the older generation to pass their peacebuilding knowledge on to the younger generation. One key informant explained how this can be done: “Old[er] women may bring younger women to help [with peacebuilding since]... an old[er] woman... may select a young woman to train in these practices” and thus take over this work in the future.³⁶ Through this intergenerational mentorship, the knowledge and experiences of older women are passed down to younger women in the hope of maintaining positive peacebuilding practices within their communities long-term.



Photo Credit: Jihane Nami/Mercy Corps

In addition to women’s roles as leaders and older members of their communities, other aspects of women’s identities, such as those related to their family history and lineage, also influence their authority in peacebuilding efforts. This supports one man’s belief that for some women, “sometimes it’s a God given gift [and] whenever they speak, people listen.”³⁷ Griots, for example, are community members who maintain the community’s history and oral traditions. Both men and women focus group participants discussed griots as

³⁰ FGD 1, Women, Touna; FGD 1, Women, Nampasso.

³¹ FGD 1, Women, Flabougou.

³² KII 7, Man, Touna.

³³ KII 9, Man, Flabougou.

³⁴ FGD 3, Women, Mion.

³⁵ FGD 2, Women, Flabougou.

³⁶ KII 3, Man, Nampasso.

³⁷ KII 5, Man, Mion.

being influential peacebuilders.³⁸ Women griots are highly respected and considered leaders in their communities, thus giving them a strong voice in peacebuilding efforts.



“If there is a misunderstanding between two families, we look for the solution in the family [and] we look for some caste women to talk between people.”

— Focus Group Discussion, Female Participant, Flabougou

Similarly, depending on a woman’s caste, which she is born into, she could have a greater role in peace and mediation efforts if she is from a higher and more respected caste. The importance of caste was discussed by multiple women in focus groups.⁴⁰ One older woman explained that “if there is a misunderstanding between two families, we look for the solution in the family [and] we look for some caste women to talk between people when it comes to two villages.”⁴¹ Within the caste system, blacksmiths are powerful, so women blacksmiths are particularly respected as peacebuilders within their communities. A young woman in a focus group said that “women blacksmiths are very respected and listened to,” a view supported by other focus group participants.⁴²

Along with caste, the joking relationship prominent in Mali can affect women’s roles in peacebuilding. In West Africa, joking relationships are between people of certain kin-based groups (such as ethnicity, caste, or household members) who banter and tease each other in good spirits without animosity.

Historically, joking relationships have helped different groups in Mali communicate and resolve conflict despite their differences. In this manner, women who are joking cousins with others, or have a joking relationship with certain groups, have an advantage as peacebuilders. An older woman in a focus group explained that “the cousinages” of a woman makes her more influential in peacebuilding,⁴³ demonstrating the powerful role of humor in tense conflict situations.



JOKING RELATIONSHIPS

In Mali and other west African contexts, the joking relationship is a common social practice in which one person teases another. Though the teasing is not to be taken seriously and is only a form of “joking.” The joking relationship between two individuals becomes established through three types of relationships: 1) people who have a “blood pact” such as through clans; 2) kinship relationships (e.g. cousins and grandparents) and kinship by marriage (e.g. in-laws); and 3) those in the same age group. This cultural practice has become an important form of social cohesion and a way to abate tensions between different groups. Joking relationships are known as “the social management of conflicts through laughter.”³⁹

Despite these views regarding the relationship between women’s identity and their power, some participants do not agree. Some stated that any woman, regardless of role or age, can be involved in peacebuilding. A

³⁸ FGD 3, Women, Nampasso; FGD 3, Women, Kampolosso; FGD 2, Women, Touna; FGD, Men, Flabougou.

³⁹ Cissoko, 2019.

⁴⁰ FGD 3, Women, Nampasso; FGD 3, Women, Kampolosso; FGD 2, Women, Touna; FGD 1, Women, Mion; FGD 3, Women, Flabougou.

⁴¹ FGD 3, Women, Flabougou.

⁴² FGD 2, Women, Mion.

⁴³ FGD 3, Women, Nampasso.

young woman in a FGD explained that “there is no specifically influential type of woman in [conflict resolution] activities [since] all women do it... together.”⁴⁴ Additionally, a key informant said that the only requirement is that the woman “like peace and don’t want to get into conflictual situations, [and then] this kind of woman can help other women... [and] men avoid conflict.”⁴⁵

Lessons Learned about W/GPS Research

This study identified several findings about women’s roles in peace and conflict in their communities in this specific context in central Mali. Reflecting on the study’s findings and the overall research process, several lessons emerged about conducting research within W/GPS programs. The two main lessons learned relate to the recruitment of study participants and the possibility of bias in participants’ responses.

Recruitment of Participants

The recruitment of a gender-diverse pool of key informants represented a challenge to learn from for future studies. A community leader helped the research team identify the study’s ten key informants, who were nine men and one woman. Ideally, the key informants should have been 50% men and 50% women. However, the community leader’s internal biases may have influenced the gender division of the key informants. With the study’s focus on women’s roles in peace and conflict, speaking with only one female key informant was insufficient. The participation of more female key informants could have yielded a broader understanding of the topic by including both women from the communities (who were in the FGDs) and more women subject matter experts as key informants. Including a diversity of women in the study with different lived experiences and roles in their communities, influenced by their economic status, education, and other interpersonal factors, would have led to even more holistic findings about W/GPS in central Mali from women who have had varying experiences with peace and conflict. However, given certain logistical challenges and the context, this was not possible.

This experience speaks to the influence of privilege and power hierarchies within research. Often this is discussed regarding the relationship between the researcher and the study participants.⁴⁶ However, in this study, privilege is visible *among* the study participants (and potential study participants) themselves, particularly the key informants. Specifically, the limited number of female key informants in this study could reflect the culture in which gender hierarchies place men over women when it comes to speaking publicly about matters of peace and conflict. Additionally, the data collection team explained that KIIs had to be held in Bamako for security reasons, thus requiring the KIIs to travel and meet the interviewers at this location.⁴⁷ Reasons women may not have been able to travel and participate as freely include childcare, domestic responsibilities, and access to transportation. In this situation, men’s freedom of movement and ability to travel to participate in this study could help explain the limited number of available female key informants.

Bias in Responses

The other key lesson learned throughout this research is the potential for bias in responses from participants. This seemed particularly prominent in the FGDs since there was much consensus and lack of debate. For example, when asked about situations when women condone violence, most focus group

⁴⁴ FGD 3, Women, Touna.

⁴⁵ KII 4, Man, Nampasso.

⁴⁶ Riley, et al, 2003.

⁴⁷ The external research partners opted not to conduct any remote interviews by telephone, in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality for all study participants.

participants said women do not condone violence. However, some key informants more openly discussed the possibility of this, such as one man who described an intercommunal land dispute in which women advocated for violence.⁴⁸ Key informants may have felt less pressure to respond in a socially acceptable way since they were not in a group setting. However, focus group participants may have felt a tendency to agree with the majority opinion among the group members and avoid expressing any dissenting views.⁴⁹ With a small study like this one, it is difficult to make these determinations, particularly since the key informants' different opinions from the FGDs may have been outliers as well.

Response bias by the key informants may have also occurred in this study. Specifically, the identities of the research team may have influenced the key informants' responses. Mercy Corps, an international non-governmental organization (INGO), conducted this study with the same communities in Mali who are participating in the Mercy Corps program Ben ni Baara. Given the existing relationship with Mercy Corps, participants in this study may have responded in a certain way to maintain a positive rapport with the INGO implementing programs in their communities. Additionally, the two researchers who interviewed the key informants were female academics from the USA. The academics asked the key informants about the role of women in their communities, and more specifically roles in peace and conflict. However, being asked these types of questions about women *by* women may have caused the male key informants to respond in a certain way that was inaccurate. It is possible the male key informants would have given different responses if interviewed by male academics. Though we cannot definitively determine the presence of this bias among the key informants, or its source, bias is important to consider when analyzing data, especially when collected in a setting with strong gender hierarchies.

Recommendations

Considering the study's lessons learned, several recommendations can be applied to future W/GPS programs. The first set of recommendations provides guidance and considerations for designing programs focusing on W/GPS. The second set suggests ways to improve the data collection process for research, monitoring, and evaluation focused on W/GPS questions and programs.

Creating and Implementing W/GPS Programs

When planning and implementing programs focused on W/GPS, our main recommendation is to highlight the complexity and diversity of populations

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Design W/GPS programs and research with an intersectional approach**
- **Leverage existing peacebuilding practices and roles in communities**
- **Consider supporting the establishment of women's groups**
- **Engage the household level across the whole community**
- **Consider supporting the influence of women in formal peacebuilding mechanisms**

⁴⁸ KII 6, Man, Mion.

⁴⁹ Bergen and Labonté, 2020.

affected by W/GPS through an **intersectional approach** to programs.⁵⁰ For example, through a gender lens, we might find that women in a community experience life differently than the men in the same community. However, by taking an intersectional approach, we might find that different women within the same community might themselves have diverging experiences depending on their age, marital status, education level, ethnoreligious group, or any other individual characteristic. The myriad of possibilities for future analyses across various characteristics demonstrate the complexity of every woman's experience and the benefit of using an intersectionality approach to conducting W/GPS programs and research.

Below are recommended steps for designing and implementing W/GPS programs based on our study findings, each of which must be adapted to any given program's specific context.

1. **Design W/GPS programs and research with an intersectional approach.** In contrast to a gender lens, an intersectional approach reveals how different women within the same community might themselves have diverging experiences depending on their age, marital status, education level, ethnoreligious group, or any other individual characteristic that may influence their life experiences. Specifically:

- a. **Design W/GPS programs with a full understanding of the characteristics that may make women or different identities or profiles more or less influential.** It should not be assumed that women leaders of community groups, or other women in roles associated with power, are going to be the best facilitators in achieving meaningful impact in W/GPS programming. This speaks to the importance of ensuring proper inclusion and representation by program participants of different ages and the different population segments within their communities.
- b. **Leverage existing peacebuilding practices and roles in communities, including those within formal and informal networks.** For example, with older women mentoring younger women, programs should identify older female peacebuilders in their communities and then explore opportunities to expand the learning of their approaches to multiple young women in the community. Additionally, peacebuilding programs should

INTERSECTIONALITY IN MALI

Our study found that some women in these communities in Mali have a strong influence on peace and conflict due to their interpersonal relationships. Specifically, married women play a prominent role in influencing their husbands at home regarding peace and conflict. Using an intersectional lens, it is evident that a woman's marital status influences her peacebuilding role in these communities.

Consequently, comparing the experiences of married and unmarried women is a way to further advance this finding in future research. Intersectional analysis could go even further by comparing not only women's experiences based on marital status, but also across levels of education, or other characteristics like household size or source of income, to examine how various characteristics interact and affect women's roles in peace and conflict.

⁵⁰ Intersectionality is the concept that people's different characteristics (such as sex, race, and ethnicity) "intersect" and overlap in various ways to influence a person's life experiences. For more background on this concept, see Crenshaw, 1989.

explore opportunities to strengthen and leverage relationships or groups that tend to promote peace, such as joking cousins.

2. **Consider supporting the establishment of women’s groups, particularly to encourage youth inclusion.** Even though these groups may not primarily serve a peacebuilding function, they have a strong potential to serve as a peacebuilding support structure and venue through which women of different ages can convene, discuss, and develop mentoring relationships, thus promoting youth inclusion in peacebuilding.
3. **Engage the household level across the whole community given the role of women in the private sphere and potential impact of intra-household dynamics on peacebuilding outcomes.** Additionally, when implementing these programs, male program staff members should work with male community members, and female program staff members should work with female community members. While this may not be possible in every context, efforts should be made to ensure that all members of the program, from both the program staff and the community, feel comfortable participating.
4. **Consider providing resources to amplify the influence of women in formal peacebuilding mechanisms such as conflict resolution committees.** For participants interested in participating in formal peacebuilding mechanisms, programs should consider providing them with training and resources to learn more about the mechanisms and how to participate, along with networking opportunities to facilitate such engagement. Programs should provide these opportunities for participation to a diverse group of women to ensure inclusion and representation of different segments within their communities in these formal mechanisms.

Conducting W/GPS Research, Measurement, and Evaluation

Below are two main recommendations to inform future research, measurement, and evaluation on W/GPS, which are further described in the remainder of this section.

1. **Adopt a participatory approach for research focusing on W/GPS to allow greater inclusion of the study participants in the research design, implementation, and knowledge production.** This can lead to greater local acceptance, ownership, and legitimacy for the study and can better represent the local interests and concerns of the study population.
2. **Research on W/GPS must ensure adequate diversity in the sampling of participants and extensive data disaggregation.** Including different segments of the population in research studies provides an opportunity to gain a more cohesive understanding of W/GPS among different community members who all have different life experiences.

METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR W/GPS RESEARCH

- **Adopt a participatory approach**
- **Ensure adequate diversity in participant sampling and data disaggregation**

Participatory Approach

In line with feminist principles, more research focusing on W/GPS is needed and should take a **participatory approach** to allow greater inclusion of the study participants in the research design, implementation, and knowledge production.⁵¹ While FGDs and interviews - which were used in our study - are extremely valuable qualitative research methods, implementing qualitative research through a participatory approach can lead to even greater local acceptance, ownership, and legitimacy for the study.

Instead of viewing people as subjects of a study, participatory methods are developed and implemented in direct collaboration *with* the study population and shift *away* from extractive research. This approach does not require the study population to be trained in research. Instead, participatory research values the democratization of the research process by involving those who either directly belong to the study population or can voice their interests.⁵² Through a participatory approach, research on W/GPS can better represent the local interests and concerns of the study population.⁵³ This approach to research not only aims to generate new knowledge but also aims to address the most important community concerns.⁵⁴

It is important to note that implementing a study with participatory methods will require careful training of the research teams. In such a collaborative environment, it is extremely important for the research team to meticulously track the date and location of each step of the participatory research process, along with demographic information about all of the participants (when appropriate). It is also important to acknowledge the challenges with conducting participatory research. Especially in conflict settings, where much W/GPS research is undertaken, the context can change rapidly, and the security environment can present several challenges. For example, community members, and especially women, may not feel safe traveling to participate in all of the phases of the research design and implementation process. Additionally, communities may fear intimidation, harassment, or retaliation for participation in studies that address sensitive topics. Recognizing these challenges early on can help researchers strategize and lay a foundation to best support collaborative, participatory approaches that aim to minimize such challenges.



PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Participatory research is a collaborative approach to research between researchers and study participants. Instead of the study participants being the “subject” of the research, they are actively involved in the study from the design phase, implementation phase, and even the data analysis and dissemination phases. Participatory approaches give local ownership to the research and provide a way for the population themselves to set the agenda and priorities for the study to address their communities’ most pressing concerns.

Diversity and Data Disaggregation

A key component of participatory research, and research on W/GPS overall, is **diversity** in the sampling of participants selected for the study. Ensuring adequate representation of people’s lived experiences can be challenging, especially in qualitative research.⁵⁵ However, including different segments of the population in

⁵¹ Maguire, 1987.

⁵² Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020. There are a variety of types of participatory research methods, and one is participatory action research (PAR). Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) explain that PAR “emphasize[s] social change and transformation, active collaboration through participation between researcher and members of the system, and iterative cycles of action and reflection to address practical concerns.”

⁵³ Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995.

⁵⁴ Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020.

⁵⁵ Denzin and Lincoln, 2005.

research studies will provide an opportunity to gain a more cohesive understanding of W/GPS among different community members who all have different life experiences.

When conducting research with diverse populations on W/GPS, it is also crucial to ensure the collected data are **disaggregated**. By disaggregating data by sex, trends can be identified within the findings that may speak more to the experiences of men, women, or both. Yet even within these disaggregated groups, it is important to consider disaggregating the groups even further to learn more about specific findings through intersectionality. For example, data are often disaggregated by ethnoreligious groups. However, the data should be separated even further, such as by education level or income, to gain a more detailed understanding of the context for specific segments of the population.⁵⁶ Within W/GPS research, disaggregation by sex may not yield many findings. However, disaggregating the data by sex and by ethnicity could provide insight about W/GPS for women in different communities. These data could then be disaggregated even further by age, size of household, or source of income, which can then yield findings that speak to generational W/GPS topics. An intersectional approach with more levels of data disaggregation can lead researchers to generate even more detailed findings about specific segments of a study population.

⁵⁶ Kauh, et al, 2021.

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CONTACT

Ryan Sheely, PhD
Director of Research - Peace, Conflict, and Governance
rsheely@mercycorps.org

Bharathi Radhakrishnan, PhD
Researcher - Peace, Conflict, and Governance
bradhakrishnan@mercycorps.org

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45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org