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REBUILDING DIGNIFIED LIVES

Gender in peacebuilding in Burundi



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Henri Myrttinen with Pierre Claver Nsengiyumva

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Contents

Abbreviations	4
Executive summary	5
1. Introduction and background	6
1.1 Methodology	7
1.2 Background to post-conflict Burundi	7
2. Gender relations in Burundi	12
2.1 Gender roles during the conflict	12
2.2 Returning populations	12
2.3 Ex-combatants	14
2.4 Post-conflict gender roles	18
3. Projects in focus	21
3.1 Association des Femmes Repatriées du Burundi (AFRABU)	21
3.2 Centre d'Encadrement et de Développement des Anciens Combattants (CEDAC)	22
3.3 Association des Hommes contre les Violences faites aux Femme (AHCVF)	23
4. Thematic focus areas	25
4.1 Continuums and permutations of violence	25
4.2 Economic recovery	27
4.3 Access to justice	28
4.4 Intergenerational dynamics	31
5. Conclusions	33

Abbreviations

AFRABU	Association des Femmes Repatriées du Burundi
AHCVF	Association des Hommes contre les Violences faites aux Femmes
CEDAC	Centre d'Encadrement et de Développement des Anciens Combattants
CNDD-FDD	Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie
CSO	Civil society organisation
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAB	Forces Armées Burundaises
FDN	Forces de Défense Nationale
FGD	Focus group discussion
FNL	Forces Nationales de Libération
GDP	Gross domestic product
IDP	Internally displaced person
IGA	Income-generating activity
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PALIPEHUTU	Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu
PNB	Police Nationale du Burundi
PPA	Programme Partnership Agreement
PPP	Purchasing power parity
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SGM	Sexual and gender minorities
SLA	Savings and loan association
SSR	Security sector reform
ST	Special Tribunal
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPRONA	Union Pour le Progrès National
VPU	Vulnerable persons' unit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The post-independence history of Burundi until 2005 (and, to some degree, until 2008, with further spikes in 2009 to 2010) has been largely marked by violent conflict and genocide, the numerous legacies of which continue to cast their shadow over Burundian society. The peacebuilding process remains a fragile one, with many fearing that the 2015 elections will lead to further political violence. Nonetheless, since the end of the civil war, Burundians at all levels have been rebuilding their individual and family lives as well as those of their communities. This process has been mostly occurring at the local level and has involved often painful negotiations and renegotiations of past violence and current, gendered power dynamics. This study, which is part of a wider four-country research project, seeks to highlight some of these processes and possible lessons that can be drawn from them.

The basic premises of this study are firstly that gender identities, norms and power dynamics are essential to peacebuilding. Secondly, gender needs to be understood in a comprehensive, relational way for it to be a meaningful and useful category of analysis for peacebuilding. By this, we mean that gendered approaches need to be aware of the different roles, norms, expectations, opportunities, needs and vulnerabilities faced by women, men, girls, boys and transgender and intersex persons. Moreover, these gender identities need to be seen in the context of other social identity markers such as age, class, disability, ethnic background, marital status or the like. It should be acknowledged also that gender identities are constructed by men and women, girls and boys, sexual and gender minorities together, and in relation to each other.

In this study, we first outline the history of the conflict in Burundi and its gendered impact on society, with a special focus on two groups: displaced persons (both internally displaced persons and refugees) and ex-combatants. After a brief discussion of post-conflict gender relations, we then highlight the work of three Burundian organisations – the Association for Repatriated Women in Burundi (*Association des Femmes Repatriées du Burundi*, AFRABU), the Training Centre for the Development of Ex-combatants (*Centre d'Encadrement et de Développement des Anciens Combattants*, CEDAC) and the Association of Men against Violence against Women (*Association des Hommes contre les Violences faites aux Femmes*, AHCVF). In different ways, each of these organisations takes a gender-relational approach to peacebuilding, although this is not explicitly stated as such. Finally, we examine four areas of peacebuilding through a gender lens: continuums and permutations of violence, economic recovery, access to justice and intergenerational issues.

We conclude that Burundians and Burundian society as a whole have undertaken considerable efforts to rebuild their lives, often with little outside support. However, a host of gendered challenges remain, while the threat of renewed violence looms. Changing the gendered power structures and dynamics goes to the very heart of a society, and gendered identities constitute the very essence of the self. The political and sensitive nature of working on gender in peacebuilding should therefore be acknowledged, and its transformational goals can only be achieved with and not against the wills of the beneficiaries. This requires time both for the analysis and the implementation, and a willingness to question sometimes simplistic gender stereotypes. We believe that the gender-relational approach allows for the undertaking of the necessary comprehensive analyses as well as finding approaches that accommodate the views and needs of different women of a variety of ages and social classes, with different life histories, and living both in the rural *collines* and the urban *quartiers*.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since 2005, Burundi has been slowly emerging from decades of intermittent violent communal conflict and genocide. Although tensions persist even at the time of writing, and occasional acts of violence flare up, the country has been making slow, steady progress towards becoming a more peaceful and inclusive society for women, men, girls and boys of different ethnic and social backgrounds. Burundians of all ages, classes and genders are slowly rebuilding their lives and their society, but the increasing violence in the run-up to the 2015 elections has highlighted how fragile these processes are. The gains are not irreversible and require sustained peacebuilding efforts by Burundian society, its political leadership and external supporters.

The complex conflict – commonly referred to as the Burundian Civil War from 1993 to 2005 – and its violent pre-history dating back to the de-colonisation era and earlier have been well documented. Although this history greatly informs the present and will continue to influence future developments, the focus of this paper will be on gender in peacebuilding in post-conflict Burundi at the time of research. It is thus a partial snapshot of a society in the midst of multiple, at times contradictory, processes of change.

This paper is one of a series of four country case studies carried out as part of International Alert's gender in peacebuilding strand, which forms part of its Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The other three country case studies are Colombia, Nepal and Uganda, which are published separately by Alert. In addition to these, the key findings from the case studies are summarised in a separate synthesis report entitled *Re-thinking gender in peacebuilding*.¹

While both the broader and deeper understandings of gender are often evoked rhetorically by peacebuilders, in practice the focus often remains a narrow, even tokenistic one: a focus on women and girls often depicts them as a homogenous group of victims without agency. As outlined in the first report of this PPA research project, *Gender in peacebuilding: Taking stock*,² we propose an alternative, relational approach to gender in the field of peacebuilding. Here, gender identities are seen as being co-produced in society by men and women alike and in relation to one another, while gender is examined in relation to other social identity markers.

The relational approach views gender roles, identities and expectations as being socially co-constructed – that is, masculinities, femininities and other gender identities do not come about separately from one another but are interdependent. Importantly, gender identities also interact with other social identity markers such as class, age, disability, urbanity/rurality, marital status, sexuality or, in some cases, ethnic or religious backgrounds. The resulting gender identities are valued differently and imbued with differing potentials of power in society.

Employing a similar research methodology in all four country case studies, we examine how gender in peacebuilding can be conceived of in a broader and deeper sense than is usually employed. In terms of broadening the scope, this means looking not only at women, girls and femininities but also at men, boys and masculinities, as well as sexual and gender minorities (SGM). In terms of deepening the understanding, the challenge lies in looking critically at the interplay between gender and other social factors.

1 H. Myrntinen, J. Naujoks and J. El-Bushra (2014). *Re-thinking gender in peacebuilding*. London: International Alert. Available at http://www.internationalalert.org/sites/default/files/Gender_RethinkingGenderPeacebuilding_EN_2014.pdf

2 J. El-Bushra (2012). *Gender in peacebuilding: Taking stock*. London: International Alert. Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201210GenderPeacebuilding-EN.pdf>

In addition to proposing a theoretical and practical reframing of how gender is conceptualised and operationalised in peacebuilding, the research examined four peacebuilding-related issues in detail from a gender-relational perspective:

- Continuums and permutations of violence;
- Economic recovery;
- Access to justice; and
- Intergenerational issues.

In order to illustrate what gender-relational peacebuilding can mean in practical terms and in line with the structure of the other reports, we will also examine the work of three Burundian grassroots organisations – AFRABU, CEDAC and AHCVF.

1.1 Methodology

The research for the study consisted of an extensive literature review, background interviews both in Burundi and abroad, as well as multi-sited field research in country. The field research for the study was carried out in May 2013 in the districts of Bujumbura *mairie*, Bujumbura *rural*, Gitega and Rutana.

The methods used included key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as participatory observation. The interviews and FGDs were conducted in Kirundi, French and English and involved local community members, civil society organisations (CSOs), administrative officials, academics, as well as representatives of international organisations and donor agencies. In total, 26 KIIs were carried out, along with five FGDs involving approximately 36 participants.³ In addition, further interviews were conducted with over a dozen academics and practitioners who have been or are working in or on Burundi.

Additional valuable input came from a two-day workshop of the community of practice on gender in peacebuilding, which was organised by Alert in Bujumbura together with local CSOs as well as state administration representatives and traditional leaders. Given its limited scope, this study in no way claims to exhaustively cover all aspects of gender in peacebuilding in Burundi or to be statistically representative. Rather, it aims to raise several key issues and to highlight the need for and possibilities of adopting a gender-relational approach.

1.2 Background to post-conflict Burundi

Burundi emerged out of a civil war, which commenced in 1993, with the signing of a series of peace agreements in Arusha, Tanzania and Pretoria, South Africa, in the early to mid-2000s. However, sporadic armed violence continued until 2008. The civil war, with an estimated 300,000 dead and approximately one million displaced internally and externally, was arguably the bloodiest period in the country's violent post-colonial history, which was punctuated by political assassinations, killings, massacres and two genocides, all of which fed into the brutal 12-year civil war. The violence has been complicated by events in neighbouring countries, especially Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which influenced and were themselves influenced by events in Burundi.⁴ In addition to the casualties, the cycles of conflict and violence displaced hundreds of thousands of Burundians, both internally and to refugee camps and exile abroad.⁵

³ Although efforts were made to restrict attendance to those directly involved, especially in rural areas, it is often difficult if not impossible to limit and control the size of FGDs, which people drift in to and out of, without causing other difficulties.

⁴ For a detailed history of Burundi and its complex dynamics until the death of Ndadaye, see, for example: R. Lemarchand (1994). *Burundi – Ethnic conflict and genocide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For a gendered analysis of Burundian history, with a particular focus on the 1992–2005 conflict and genocide, see: P. Daley (2007). *Gender and genocide in Burundi – The search for spaces of peace in the Great Lakes Region*. Oxford: James Currey.

⁵ By 2003, the International Crisis Group estimated that around 800,000 Burundians lived as refugees in Tanzania alone, while around 281,000 were permanently displaced internally, along with 100,000 who were temporarily internally displaced. See: International Crisis Group (2003). 'Réfugiés et déplacés au Burundi: Desamorcer la bombe foncière', ICG Rapport Afrique No. 70. Nairobi/Bruxelles: ICG.

The 1993–2005 civil war was triggered by the assassination of the first democratically elected president of the country, Melchior Ndadaye, on 21 October 1993. The war ended formally with the swearing in of the post-conflict president, Pierre Nkurunziza, on 26 August 2005. The complex war that followed Ndadaye's assassination involved mainly the Tutsi-dominated Burundian national armed forces and the Hutu rebel groups, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (*Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*, CNDD–FDD) and the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People – National Forces of Liberation (*Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu – Forces Nationales de Liberation*, PALIPEHUTU–FNL), along with smaller and break-away groups, as well as violence perpetrated by locally organised militia and self-defence groups.

The field interviews conveyed a strong sense that many Burundians have grown weary of the decades of genocide and war. Many were sceptical of the motivations of their political leadership and aware that violence may be mobilised again in elite struggles over control of access to power, privilege and rent-seeking opportunities. The weariness and cautiousness overshadowed their own, often highly localised attempts to rebuild dignified peacetime lives.

“Do I see myself as a hero? You can be seen as a hero if you defend your country, or for particular, heroic deeds. But us [low-ranking ex-combatants]? Not one of us beat the system; no one met their goals. No one can regard us as heroes.”

MALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

Burundi at the time of writing remains one of the poorest countries on the planet, with the World Bank ranking it as having the third lowest gross domestic product (GDP) purchasing power parity (PPP) per capita after the Central African Republic and the DRC. Moreover, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranks the country of approximately 10.5 million inhabitants at 178 out of 186 countries in terms of its Human Development Index.⁶ Outside of the capital city of Bujumbura and provincial centres, most Burundians live off of subsistence agriculture and their social life continues to be focused around the *collines* (literally ‘hills’, but this term is also used to refer to the lowest level of administration, in effect hamlets).

The country is largely Roman Catholic, with sizeable indigenous religious groups, along with Protestant and Muslim minorities.⁷ Next to the more established Protestant congregations that were established during the colonial era, new evangelical movements are rapidly gaining ground, especially in urban areas. However, traditional animist beliefs also continue to coexist with these monotheistic religions. Ethnically, the population of around 10 million is majority Hutu (usually estimated at around 85%, although reliable figures are not available), with Tutsi making up around 14% and Twa around 1%.⁸ In spite of improvements in their legal status, the Twa (or more commonly Batwa) continue to face social discrimination and economic disempowerment, which further exacerbate gender-based vulnerabilities.⁹ There is, however, as of yet very little

⁶ UNDP [2013]. *Human development report 2013 – The rise of the South: Human progress in a diverse world*. New York: UNDP. World Bank [2013]. ‘GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$)’, World Development Indicators database. Available at http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?order=wbapi_data_value_2012+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=desc

⁷ According to the US State Department: “Although reliable statistics are not available, religious leaders estimate approximately 60 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, while 20 percent belongs to indigenous religious groups and 15 percent to Protestant groups. Muslims constitute 2 to 5 percent of the population, and live mainly in urban areas. Most Muslims are Sunni, although some are Shia.” US State Department [2013]. *International religious freedom report for 2013*. Available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

⁸ At times, the Kirundi version of names of the ethnic groups is used: Bahutu, Batutsi and Batwa, most commonly for the Twa.

⁹ An example of this is enrolment in primary education, where a study of two provinces showed overall enrolment of Batwa children being 57.8%, but only around a third of these were girls, partially and possibly reflecting the triple burden of poverty, ethnic discrimination and gender-based differences, such as expectations of Batwa girls to marry young, help in the household and assist their parents selling pottery. However, these figures and underlying reasons would need to be further investigated, as there were significant differences between the two provinces. UCEDD and UNIPROBA [2009]. *Inquiry Report on Educational Discrimination Against Batwa Girls In Burundi – The Case of the Karusi and Muyinga Provinces*. Bujumbura: UCEDD/UNIPROBA

disaggregated data on the Batwa in Burundi in general, and even less gender-disaggregated data or research.¹⁰

Following the peace accords, which were ratified by a referendum in 2005, the post-conflict reconstruction effort has included disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes for former combatants; reintegration efforts for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); a security sector reform (SSR) process involving the military and police; a halting transitional justice process; and extensive efforts to rebuild functioning and more equitable state administration structures. It should be noted, however, that, while we use the term ‘post-conflict’ here partly by way of convention and partly to differentiate the current situation from the phases of active, combat-related violence, the dividing line on the ground and in people’s everyday lives is often not as clear as it may seem from the outside. As Henrik Vigh puts it, the notion of ‘post-conflict’ can convey a false sense of moving from conflict to peace in a linear fashion, obscuring the reality that “a great many people find themselves caught in a prolonged crisis rather than merely passing through it”.¹¹

A major threat to the post-conflict settlement was removed in 2006 when the last insurgent group, PALIPEHUTU-FNL, signed a ceasefire agreement with the government – although fighting flared up again briefly in 2008, in addition to violence related to elections in 2009–2010. While Burundian society has been slowly rebuilding itself and seeking to overcome decades of mistrust and violence, the process remains fragile, as underlined by the increasing tension and fear of politically motivated violence in the run-up to the 2015 elections.¹² Measures to improve gender equitability, at least numerically, have been implemented by the Burundian government, such as having a 30% quota for female parliamentarians.¹³ Many of the development goals aimed for, such as in healthcare or education, are often more or less equally distant for the majority of Burundian men and women, girls and boys.

In the immediate post-conflict setting, the international community – chiefly the World Bank and the United Nations through its peacekeeping missions, as well as key bilateral donors – played a major part in setting the frameworks for the post-conflict settlement, including DDR and SSR processes and the reintegration of displaced persons.¹⁴ In 2006, Burundi was placed on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which has led to cooperation between the Burundian government and international and local partners in the areas of good governance, strengthening the rule of law, community recovery and land ownership.¹⁵ While the approach was initially gender blind, according to interviewees, pressure by local women’s rights organisations and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) led the UN to take women’s rights more into account, although much of this seems to have remained mostly at the rhetorical level.¹⁶

While national and international agencies have established the broad frameworks for the return of displaced populations and demobilisation of former fighters, much of the actual day-to-day work of reintegrating ex-combatants, IDPs and refugees has been left to the communities and

10 One of the few more extensive sources on gendered discrimination of Batwa women and girls is K. Ramsay (2009). *Uncounted: The hidden lives of Batwa women*. London: Minority Rights Group International. Available at <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4bf389f82.pdf>. Unfortunately, this report does not have much either on the Burundian situation.

11 H. Vigh (2008). ‘Crisis and chronicity: Anthropological perspectives on continuous conflict and decline’, *Ethnos*, Vol. 73, No. 1. p.8.

12 See, for example: J.C. Nkundwa (2013). ‘Burundi at crossroads: Tensions are rising ahead of the 2015 elections’, *Insight on Conflict*. Available at <http://www.insightonconflict.org/2013/10/burundi-at-crossroads/>

13 Article 129 of the Constitution sets a minimum quota of 30% for women in government and the National Assembly [Article 164], while Article 143 provides for a “public administration representative of the population, including women”. In 2011, the percentage of women in central government was 42.8% and 32% at the local administrative level. Source: UNDP (2011). *Gender equality and women’s empowerment in public administration – Burundi case study*. New York: UNDP.

14 The respective UN peacekeeping missions have been the *Opération des Nations Unies au Burundi* – ONUB (2004–2006), *Bureau Intégré des Nations Unies pour le Burundi* – BINUB (2007–2011) and *Bureau des Nations Unies au Burundi* – BNUB (2011 onwards).

15 United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (2014). ‘Burundi’, available at http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/sm_burundi.shtml

16 Interviews with INGO personnel involved with the processes, London, October 2014.

CSOs at the village or neighbourhood level. Through the everyday grassroots reconciliation work, trust and social cohesion between ethnic groups have been slowly rebuilt, although there have also been cases of revenge and retribution. Based on the field interviews, respondents tended to see the reconciliation processes as happening in parallel but separately for different socio-economic classes: on the one hand, community-level efforts formed the basis of reconciliation at the grassroots level, while members of the elites of both main ethnicities were involved in deal-making processes of their own. As a result, class-based cleavages seemed to be becoming more pertinent, rather than divisions along ethnic and clan lines that have often dominated Burundian history since independence.

Of the returning refugees, most are Hutus who have been living mainly in Tanzanian refugee camps, partly since the 1972 genocide, but often in other locations too. Some of the younger 'returnees' have spent their entire life outside of Burundi and, in some cases, may be second- or third-generation foreign born. The IDPs are for the most part Tutsis, while former combatants include members of all ethnic groups.

Following the various peace accords at Arusha, the different combatant forces underwent a DDR process and the previously Tutsi-dominated Burundian Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Burundaises*, FAB) were transformed into the National Defence Forces (*Forces de Défense Nationale*, FDN). Based on the peace agreements, both the FDN and the new National Police Force of Burundi (*Police Nationale du Burundi*, PNB) are to have 50:50 Hutu and Tutsi representation as well as to integrate ex-combatants from all sides. Following the demobilisation of the combatants, the former guerrilla movements CNDD-FDD and PALIPEHUTU-FNL also have been integrated into the political life of Burundi, with the former dominating government.¹⁷

Based on our interviews with Burundian and international officials, former combatants and observers involved in the reintegration processes, as well as a review of secondary literature, bringing together members of the different fighting factions into the new security forces has been surprisingly smooth, apart from initial frictions.¹⁸ The security forces have also been undergoing extensive, externally supported SSR processes, which also have included, at least on paper, gender components. In practice, however, this has almost exclusively meant increasing the number of women in the security forces and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), rather than incorporating a holistic understanding of gender into the processes – such as addressing issues of militarised masculinities or male-dominated networks of patronage and their impact on security service provision.¹⁹ According to interviewees, tackling deeper-seated issues of institutional cultures has been easier with the police rather than the army, as the PNB, unlike the FDN, is a new institution unencumbered by prior 'baggage' in this respect.

While there has been no return to full-scale violence after 2008, individual cases of violence do occur where it is often difficult to verify perpetrators or motives. As a result, both the acts of violence and the rumours and suspicions surrounding them add to growing feelings of insecurity and tension.²⁰ During the time of the research, for example, a public minibus was attacked in Bujumbura *rural* province and several passengers were killed; it was rumoured that the act was carried out by criminals or that it had a party political background, or even a mixture of both. A high-profile incident with a likely criminal case in September 2014 involved the killing of three Italian nuns in an apparent bungled robbery. Meanwhile, politically motivated intimidation

17 W. Nindorera (2012). *The CNDD-FDD in Burundi – The path from armed to political struggle*. Berghof Transitions Series No. 10. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

18 Both an ex-combatant and a long-time international observer we interviewed went so far as to call it, separately from each other, literally 'miraculous'. Interviews, Bujumbura, 16 and 22 May 2013. For secondary literature, see, for example: H. Boshoff (2006). 'Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration during the transition in Burundi – A success story?', in R. Southal (ed.), *South Africa's role in conflict resolution and peacemaking in Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press. pp.135–150.

19 Interviews, Bujumbura, 21–22 May 2013; and C. Capello (2009). *SSR and gender within the Dutch fragile states policy: A Burundian example?*, MA thesis, Radboud University Nijmegen.

20 Interview, Bujumbura, May 2013.

and violence have been rising steadily in the build-up to the 2015 elections.²¹ Of particular concern has been politically motivated violence perpetrated by party youth wings, especially the *Imbonerakure*, the youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD party. A potential problem, given their alleged involvement in politically motivated violence and intimidation, is the fact that the Burundian government in 2014 announced that the *Imbonerakure* would be integrated into official mixed security committees (*comités mixtes de sécurité*) at the local level, thus giving a heavily partisan group access to state resources.²²

Civil society activists probing sensitive issues such as corruption whom we interviewed reported feeling under threat, as did activists campaigning for SGM rights. Former members of the FNL complained in our interviews of intimidation and hinted at targeted assassinations. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported several dozen extra-judicial killings in 2012, down from a spike of 101 in 2011, although the degree to which these were politically motivated remains unclear.²³ Both excessive violence by security forces and violent crime remain major societal concerns, as do widespread domestic violence and SGBV.

21 On political violence, see: Human Rights Watch (2012). *'You will not have peace while you are living' – The escalation of political violence in Burundi*. New York: Human Rights Watch; and Amnesty International (2014). *Burundi: Locked down – A shrinking of political space*. London: Amnesty International. Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR16/002/2014/en/f6f2ac9b-504a-46d9-965a-6ff5cc793fad/afr160022014en.pdf>. On the case of the Italian nuns, see: BBC News (2014). 'Italian nuns killed in Burundi convent attack', 8 September 2014. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-29109137>

22 Amnesty International (2014). Op. cit. p.26.

23 Amnesty International (2013). *Annual Report 2013*. London: Amnesty International; and Human Rights Watch (2012). Op. cit. Updated figures were not available at the time of writing.

2. GENDER RELATIONS IN BURUNDI

The repeated cycles of violence experienced by Burundian society and their aftermath have created new gendered vulnerabilities, exacerbated existing ones, but also opened up new opportunities for rethinking gendered power dynamics. Given that the full complexities of gender relations and their changing nature throughout the complex processes of post-conflict reconstruction in Burundi cannot be captured here, we focus on some key findings and issues that arose during the research, with a special focus on returning populations and ex-combatants.²⁴

2.1 Gender roles during the conflict

Burundian society has experienced profound change owing to the combined cataclysmic experiences of genocidal violent conflict, mass displacement and now post-conflict recovery, along with the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic coupled with other major societal changes such as modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation. Yet, in spite of these changes, many societal norms also persevere or are clung to ever more tightly in the face of change. This is in many ways true of gender norms, identities and power dynamics, which are in constant flux yet often guided by ideals and ideologies that are far slower to change. In the Burundian case, these have included male predominance (especially of older men), expectations of female submissiveness and the ideals of a heterosexual, family-oriented life. According to interviewees and secondary sources, gender relations have traditionally been marked also by a high degree of mutual distrust between men and women, for example around household finances.²⁵ These continue to echo strongly in society even if both the readiness to adhere to them, along with the necessary socio-economic conditions for fulfilling or living up to these ideals, have changed dramatically.²⁶

As in the other country reports, we will focus here primarily on returnee populations (both IDPs and refugees) and former combatants. In the Burundian context, refugees have tended to be Hutu, with the first major wave fleeing in 1972 into neighbouring countries, especially Tanzania, followed by subsequent waves. IDPs tended to be in their majority Tutsis. Prior to the peace agreement, the armed forces were traditionally Tutsi-dominated, with regional provenance between Tutsis playing a major role as well, leading to strong ethnic and regional biases. The insurgent groups, civil defence and self-defence militias included members of all ethnicities. While the old armed forces were predominantly male, some of the insurgent groups had relatively high numbers of female combatants and non-combatant supporters.²⁷

2.2 Returning populations

Among refugees and IDPs, the experience of displacement also profoundly changed gendered identities and power dynamics. However, the experiences and impacts are very different, as for some refugees the displacement experience was one of several generations and spanning several

²⁴ For a discussion of pre-independence norms pertaining to class, gender and ethnicity, see: E. Albert (1963). 'Women of Burundi: A study of social values', in D. Paulme (ed.), *Women of tropical Africa*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. pp.179–215. For a gendered analysis of the conflict, see, for example: P. Daley (2007). *Op. cit.*; for a study on gendered aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding, see, for example: P. Uvin (2009). *Life after violence – A people's story of Burundi*. London: Zed Books.

²⁵ Interviews, Bujumbura, 18 May 2013 and Gitega, 20 May 2013; see also: Care International (2007). *Etude café – A study on the impact of the coffee harvest on Burundian livelihoods*. Bujumbura: Care International.

²⁶ See also: P. Uvin (2009). *Op. cit.*

²⁷ Interviews with ex-combatants, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*, May 2013. However, estimates should be treated with caution as no reliable figures exist. For a discussion of possible numbers of female combatants, see section below on ex-combatants.

countries or even continents; conversely, for others it may have involved weeks or months, with much shorter geographical displacements, although the individual impact will not necessarily have correlated with the time or distance of displacement.

The impact of displacement on gender roles and expectations, especially of Burundian refugees in Tanzania, has been examined quite extensively.²⁸ However, the longer-term gendered impacts of internal displacement and of the subsequent return remain far less researched. Many of the narratives from the Tanzanian camps on changing gender and age dynamics were also reflected in our findings from Northern Uganda – for example, feelings of loss of agency and power especially by men, the sense of infantilisation due to aid dependency, and the real and perceived increase in attention paid to and opportunities offered to women and younger people of both sexes in the camps.²⁹

The refugees' experiences of displacement were often coloured by gender, age, class and education levels. This was particularly evident in the Tanzanian camps, where knowledge of English and Kiswahili could provide new openings. As Turner relates on life in the camps:

*"[...] gender ideals do not change significantly, and [...] the young men are seeking to recuperate the masculinity that they perceive to have lost in the camp [...] Whereas women seem to try carrying on as things were in Burundi, cooking, child caring, fetching firewood, etc., elder men appear to be paralysed by the situation, while (some) young men make use of this suspension of social structures and try to change things to their own advantage."*³⁰

Often complex, decades-long biographies of multiple displacement and migration have given the returnees different skill sets, such as language, technological or problem-solving skills, but have also left returnees with traumas and emotional scars. In FGDs with returnees in Rutana and its environs, many recalled the difficulties of returning and reintegration, but stressed also how they often saw returnees, especially women, as having more self-confidence, independence, organisational skills and social capital than many of the *'autochthones'*.³¹

The humanitarian crisis of internal displacement often increased the risk of exposure especially of young girls and women to SGBV outside camps, temporary or long-term abduction by armed factions for both young men and women, exposure to SGBV by the security forces tasked with protecting the IDP camps, increased domestic violence and gendered abuse of power such as having to consent to sex in exchange for being put on lists to receive food aid.³² Thus, in multiple ways, pre-existing, patriarchal gender norms and attitudes, such as men's 'natural right' to have sex, were amplified and exacerbated in the context of displacement and conflict.

28 See, for example: L. Malkki (1995). *Purity and exile – Violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and S. Turner (1999). *Angry young men in camps: Gender, age and class relations among Burundian refugees in Tanzania*, New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 9. Geneva: UNHCR Centre for Documentation and Research.

29 With infantilisation, we refer to processes whereby adult men in particular have been relieved of roles and positions that are considered integral to male adulthood, such as decision-making and being breadwinners; instead, they find themselves in positions of being passive recipients of aid from outside agencies (be it national governments or INGOs), devoid of control over crucial decisions. In addition, local masculinities have often been pathologised by outside interveners and equated with qualities such as a propensity for violence, substance abuse, irresponsibility, uncontrolled sexuality or laziness. For Uganda, see: C. Dolan (2002). 'Collapsing masculinities and weak states – A case study of Northern Uganda', in F. Cleaver (ed.). *Masculinities matter! – Men, gender and development*. London: Zed Books; and J. El-Bushra, J. Naujoks and H. Myrtilinen (2014). *Renegotiating the 'ideal' society – Gender relations in the wake of conflict and displacement in Uganda*. London: International Alert. Available at http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Gender_%20RenegotiatingIdealSocietyUganda_EN_2013_0.pdf

30 S. Turner (1999). Op. cit. pp.145, 150.

31 In the Burundian context, those who did not flee are often referred to as the *autochthones*.

32 See, for example: Acord (2007). *'Lost generation' – Young people and conflict in Africa*. Nairobi: Acord; and Care International (2005). *Using innovative approaches to better understand sexual harassment and exploitation within the food distribution program*. Bujumbura: Care International; and H. Seckinelgin, J. Bigirumwami and J. Morris (2011). 'Conflict and gender: The implications of the Burundian conflict on HIV/AIDS risks', *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 11, No. 1. pp.55–78.

With the onset of peace, the new opportunities and challenges posed by the post-conflict period intertwine with these experiences of the conflict years as well as expectations of a return to imagined *ante bellum* 'normality' – including in terms of gender relations.³³ These coexisting and contradictory expectations impact on relations between genders and generations of the returning populations. As a result, they need to be negotiated, taking into account the expectations, attitudes, perceptions and preconceptions of the communities into which the returnees seek to (re)integrate.

Besides having to reconcile past grievances, often after decades, those who returned and those who remained have had to renegotiate political participation and access to resources among themselves. Access to land is a crucial issue in Burundi, and, while many shorter-term IDPs reported having been able to return to their plots without any great problems, former refugees, particularly those who had left in 1972, often faced issues of their former plots being claimed or occupied by others. Access to land by single women and widows has been especially difficult, and those women who have not been able to secure access are often reliant on the goodwill of others, be it family, neighbours or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A further issue raised in the FGDs – and one that was also echoed in the other three country reports but on which there is little quantified evidence – was that, during the periods of violent conflict and displacement, men often had multiple partners in different locations with no formalisation of the partnerships.³⁴ Following the end of the conflict, many of these women were left to their own devices by their male partners.

On a more practical, but nonetheless important level, many of the younger and longer-term returnees from the Tanzanian refugee camps in particular had difficulties adapting to Burundi, as they had been used to using English in the camps and now had to adapt to French as the official language. Furthermore, many returnees commented on the difficulty of getting used to arduous, physically labour-intensive farming in Burundi, having been more used to trade- and commerce-related activities in the camps.³⁵

2.3 Ex-combatants

Since the end of the Cold War, the gendered dynamics of sub-Saharan African combatant forces, especially insurgents, have been a source of enduring interest among the media, NGOs and academics. This has often led to highly sensationalist coverage, with a focus on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence. While these aspects of serving in the armed groups also came to the fore in our interviews with the ex-combatants, the picture that emerged was far more nuanced and complex than the more common, simplistic stories focusing on incidents of sexual excess, unbridled violence and exploitation. In examining armed groups, it is important to differentiate between the members of regular forces and the different insurgent groups, as they tend to have different internal dynamics. It is also important to keep in mind differences in positions of power and vulnerability based on age, gender and rank.³⁶ While stereotypes of brutal and brutalised male soldiers, victimised female soldiers and manipulated child soldiers are often based on reality, they do not capture the complexities of combatant experiences, of individual agency and of blurred victim/perpetrator roles.³⁷ A lack of understanding of these complexities and of how

33 Often this 'normality' is framed in terms of an imagined, seemingly conflict-free heteronormative 'golden age' of the past. See also: J. El-Bushra et al (2014). Op. cit.

34 In addition to formal marriage (which was rare especially among younger ex-combatants of non-state armed groups), men and women might live together in more informal arrangements, such as traditional marriage, 'bush marriage', girlfriend/boyfriend relationship or concubinage. As H. Seckinelgin et al (2011). Op. cit. note: "Furthermore, another aspect of this relationship is the difficulty in getting formal legally binding marriage. An overwhelming number of interviewees pointed out that when they were talking about marriage this was a traditional marriage which does not give entitlements to women and can be dissolved when the husband decides to do so."

35 FGDs with former refugees, Rutana area, 19–20 May 2013.

36 For an excellent study of the complexities of female involvement in Sierra Leonean insurgent forces, see, for example: C. Coulter (2009). *Bush wives and girl soldiers. Women's lives through war and peace in Sierra Leone*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

37 See also: C. Coulter (2009). Op. cit.; and M. Utas (2005). 'Victimcy, girlfriending, soldiering: Tactic agency in a young woman's social navigation of the Liberian war zone', *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 2. pp.403–443.

conflict exacerbated existing gendered inequalities has contributed to the failure of many DDR interventions from a gender perspective, increasing pre-existing vulnerabilities and creating new ones, such as exposure to HIV/AIDS.³⁸

In particular, female ex-combatants of the irregular forces whom we interviewed related stories of sexual exploitation but also of more stable relationships, solidarity and, among the lower ranks, a higher degree of gender equitability than in civilian life. Women combatants were partially in the position to give orders to men and lower-rank men were expected to carry out tasks traditionally coded as feminine, such as cooking, doing the laundry and cleaning. Ex-combatants also stressed, perhaps in reaction to dominant stereotypes of (especially male) sexual depravity, that the rebel units had strict rules against the lower ranks engaging in sexual relationships (officers were exempt), drinking alcohol or using other drugs. Sex with minors was also forbidden.³⁹ According to one former FNL combatant, the group also policed civilians' behaviour in areas under their control, dispensing justice against, among others, perpetrators of domestic violence.⁴⁰

Furthermore, against common narratives of gendered patterns of forced recruitment, of the ex-combatants we interviewed, all women had joined voluntarily for a variety of political, personal and economic reasons (although they had not necessarily remained wholly voluntarily with the armed factions after joining), while a number of the men had been forcibly recruited.⁴¹ Instead of greed, ethnic hatred or bloodlust, the most common driving factors (of an admittedly very small sample) were more mundane issues of escaping abusive family relationships, the need to support family members, being caught up in situations where there was little choice and, to a lesser albeit not unimportant degree, the will to change unjust societal structures.

“I joined the insurgents after our mother died. I was anxious and looking for a way to support my younger siblings, so I joined. But I soon realised it was a mistake. It was impossible to reach my goals there – but also impossible to go back.”

FEMALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

“I joined the rebels to escape the abuse at home. When my mother died, my father remarried and my step-mother abused us children. So when the war came, I thought: ‘if I’m not even safe at home, the one place I should feel safe in, why not join them?’ Also, I thought I was fighting for a bigger cause; that we could change the system where one group was always on top and the other would never get power.”

FEMALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

“I was forcibly recruited and didn’t dare to escape – that could have meant death. But when the fighting ebbed before the peace agreement, I heard that ex-combatants would receive a reintegration package, I quickly rejoined as I needed the money. It didn’t last me for very long, but I was able to pay my father’s hospital bills.”

MALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

As in other combatant forces in other conflicts,⁴² interviewees related how internal policing of sexuality was dependent on rank: female combatants often had little say, especially if more senior male commanders demanded sex, while lower-ranking men were barred from sexual relations with their female comrades.⁴³ Cases of same-sex relationships or SGBV against men were not

38 H. Seckinelgin et al (2011). Op. cit.

39 Similar rules – and rank-based exemptions – are also mentioned by interviewees quoted in Acord (2007). Op. cit. and H. Seckinelgin et al (2011). Op. cit.

40 Interview with male ex-combatant, Bujumbura, 17 May 2013.

41 Separate individual interviews with four male and four female ex-combatants of different insurgent groups and FAB, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*. For testimonies of young female ex-combatants, see also: Acord (2007). Op. cit.

42 See, for example (for Colombia): D. López Castañeda and H. Myrtilinen (2014). *Re-examining identities and power: Gender in peacebuilding in Colombia*. London: International Alert; and (for Sierra Leone) C. Coulter (2009). Op. cit.

43 Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*.

mentioned in the interviews, which may be more indicative of strict social norms around these issues than of an absence of such cases. Men of lower ranks were also expected to carry out roles traditionally seen as ‘feminine’, whereas higher-ranking male officers would expect women or lower-ranking men to carry out these duties for them.⁴⁴

Following the signing of the peace accords, around 55,000 former combatants were demobilised, among them 26,000 soldiers and ex-rebels, along with some 20,000 paramilitary combatants linked to the FAB and another 10,000 ‘militant combatants’ associated with the CNDD-FDD.⁴⁵ According to interviewees and secondary literature, many if not most female combatants and less well-connected male combatants lost out on reintegration packages. The percentage of up to 30% of female combatants reported by our interviewees was probably an overestimation and might be reflective of certain non-representative units; in any case, the figure of 500 female ex-combatants enrolled in the demobilisation programme⁴⁶ is in all likelihood far lower than the number of women who would have been eligible.⁴⁷ As Seckinelgin et al put it, quoting Handrahan, the DDR process in Burundi was “framed through male paradigms that ignored women’s constant insecurity within the social relations created by the conflict”.⁴⁸ The need – and opportunity – to address the risks of increased HIV/AIDS by returning ex-combatants was not seriously addressed.⁴⁹

In the case of women ex-combatants, especially those pregnant or with children, many were reported by our interviewees as having been sent to rural areas instead of the cantonment camps where registering for the DDR programme was occurring. Women also lacked access to information and/or access to the networks of patronage that helped male ex-combatants to access reintegration packages. In addition, reclassifying the ranks among male combatants seems to have been inflated, with the aim of receiving larger reinsertion packages, while combatant women were reclassified as having had lower ranks or as having been in non-combat roles such as logistics. Combatants without weapons were at times not eligible for reinsertion packages and political and personal favouritism has been alleged.⁵⁰ Both men and women reported being cheated out of full reinsertion packages by commanding officers, civilians or even their spouses, partners and family members.⁵¹

While the economic support given to ex-combatants was seen as being mostly inadequate but at least some form of support, a more significant shortcoming identified by all respondents concerned the psychosocial preparation of both returning combatants as well as receiving communities for reintegration.⁵² As in the other case studies covered in our research, ex-combatants tend to be stigmatised in society.⁵³ In Burundi as elsewhere, they tend to be seen as dangerous, as having the ‘same appetites’ as before, as being violent and greedy, as wanting to live ‘an easy life’, and/or as being so traumatised that they are perceived as ‘ticking time bombs’ by community members.

Since both female and male ex-combatants face social stigmatisation, lack of understanding for their psychosocial issues and thus difficulties in finding partners, both female and male

⁴⁴ Interviews with male and female ex-combatants, 17 May 2013, Bujumbura.

⁴⁵ Figures from: P. Douma and J-M. Gasana (2008). *Reintegration in Burundi: Between happy cows and lost investments*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute. For a discussion of ex-combatant motivations and aspirations, see also: P. Uvin (2007). ‘Ex-combatants in Burundi: Why they joined, why they left, how they fared’, Presentation to the World Bank, 23 May 2007.

⁴⁶ P. Douma and J-M. Gasana (2008). *Op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Taking the low estimate of 5% involvement by women in the CNDD-FDD alone (W. Nindorera [2012]. *Op. cit.* p.6), excluding their militants, this would already amount to around 500 female combatants. Out of more than 3,000 child soldiers who were reintegrated in the whole of the country, only 48 were girls, according to Acord (2007). *Op. cit.* pp.22–23. By September 2006, 494 women had been demobilised, compared with 17,192 men.

⁴⁸ L. Handrahan (2004). ‘Conflict, gender, ethnicity and post-conflict reconstruction’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 4. pp.429–445, quoted in H. Seckinelgin et al (2011). *Op. cit.*

⁴⁹ H. Seckinelgin et al (2011). *Op. cit.*

⁵⁰ P. Douma, I. Briscoe and J-M. Gasana (2010). *Peace in idle hands: The prospects and pitfalls of economic recovery in Burundi*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute. p.9. Available at http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20100922_cru_publicatie_ibriscoe.pdf

⁵¹ Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*. See also: Acord (2007). *Op. cit.*

⁵² Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*.

⁵³ See also: J. El-Bushra et al (2014). *Op. cit.*; D. López Castañeda and H. Myrtilinen (2014). *Op. cit.*; and J. Naujoks and H. Myrtilinen (2014). *Re-assessing gender norms after conflict: Gender in peacebuilding in Nepal*. London: International Alert.

interviewees reported tales of ex-combatants often marrying each other, even former adversaries, as they shared common experiences and could thus relate to each other. The gendered stereotypes of male ex-combatants tend to be more negative towards men than against women. Men, based on our interviews, were more likely to be seen as potential thieves, thugs, killers or worthless louts. Female ex-combatants were more likely to be seen as victims, but nonetheless as having also transgressed socially acceptable gender norms.⁵⁴ The presumed danger associated with ex-combatant status seemed to be also projected especially onto men *assumed* to be former fighters because of the kind of menial employment they are carrying out, such as motorcycle or bicycle taxi drivers, be they former combatants or not.⁵⁵

“At first, when I began reintegrating into the community, people were afraid of me, so I needed to show both my innocence and that I could be a responsible person. Slowly, people started accepting me, and things slowly became normal. But it was not easy. Dealing with much distrust, with being shunned socially – that was hard. Even now, sometimes, when someone gets drunk they might say something bad about me because I was a combatant.”

MALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

“It is a daily effort for me to make people understand I’m still a human, even though I have spent years in the bush. It requires me to be very patient, very flexible with people.”

FEMALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

While former combatants of non-state forces have struggled to be re-accepted by society, former soldiers and especially the higher-ranking officers of the national armed forces, FAB, have had to deal with a similar but in some way different set of challenges. Whereas non-state actor ex-combatant status was perceived as a stigma by all of our interviewees, for ex-members of the FAB interviewed, civilian life has meant dealing with the loss of social standing and privilege. Given their small pensions, they have had to take on civilian jobs, including as security guards or, alongside their former foes, as bicycle and motorcycle taxi drivers.⁵⁶

“[...] ex-combatants seemed to be more stigmatised by the population in 2008 than they were in 2005, which may be a consequence of the relative failure of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme.”⁵⁷

The paths of reintegration for ex-combatants have been different in the rural and urban areas, both with their own gender dimensions. While economic survival is fraught with difficulties in Bujumbura, the city does afford a degree of anonymity and social support networks that may not be available in rural communities. For disabled ex-combatants, appropriate medical services are often not available in villages. The anonymity and mutual support networks of the urban environment can be especially important to female ex-combatants who are often seen as having transgressed ‘appropriate’ gender norms, particularly those who return as single mothers after their ‘bush husbands’ have abandoned them. Both male and female ex-combatants also expressed their doubts as to whether they would be able to live up to the social expectations of rural life, such as subservience to elders.⁵⁸ Research by Acord highlighted cases of returning

54 Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*, as well as interviews with local NGOs, Bujumbura, May 2013.

55 Interviews with union representatives of informally employed persons’ trade unions, Bujumbura, 16 and 18 May 2013. For an in-depth treatment of a similar phenomenon in Sierra Leone, see: A. Menzel (2011). ‘Between ex-combatization and opportunities for peace: The double-edged qualities of motorcycle-taxi driving in urban postwar Sierra Leone’, *Africa Today*, Vol. 58, No. 2. pp.97–127.

56 Interviews with Syravebu, 16 May 2013, and the association of former soldiers, AMINA, 18 May 2013, Bujumbura.

57 S. Pézard and S. de Tessières (2009). ‘Insecurity is also a war’ – *An assessment of armed violence in Burundi*. Geneva: Geneva Declaration.

58 Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*, as well as interviews with local NGOs, Bujumbura, May 2013.

female ex-combatants with children, including victims of rape, being shunned or kicked out by communities and family members.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, the difficulties of earning an income in the city as well as the fear of targeting of ex-combatants (especially former FLN members) have forced men in particular to return to their *collines* of origin, with the hope of restarting their lives and becoming respected members of society.⁶⁰ However, men also spoke of facing ridicule on return for “having wasted the best years of their life and, not even having any money, let alone a house or wife to show for it”.⁶¹

2.4 Post-conflict gender roles

The slow end of decades of conflict and the rebuilding of Burundian society have had mixed impacts in terms of gender norms, roles and expectations. While new, more gender-equal spaces and dynamics have emerged, in other ways old heteronormative and patriarchal norms have been re-established or new forms of inequality have arisen. As in the other case studies of this research project, the post-conflict era has witnessed both a questioning of old norms as well as a re-assertion of old norms – the expectation that now, after the abnormal period of conflict and displacement, the nation can return to ‘the way things should be’, and expectations that blend the two.⁶²

One seemingly mundane area where the ‘roll-back’ to old roles is visible is around household chores, such as cooking. Both female ex-combatants and female returnees stated that, while men and boys had participated in these duties out of necessity in the conflict years, the expectation now was that women would again be in charge of household and reproductive duties, unless economic circumstances came in between.⁶³ Importantly, different men and women, regardless of socio-economic status, saw these dynamics in a different light: some women, old and young, welcomed the return to old gender norms, while others resented it and tried to raise their sons and daughters differently; many men interviewed espoused more equitable approaches, while others defended male privilege as the ‘right’ order of things.⁶⁴

One internationally renowned approach to working with men to change attitudes towards gender roles and reduce both domestic violence and SGBV is ‘*Abatangamuco*’ (literally meaning ‘those who shed light’ in Kirundi). This local Burundian approach has since gained support from donors and INGOs, including CARE International as one of the main sponsors.⁶⁵ The movement seeks to promote men’s engagement with and leadership in promoting new, more gender-equitable relations in the household and renouncing domestic violence and SGBV. The movement seeks to

59 The complexity of gendered, age- and status-related challenges is captured in the following case presented by Acord (2007). Op. cit. p.24: “Even though girls are treated badly by all members of the family without exception, the girls we interviewed considered the worst maltreatment to come from their brothers. This intolerant behaviour is linked to questions of inheritance. In fact, when a girl gives birth to a boy, the maltreatment of the girl and her child is worse, because this child has the right to inherit from his maternal grandfather and therefore encroaches on the possessions which would otherwise come down to his mother’s brothers, given that in Burundi only male descendants have the right to inherit. Not only that, but also the girl mother’s chances of marrying are slim, and her brothers resent the fact that she will for ever be a burden on the family.”

60 Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*, as well as interviews with local NGOs, Bujumbura, May 2013. On the targeting of FNL members, see also: Human Rights Watch (2012). Op. cit.

61 Interview with male ex-combatant, Bujumbura, 17 May 2013.

62 See also: P. Uvin (2009). Op. cit. for an examination of these dynamics.

63 Similar to conflict, economic duress, such as widespread urban poverty, tended to be framed as something temporary and extraordinary, necessitating a temporary and extraordinary lifting of gender role expectations – although de facto the temporary suspension or deferral of expectations of fulfilling the male breadwinner role, for example, is often more or less permanent. Interviews, Bujumbura, Rutana and Gitega, 16–22 May 2013.

64 Peer pressure can play a major role as well. As one female returnee related, she had raised both her sons and daughters to help with household chores, but, on their return to Burundi, the boys quit as they felt ashamed and faced ridicule from peers. FGD, Rutana, 19 May 2013.

65 For a comprehensive and highly positive review of *Abatangamuco*, see: H. Wallacher (2012). *Engaging men – The Abatangamuco and women’s empowerment in Burundi*. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Interviewees contacted on Burundi during our research also raised more critical questions around possible reinforcing and privileging of male agency vis-à-vis female agency and questions surrounding the depth of adherence to principles of gender equality across the movement.

instil in its members a positive pride in a ‘new’ kind of masculinity. It spreads its message through theatre productions and testimonies, in which members talk at village-level meetings of their new life. Men who give their testimonies draw on the fact that many villagers will remember their former selves and ask them to compare between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ ways of being a man, with their wives acting as a witness to this change. Those men who choose to change their ways can apply to join *Abatangamuco*, after which they need to pass a probation period. If they pass, they are inducted into the ‘brotherhood’ in a public ceremony.⁶⁶ Although the programme focuses mainly on men as actors of change, their wives are also included both indirectly (through their husbands) and directly in the programme.

“Now I think of the household as a ‘we’, not only as an ‘I’. Like many men, I used to only consider myself and my mates. I would take the household money and go to the cabaret [shebeen] and get drunk with my mates. Men often only consider themselves, and by that, they destroy their households. But now I have changed – and people see how I have changed, and many other men want to join [Abatangamuco].”

“At first when I joined [Abatangamuco], other men would mock me and say that I’m stupid or that I had been bewitched by my wife, but now they don’t laugh at me anymore as they see how I have changed.”

“People know how I was before, how I ran around in ragged clothes, smelly and dirty. How I spent my money on beer in the cabaret, how I was living like an animal. But now, they see how I have changed [since joining the group], I have changed my ways. I no longer spend my money in the cabaret, and they see how I now have self-respect, how I now have nice, clean clothes.”

FGD DISCUSSIONS WITH ABATANGAMUCO MEMBERS, GITEGA

In the interviews, *Abatangamuco* members emphasised their new-found respect both by others and for themselves. This was especially reflected in the wearing of clean clothes and the appreciation showed by traditional and official leaders, by community members and by INGOs. Also, they highlighted how their lives had qualitatively become better emotionally and economically by having more equitable relationships with their wives, therefore overcoming the long-entrenched antagonistic stereotypes of men and women into which they had been socialised. Through the programme, the men and women have learned to work as couples, and women are encouraged to participate in household- and community-level decision-making about social, economic and political issues. Both husbands and their wives clearly gain social status through participation in the programme, and both are often sought out for personal and marital advice by other community members, with the momentum of the movement growing fast.

As in the case of similar movements in northern Uganda,⁶⁷ the results in terms of reducing instances of SGBV, changing gendered power dynamics and promoting positive masculinities would seem to be impressive – although, given a lack of a baseline, we were not in a position to determine the progress other than by relying on *ex post facto* anecdotal evidence. If there is one critique that could be made, however, it is that the movement tends to highlight and celebrate male agency, with women mainly playing an indirect role through their husbands rather than being agents in their own right. While for many men the process has indeed been transformative and changed their perceptions of gender roles and relations in a more equitable way, the process also allows for a loophole for others to exchange a harmful and disreputable form of dominant masculinity for a more benevolent and respectable form of male dominance. Nonetheless, this heteronormative approach is also one of the major reasons for the success of the movement, drawing on locally accepted ideal gender norms of men and women, above all mutuality and respectability.

⁶⁶ Interviews with CARE staff and *Abatangamuco* members, Gitega, 20 May 2013.

⁶⁷ See: J. El-Bushra et al (2014). Op. cit.

While *Abatangamuco* tends to be a more rural movement, the pressures to conform to expectations of being a successful, respectable male breadwinner also weighs heavily on urban men, both the generationally young and those trapped in the social category of ‘youth’, despite their age. This is because they are not able to live up to the socio-economic markers of social male adulthood, such as being able to provide for oneself and one’s family.⁶⁸ Men and women are also under horizontal age-group pressure to adhere to expectations of urban success.

“Nowadays [among young men in the city], it’s all about what you earn, how you look, how you dress, how you are seen as taking care of your family, that’s what counts ... in the city, there’s a lot of pressure to be seen as urban, to dress well, to drink with your mates, to party ... and, as a result, most men end up with no money.”

UNION ORGANISER, BUJUMBURA

Given economic pressures, young men and women increasingly are crossing gendered barriers to take on jobs previously ‘coded’ as being only for the other sex, other socio-economic strata or other ethnicities (e.g. the Batwa). Examples include men working as cooks or cleaners. As with ex-combatants, however, this does not necessarily mean that gender ideologies change as the de facto overturning of gendered expectations of jobs is perhaps socially regarded as a passing aberration. The situation is not only gendered, but is also intricately linked to class, age and locality, among other factors: for instance, a young middle-class female lawyer working for an NGO in the capital may face less ridicule and ostracism than a middle-aged male farmer in the countryside who is washing his child’s clothes on behalf of his wife.

In terms of SGM, while there is no outright outlawing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) identities in Burundi, sexual acts of an ‘unnatural’ nature are criminalised, and social and political pressure mean that SGM persons and organisations advocating for their rights operate ‘under the radar’, to the degree of almost complete invisibility.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, in spite of occasional rhetoric to the contrary, same-sex relationships are not new to Burundian society: for example, a dictionary from the year 1904 lists seven different Kirundi terms for male-male sexuality and at least two terms for traditional transgender priests.⁷⁰ According to interviewees, local NGOs, churches as well as legal and medical services tend to deny the existence of SGM persons, thus increasing their vulnerability to harassment, abuse, various forms of violence but also to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV/AIDS. According to the interviewees, while physical violence is relatively rare and people suspected of being SGM are exposed mostly to verbal hassle, violence, ‘social death’ and state repression remain constant threats. While urban life can, in this respect, be *relatively* easier than life in rural areas, in both areas, at the family, peer and community level, there can be tacit acceptance of gender and sexual diversity.⁷¹

68 Female adulthood often tends to be defined biologically while male adulthood is defined socio-economically. See also: Dolan (2002). *Op. cit.*; and H. Vigh (2006). *Navigating terrains of war – Youth and soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, on expectations of male adulthood and ways of trying to navigate lives where living up to the gendered societal expectations is not possible.

69 This went so far as to cause difficulties for the field research, as SGM rights organisations were extremely cautious and reluctant about engaging with us.

70 J.M.M. van der Burgt (1904). ‘Dictionnaire Français-Kirundi. Bois-le-Duc: Société l’illustration catholique’, quoted in S. Murray and W. Roscoe (1998). *Boy-wives and female husbands – Studies in African homosexuality*. New York: Palgrave. p.39.

71 Interview with SGM rights organisation, Bujumbura, 21 May 2013.

3. PROJECTS IN FOCUS

As in the other country reports, we chose three local-level peacebuilding projects that integrate gender into their programming from what, in our eyes, would be a gender-relational perspective. In some cases, it was a conscious or semi-conscious choice; in others, it was borne out of everyday necessity and pragmatism. The selected case studies are the organisations AFRABU, CEDAC and AHCVF.

3.1 Association des Femmes Repatriées du Burundi (AFRABU)

As the name implies, AFRABU was originally founded as a women's organisation, focused on working with the challenges faced by returning, repatriated refugee women, the majority of whom were Hutu. However, the organisation soon noticed that, in order to achieve its broader aspirations of peacebuilding through increased social inclusion and its goals of a more gender-equitable society, it would need to work in a broader fashion than focusing merely on its primary group of concern. Therefore, AFRABU needed to work with women *and* men; in order to work on the challenges faced by returning refugees, it needed to work with IDPs and refugees, but also the receiving of '*autochthones*' as well as ex-combatants and veterans. However, realising that the 'playing field' was not even for men and women in terms of possibilities for participating, AFRABU's activities built in safeguards seeking to ensure that women would be given an opportunity to increase their abilities to participate more economically, socially and politically, by insisting for example that all of the projects supported by the organisation would be headed by a woman.

In addition to lobby and advocacy work on women's rights issues at the national and international level (including pressuring the government to include women's concerns in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, PRSP), AFRABU works intensively with communities at the *colline* level. A large part of the work consists of giving support to farmers, livestock herders and petty traders by organising local-level savings and loan associations (SLAs) and getting groups of ex-refugees, ex-IDPs, ex-combatants and *autochthones* to work together on income-generating activities (IGA). Such activities include farming, food processing, computer services, print shops or setting up small restaurants.

Among the key issues of AFRABU's work has been working on access to land and other socio-economic resources, which have been especially restricted to women, those socially considered as youth and those seen as having stepped outside of the community, be it for extended periods of absence (e.g. refugees) or due to their real or perceived roles in the war in the case of ex-combatants. Many of the beneficiaries also need skills development and other forms of support in terms of working on IGA projects, setting up small enterprises and dealing with microfinance institutions, which often have highly punitive interest rates.

The SLA and IGA work is run through small groups of maximum seven people, mostly mixed in terms of age, sex and background. In order to try to ensure that women are not sidelined by more vocal men, all groups are led by women – often relatively young women, thus challenging both patriarchal and gerontocratic stereotypes. Even when the women and men involved are visibly able to demonstrate how their participation in the AFRABU-sponsored activities is having a positive effect on, for example, household finances, passive and active community and family resistance against the transgression of expected age- and gender-related norms may persist.

“We need to bring our husbands around to understand that we, as women, also have something to contribute to the household and to our relationship, even if it is as simple as me buying me and my husband both a beer each with the money I have earned and bringing those home and then sharing them together, something that is still seen as extraordinary in the community.”

FEMALE MARKET TRADER AND SLA PARTICIPANT, RUTANA

Husbands still often do not allow women to work on AFRABU-supported IGA projects or to join SLAs. Also, they may seek to control the extra household income generated, thus increasing the need for the organisation to work with men to help them understand the benefits of more equitable relations and to lessen fears of a loss of power, control and privilege. In addition to the gender-relational work, which the organisation has adopted more out of practical necessity than prior planning, AFRABU seeks through its everyday efforts to build trust and understanding between the different groups of returnees, ex-combatants and *autochthones*. The hope is that, through the day-to-day interaction with each other, the project participants will begin to better understand the different challenges faced by those who spent years in exile or internal displacement and are now returning, by those who remained behind, and by those who, voluntarily or not, joined the combatant forces. Through this interaction, it is hoped that the different groups will learn to overcome their differences.

3.2 Centre d'Encadrement et de Développement des Anciens Combattants (CEDAC)

CEDAC was founded in 2004 by former combatants as a self-help group with the aim of combating armed violence and assisting ex-combatants. It has a membership of over 14,000 male and female former combatants.⁷² CEDAC has received support from various international NGOs and donors, including the UNDP and UN Women, to undertake its peacebuilding and development initiatives. These have included psychosocial support for ex-combatants and survivors of violence, campaigns for the voluntary handover of firearms and control of small arms and light weapons (SALW), campaigns on violence reduction at the individual and community levels, and support for former combatants and the communities into which they are reintegrating.

The work of CEDAC seeks to address many of the gendered challenges and obstacles faced by former combatants. For example, it works with men and women on domestic violence, SGBV and HIV/AIDS issues. A key part of the programming is giving men and women who are survivors of violence and/or were in the various armed factions the space to talk about their issues. In addition, it provides them with the necessary skills and tools to both help themselves and provide peer-to-peer support. Both male and female ex-combatants have been trained to act as peer-to-peer counsellors and have been, based on our interviews with beneficiaries, a great asset for ex-combatants struggling with their reintegration into civilian life.⁷³

“After reintegration and demobilisation, I found myself lost in a life that was abnormal for me – namely civilian life. Even though it was what everyone else around me called a ‘normal’ life, it was anything but normal for me.”

FEMALE EX-COMBATANT AND CEDAC PEER-TO-PEER COUNSELLOR, BUJUMBURA

In terms of the work with ex-combatants directly, the key elements are psychosocial rehabilitation and supporting those with conflict-related disabilities with whatever medical support is available. It also gives support for the socio-economic reintegration of combatants, for example through skills training and SLAs. In terms of trust building at the community level, CEDAC staff highlighted

⁷² P. Douma et al [2008]. Op. cit. pp.26–27.

⁷³ Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*.

the importance of their SALW control work. In addition to reducing weapons proliferation, this work also countered common stereotypes of ex-combatants as irresponsible and violence prone, as it was female and male ex-combatants carrying out the disarmament campaign.⁷⁴

Community trust has also been increased through CEDAC initiatives that extend beyond the ex-combatants. Examples include giving, where possible, more general support to those with physical disabilities due to the conflict, to widows, widowers and orphans, but also directly and indirectly to the families of ex-combatants secondarily affected by conflict-related trauma and accompanying violent behaviour against the self, immediate family members and members of the community.

Although it is not explicitly labelled as being gender-relational, the work of CEDAC has had a strong element of this in its approach: on the one hand, it has highlighted both the problem-solving agency of female and male ex-combatants; on the other hand, it has used these to address the particular needs and vulnerabilities of the women and men involved in and benefiting from the organisation's programmes and activities. Apart from assisting survivors of violence and ex-combatants in their social and psychosocial reintegration process, this has allowed them to discuss gendered needs and societal obstacles faced by women and men ex-combatants of different ages and social backgrounds.

3.3 Association des Hommes contre les Violences faites aux Femmes (AHCVF)

AHCVF is a small but energetic grassroots organisation, which is locally run and mostly locally funded. The organisation seeks to change men's attitudes to patriarchy and the violent ways in which it is imposed in Burundian society. It was established in 2009 and currently has a group of around 20 'change agents', who give trainings and run outreach campaigns across the country. The organisation works with men to increase gender awareness and equitability as well as to reduce both direct violence (e.g. domestic violence and SGBV) and structural violence that disproportionately disadvantages women and girls, but also impacts on men's wellbeing.

In the words of one of its activists, the organisation wants to tackle the "root of the violence, which is the socially constructed masculine 'need to dominate' that is inculcated into men at an early age, along with the belief that women are worth nothing, which is then perpetuated through family structures, in the schools, supported by the church and the state, and reinforced by male peers".⁷⁵ While presenting a strong critique of male privilege and patriarchy, the organisation also emphasises the cost of this belief system for men: men are taught to mistrust their wives and to keep their money away from them lest she steal it, therefore becoming alienated from their spouses and their children as well as, importantly, from themselves.

"We need to work with men to show them how they can benefit from gender equality – that it is not about losing control but about getting to know their children, getting to know their wives, getting their household finances in order and – yes! – having better sex, which is something many men have never thought about, that both parties should enjoy it!"

AHCVF ACTIVIST, BUJUMBURA

The work of AHCVF tackles many of the fundamental issues that underpin patriarchal structures in Burundian society. However, it does so by drawing on the very same justifications that are used in support of patriarchy – such as custom and culture, Christianity, biology or the logic of the state – to question male privilege. The organisation seeks to fundamentally change these discriminatory

⁷⁴ Interviews, CEDAC, Bujumbura, 19 May 2013.

⁷⁵ Interview, Bujumbura, 18 May 2013.

attitudes and gender ideologies. It aims to counter the daily practices that perpetuate patriarchy and violent relations, from the individual and family level upwards, as well as the systematic disadvantaging of women and devaluation of their work and societal contributions. AHCVF also works with men to help them better understand sexual and reproductive health issues of both men and women. It also works to promote more equitable decision-making in the household around issues of household finances, division of labour, education, sex and reproduction.

The work of AHCVF consists mostly of grassroots awareness-raising activities among different groups of men, from day labourers and tea farmers to state administrators and priests, with the aim of changing patterns of perpetuating violence and oppression. The activities mainly comprise individual and group discussions, counselling and awareness-raising workshops as well as publications.

“Peacebuilding starts with the family, and, as the Constitution says, it is the basic unit of the nation – and also often reflects the patriarchal nature of the state in miniature, with the husband seeing himself as the president. The family is also where gender roles start, with naming of children, with the amount of care and love given to boys and girls, with the values we pass on to them.”

AHCVF ACTIVIST, BUJUMBURA

While AHCVF is in some ways similar to the *Abatangamuco* initiative, it uses gender issues perhaps less instrumentally than the former does; instead, it uses gender as an entry point to a more fundamental analysis of societal power dynamics with the aim of reassessing these. Its peacebuilding approach seeks to start at the personal level and to change interpersonal dynamics, seeing these as key to increasing peace at all levels of society.

4. THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

The following section will examine four thematic areas of peacebuilding from a gender perspective. These are:

- **Continuums and permutations of violence** – meaning how the various forms of violence present in society, such as political, ethnically motivated or criminal violence, but also interpersonal violence, violence against the self (e.g. suicide or substance abuse), interact with each other and how conflict-related violence can cast its shadow over the post-conflict period;
- **Economic recovery** – especially of ex-combatants and returning populations, although the term can be somewhat misleading, as it is often a case of trying to rebuild livelihoods from the ground up in radically different social and personal circumstances rather than involving a simple return to what was there before;
- **Access to justice** – including access to the formal system, to transitional justice processes and to informal and traditional justice mechanisms, along with judicial and security sector reform; and
- **Intergenerational conflict** – examining the interplay between age and gender, and how both the conflict and post-conflict dynamics have influenced and been influenced by this interplay.

The four thematic areas are not separate and discrete categories, but are interconnected. For example, the possibilities of accessing justice by a survivor of domestic violence and abuse linked to conflict-related traumas of the partner will depend on his/her age and socio-economic position and will, in turn, impact his/her possibilities of engaging in livelihood activities.

4.1 Continuums and permutations of violence

Almost a decade after the official end of the civil war, Burundi has made great strides in terms of consolidating the peace accords but, at the same time, remains affected by high levels of violence and the fear of a relapse into politically motivated violence in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Separating the various forms of violence and their motivations can be difficult and figures are unreliable, but criminally motivated violence tends to be the most common form, followed by land disputes, domestic violence and politically motivated violence.⁷⁶ In spite of disarmament campaigns, a large number of SALW is reported to be in circulation, including both commercially produced weapons from the time of the conflict and homemade weapons (*mugobore*).⁷⁷

“Is the violence political? Is it criminal? Is it motivated by personal issues? Is it opportunistic, arising out of the situation? That’s a good question. Often, I think it tends to be a mixture of motivations and they cannot be separated from one another.”

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER, BUJUMBURA

⁷⁶ S. Pézard and S. de Tessières (2009). Op. cit. pp.26–27 quote the figures of the Burundian Observatory of Armed Violence for August 2007 to December 2008. According to these figures, 50% of the 1,867 recorded acts of armed violence were identified as ‘banditry’, followed by acts of armed violence relating to land disputes (5.6%), domestic disputes (4.9%), acts connected to the FNL (4.2%), which was still active at the time, and police blunders (2.6%). The report does not specify how the other 30%-odd of violent acts were classified.

⁷⁷ Given the nature of illicit arms ownership and the relatively widespread use of *mugobore*, exact figures are difficult to determine, but a common estimate is around 100,000 SALW in circulation. See, for example: S. Pézard and N. Florquin (2007). *Small arms in Burundi – Disarming the civilian population in peacetime*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey; and Gun Policy (2013). ‘Burundi – Gun facts, figures and the law’, Country datasheet. Available at <http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/burundi>

As in many other societies, reported violence tends to be mostly committed by a specific section of society, namely young men. Pézard and de Tessières reported that “men committed 97 per cent of offences recorded in 2006 and that nearly half of all perpetrators of acts of violence were 19 to 30 years old”.⁷⁸ While this points to the need for work on young men in particular with regard to violence prevention, it is important to keep in mind that there may be other forms of violence that are not reported (e.g. if they are seen as being so ‘normal’ as not to warrant a report) or that young men may be carrying out the violence on behalf of others. Importantly, the gendered societal norms and expectations that lead to frustration among young men, also creating spaces that allow them to act violently, are co-produced by other men too as well as by women.

“Although the war is over and we have returned to peace, there is still violence. These days, it does not have the sound of bombs, it is silent. But it is occurring all the time, affecting families, women, children, men...”

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER, BUJUMBURA

SGBV continues to be a major concern, although the figures are extremely unreliable not only for women but even more so for men, boys and SGM.⁷⁹ While there is an increasing realisation of the seriousness of domestic violence and SGBV, and police responses have improved, older attitudes of seeing the violence as a private issue and of blaming the victim continue to prevail as well.⁸⁰ Beyond blaming the victim, the community, family or spouse might reject the survivor, placing them in positions of extreme vulnerability to more violence and forcing them to fend for themselves and their children with limited economic opportunities available. As in the other countries covered as part of this study, attitudes towards directly conflict-related and non-conflict-related SGBV seem to be somewhat different, with the former receiving more attention (and the survivors more understanding and support) than the latter.

More ‘mundane and everyday’ incidents of sexual harassment, abuse and violence – such as the spikes that coincide with coffee harvests when households have more money to spend and alcohol consumption, sexual affairs and fights over household finances increase – have tended to receive less donor and NGO attention than conflict-related SGBV.⁸¹ Areas that continue to receive little attention in terms of SGBV response include forced or coerced sexual relationships in prisons, of domestic staff, by teachers and of economically vulnerable women and men.⁸²

Based on interviews with ex-combatants and support organisations, many former fighters struggle with the long-term impacts of their violent experiences. While neither total figures nor comparative figures with the rest of the population are available, anecdotal evidence points to ex-combatants resorting to both domestic violence and violence against the self (including substance abuse and suicide) in reaction to previous trauma as well as frustrations with the difficult process of reintegrating into civilian society.⁸³ However, former combatants are not alone in having to face similar pressures of dealing with past trauma, difficult socio-economic conditions and gendered societal expectations that they struggle to meet. Thus, ideally, comprehensive support mechanisms should be put in place, although these are currently beyond the means of the Burundian state.

⁷⁸ S. Pézard and S. de Tessières (2009). Op. cit. p.27.

⁷⁹ Reliable figures for SGBV are not available, but S. Pézard and S. de Tessières (2009). Op. cit. p.26 report 1,435 rape victims being treated by one hospital (Seruka Centre) in 2007 alone; of these, 97% were female, mostly minors. See also: N. Zicherman (2007). ‘Addressing sexual violence in post-conflict Burundi’, *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 27. pp.48–49.

⁸⁰ Interviews with CSO representatives and lawyers, Bujumbura, 17–18 May 2013. Improved response frameworks include a National Protocol on the Treatment of Sexual Violence, developed in 2005 with the support of UNICEF and UNFPA. This protocol provides a framework for coordination of the medical response to sexual violence.

⁸¹ For sexual abuse and SGBV during and after the coffee harvest, see: Care International (2007). Op. cit.

⁸² For example, this was highlighted in studies looking at sex-for-food aid dynamics in Burundi. See: Care International (2005). Op. cit.

⁸³ Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*.

Donor and government interest has not always extended to cover violence against minority groups, which may be rendered invisible by mainstream society. One under-researched area is violence in the domestic and public sphere against people with mental and physical disabilities, which is often exacerbated by gender, age and socio-economic factors. As in some of the other country case studies for this project, belief in witchcraft and sorcery can put certain groups at risk of violence, often based on their gender and other identity markers and increased by socio-economic vulnerabilities. In Burundi, this has often included older women and, similar to other parts of East Africa, the targeting of albino children.⁸⁴

4.2 Economic recovery

Economic survival is often one of the main concerns in post-conflict societies. Access to resources, networks of support and information is often highly gendered, but also dependent on age, education, class and location, especially in terms of the urban/rural divide. In Burundi, much of society continues to be dependent on subsistence agriculture, where women often play a key role in terms of both the reproductive and productive labour that is necessary. Due to conflict, death, displacement or abandonment by their spouses, the number of female-headed households has increased in Burundi, similar to other post-conflict societies, although reliable figures are not available.⁸⁵ While this has partly opened new social and economic spaces for some women, it has also “put more responsibilities on women and forced them to take up new roles for which they were not necessarily prepared”.⁸⁶ The situation is often particularly difficult for widowed women, for ex-combatant women who have children from absconded ‘bush husbands’ or for rape victims.

Access to land is crucial for economic survival in rural areas, but average plot sizes tend to be too small to sustain households and division of land between mostly male heirs tends to exacerbate pressure on this limited resource. Limited availability of land and the need to uphold traditions of male inheritance are used as excuses to attempt to sideline women, leading to fierce competition between brothers and sisters around family land and property.⁸⁷ Widows may see their deceased husband’s assets claimed by his family members and in-laws, while returnees have at times found their lands re-appropriated by others.⁸⁸ Regulating women’s rights to inheritance remains a key demand of Burundian women’s organisations.⁸⁹

“A lot of men in the government say: ‘if we gave land rights to women, there would be a political revolt.’ So why is everyone afraid of tackling women’s access to land? Men are afraid that, if women get access to land, they can no longer control their wives. The government is afraid of conflict with men and with powerful elders, and women are afraid of the backlash that they would face from their families.”

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER, BUJUMBURA

84 See, for example: Agence France-Presse (2012). ‘Six hacked to death in attack on family of Burundi “witch”’, 14 May 2012; A. Cruz-Inigo, B. Ladizinski and A. Sethi (2011). ‘Albinism in Africa: Stigma, slaughter and awareness campaigns’, *Dermatologic Clinics*, Vol. 29, No. 1. pp.79–87; and UNHCR (2011). ‘UNHCR helps young Congolese albino on the run from witchcraft’, 14 October 2013. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/525be9c89.html>

85 N. Sow (2006). *Gender and conflict transformation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa*. London: International Alert. p.9 cites an overall figure of 26%, but there were great regional discrepancies in the immediate post-conflict situation. For instance, figures from 2005 ranged from 17% in the Cankuzo province on the border with Tanzania to 55% in the central Mwaro province. Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2005). ‘Map of female headed households distribution per site’, May 2005. Available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4821c9230.html>

86 N. Sow (2006). Op. cit. p.9.

87 Ibid.

88 Interviews with human rights CSOs and FGDs with returnees, Bujumbura and Rutana, 17 and 20–21 May 2013, respectively.

89 Interviews with human rights organisations and women’s rights groups, Bujumbura, 16–17 May 2013.

Having access to land has age- and gender-related implications too in the sense that having land and building a house is traditionally considered a precondition to marriage and a rite of passage from youth male to adult male status. At the same time, married status is considered a key component of respectable female adulthood.

Burundian women's organisations, including AFRABU and Dushirehamwe, with the support of Alert, have been vocal in demanding that the particular needs of women are taken into account in the planning of post-conflict economic recovery – for instance, through the PRSP process and by insisting that UN missions engage with women's organisations. Although the government and UN agencies have agreed to listen to demands, implementation has been lagging behind expectations.

Subsistence agriculture, and to a lesser degree growing of cash crops such as coffee, dominate in rural areas, while economic opportunities in urban areas are mostly limited to the informal sector. Many of the workers in the informal sector are below 18 years of age, often have limited education and, if they have arrived from rural areas, have few social support networks. Given the precarious working conditions in the informal sector, where most urban Burundians find themselves, there have been initial attempts to unionise other professions as well in order to give protection against labour abuses, sexual harassment and abuse (e.g. of domestic workers), to increase access to skills development programmes and to make workers aware of their rights.⁹⁰

While urban women work mostly as informal traders, an increasingly popular source of employment for men is working as a motorbike or bicycle taxi-rider, with the national union of bicycle taxi-riders, Syravebu, having a membership of around 16,000 persons. The profession was initially taken up mainly by returning male IDPs and refugees as well as by former combatants, and was often, as in other parts of Africa, seen as a less-than-respectable career option. Greater regulation of the sector by the unions has increased its respectability and, according to the union, increasingly older men and those who need to supplement their income from white-collar jobs are working in what is still de facto an exclusively male profession.⁹¹

Apart from the hardships of conflict and displacement, and the ensuing social, economic and personal problems with reintegration, returnees and ex-combatants whom we interviewed tended to highlight that, because of their experiences, they were more self-reliant, outspoken and self-confident than the so-called '*autochthonous*' population.⁹² However, it is important to note that, especially for returning women and younger men, these qualities are not necessarily seen as positive traits but rather as signs of how the conflict has transformed traditional gender mores.⁹³

4.3 Access to justice

Access to different forms of justice in Burundi is often dependent on location, but also on class, age and gender. While the formal justice system has been improved, access in many rural areas is still limited. Although responses to domestic violence and SGBV have improved, obstacles to successful prosecution remain entrenched. Traditional and informal justice systems, such as the institution of *bashingantaha* (male elders who act as dispute mediators), have in the past tended to rule against the interests of females and younger males, and have been discredited partly due to their role in the years of conflict and genocide.⁹⁴ Transitional justice processes remain in decline due to party political interference.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Interviews with union organisers, 16 and 19 May 2013, Bujumbura.

⁹¹ Interview, Syravebu, 16 May 2013, Bujumbura.

⁹² Interviews with ex-combatants, 17–18 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura *mairie* and *rural*; and interviews with returning IDPs and ex-refugees, 19–21 May 2013, Rutana and Gitega.

⁹³ See also: P. Uvin (2009). *Op. cit.* for Burundi. Similar sentiments were also aired in Northern Uganda (J. El-Bushra et al (2014). *Op. cit.*) and Sierra Leone (C. Coulter (2009). *Op. cit.*) to name just two post-conflict societies.

⁹⁴ See, for example: J. El-Bushra (2007). *Culture and conflict transformation in Burundi. Phase one report: Issues arising from the research.* London: Creative Exchange; P. Daley (2007). *Op. cit.*; and P. Uvin (2009). *Op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Interviews with human rights activists, 16 and 22 May 2013, Bujumbura; and International Centre of Transitional Justice (2011). *Le processus de justice de transition au Burundi – Défis et perspectives.* New York: ICTJ.

Owing to national and international efforts, SSR processes have improved the capacity of the Burundian police and the justice sector to respond to the security needs of citizens, including on issues of SGBV and domestic violence.⁹⁶ In addition, both the FAB and, to a greater degree, the police forces have slowly become more representative of the population by increasing the intake of female officers. As is often the case in such processes, there has been some degree of institutional resistance to change and ‘gender ghettos’ have arisen, whereby women are assigned to certain tasks (e.g. administrative duties or vulnerable persons’ units – VPUs) and men to others. Overcoming these obstacles has been easier in the police force than in the armed forces, as the former has been completely rebuilt from scratch. However, following its participation in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the armed forces’ views on the importance of gender have, according to interviewees, improved as well. However, these achievements have experienced a major setback, as both Burundian and Ugandan AMISOM troops have been accused of gross sexual misconduct in Somalia, underlining the need to go beyond a policy-level acceptance of the importance of gender to peace and security to actual implementation.⁹⁷

Training on SGBV and domestic violence response has been integrated into police training and VPUs have been established. At the same time, the legal basis for prosecuting SGBV and domestic violence has been strengthened through new laws, including the criminalisation of marital rape, largely due to pressure from women’s rights organisations.⁹⁸ However, the capacities of both the police and the formal judicial sector to respond to security needs differ greatly between rural and urban areas. Especially in cases of SGBV and domestic violence, survivors may often face family and community pressure to not report cases to the formal justice sector. In order to improve access to the formal justice system, CSOs such as the Association of Catholic Jurists of Burundi (*Association des Juristes Catholiques du Burundi*, AJCB) have set up paralegal and referral services, often supporting female survivors of SGBV in particular.

The Arusha peace agreement that ended the civil war included a framework for various transitional justice and reparation policies, including the reintegration of former combatants, mechanisms for settling returnees’ land claims, and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Special Tribunal (ST) to examine the most serious conflict-related crimes.⁹⁹ While the DDR processes and repatriation of refugees and IDPs have been implemented, as outlined above, both the TRC and ST processes have stalled. Gender issues have been raised in the debates around transitional justice, but mostly focusing on conflict-related SGBV alone.¹⁰⁰

While transitional justice processes remain blocked at the national level, numerous everyday reconciliation and reintegration processes have taken place at the local level, although there have also been cases of revenge violence against returnees and ex-combatants as well as perpetrators of past violence.¹⁰¹ Local secular and faith-based organisations have initiated many of these processes, and in other areas the *bashingantahe* institution has played a key role.¹⁰² As outlined in one report: “techniques which the *bashingantahe* use for conflict resolution include mediation, conciliation and arbitration. The principles underlying the institution are: fidelity to commitments, dialogue and working together, consensus and collegiality in taking decisions, a sense of responsibility

96 See, for example: C. Simons and F. Zanker (2013). *Die polizeireform in den postkonflikt-staaten Burundi und Liberia*, Giga Focus No. 5. Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies.

97 Interviews with international experts involved with the Burundian SSR processes, 21 May 2013, Bujumbura. On abuses in Somalia, see: Human Rights Watch (2014). ‘The power these men have over us’ – Sexual exploitation and abuse by African Union forces in Somalia. New York: Human Rights Watch. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/09/08/power-these-men-have-over-us>

98 Interview with human rights lawyer, 17 May 2013, Bujumbura.

99 M. Boddaert (2012). *Gender-sensitivity of the truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition processes in Burundi*. Utrecht: Impunity Watch. p.36.

100 “Burundian Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition processes have not been addressing gender issues in a substantial way, although they are being increasingly promoted [...] While progress is noticeable on the questions of sexual violence and women’s participation, the government does not yet seem to be as willing to redress other forms of gender inequalities and gender-based violence.” Boddaert (2012). Op. cit. pp.10–11.

101 Interviews with human rights lawyers, 17–18 May 2013, Bujumbura.

102 According to Professor Ntahombaye (quoted in El-Bushra (2007). Op. cit. p.11), the codified values of the *bashingantahe*, known as *ubushingantahe*, include *ukuri* (truthfulness), *ubutungane* (justice), *ubuntu* (sense of humanity, dignity), *umutima* (bravery, generosity, courage, commitment) and *ibanga* (discretion, confidentiality, duty to maintain one’s reserve in spite of difficult circumstances).

and of the public interest, an insistence on the truth, discretion, impartiality, compromise and tolerance.”¹⁰³ Traditional *bashingantahe* worked at all levels, from the lowest level of the family committee (*abashingantahe bo mu muryango*) to the colline-level tribunal (*intahe yo ku mugina*), the sub-chief tribunal (*sentare y- i butware*), the chief’s tribunal (*sentare y- i bugamwa*) as far as the king’s tribunal (*sentare y- i bwami*).¹⁰⁴

Post-independence, the traditional, community-based selection and investiture of *bashingantahe* were partially discontinued and replaced by government-appointed arbitrators, diminishing the legitimacy of the institution.¹⁰⁵ During the genocides and conflicts, the institution was under immense pressure and, while in numerous cases the intervention of the *bashingantahe* was crucial in saving lives, in other locations it was either powerless to stop violence or actively participated in it.¹⁰⁶

While the institution of the *bashingantahe* is seen as an important pillar of society and a link to traditional Burundian culture, especially by those who seek a return to a pre-war ‘golden age’, it has also met with scepticism and criticism in Burundi. Several Burundian interviewees saw the institution as upholding patriarchal, exclusionary and gerontocratic values and/or as having been discredited by post-independence co-optation by political parties and the ambivalent role in the decades of conflict and genocide.¹⁰⁷ According to El-Bushra, perceived discrepancies between the high ideals and individual behaviour have also undermined the status of the institution: “questions have been raised about whether the *bashingantahe* can really be said to represent the highest values when the individuals concerned often do the opposite. People wonder if they are more interested in being paid (in the form of beer) for their mediation services, than in upholding rights, and whether they are more concerned to smooth over disputes arising from wrongful behaviour (such as sexual violence), rather than challenging it.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the institution is essentially a rural one and depends on mutual bonds of trust and a deep knowledge of personal histories, something that is often absent in the rapidly growing urban areas of Burundi.

The post-conflict period has seen a range of attempts to revitalise and rehabilitate the institution, with both government and international support, including from UNESCO and UNDP.¹⁰⁹ *Bashingantahe* have often been in a key position in reintegrating returning populations and ex-combatants at the local level, carrying out reconciliation work and settling land disputes.¹¹⁰ One of the key changes has been to make the traditionally all-male institution open to women through the Bashingantahe Charter that was adopted in 2002. For now, women are able to become *bapfasoni*, persons of wisdom and integrity, if their husbands are *bashingantahe*, although widows can act in this role in their own right.¹¹¹ In part, the admission of women has reflected realities on the ground as during the conflict women, in Bujumbura for example, were already acting as judges in the absence of men.¹¹² Batwa have been traditionally barred from becoming *bashingantahe*,

103 Outlined by Professor Ntahombaye in El-Bushra (2007). Op. cit. p.11. These are also echoed by A. Naniwe-Kaburahe (2008). ‘The institution of bashingantahe in Burundi’, in L. Huyse and M. Salter (eds.), *Traditional justice and reconciliation after violent conflict: Learning from African experiences*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

104 T. Dexter and P. Ntahombaye (2005). *The role of informal justice systems in fostering the rule of law in post-conflict situations – The case of Burundi*. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. p.11.

105 During the First Republic (1966–1976), the ruling party Union for National Progress (*Union Pour le Progrès National*, UPRONA) began appointing *bashingantahe* and during the Second Republic, President Bagaza (1976–1987) forbade the practice of investiture but appointed administrators to play this role: A. Naniwe-Kaburahe (2008). Op. cit. pp.159–160.

106 As Dexter and Ntahombaye put it: “wherever the *bashingantahe* functioned well, it had been possible to limit damages from the crisis, and even to prevent them.” See: T. Dexter and P. Ntahombaye (2005). Op. cit. p.15. See also: A. Naniwe-Kaburahe (2008). Op. cit. pp.160–161.

107 See also: P. Daley (2007). Op. cit. and P. Uvin (2009). Op. cit.

108 J. El-Bushra (2007). Op. cit. p.12.

109 See: T. Dexter and P. Ntahombaye (2005). Op. cit. and A. Naniwe-Kaburahe (2008). Op. cit. for more detailed discussions of these efforts.

110 T. Dexter and P. Ntahombaye (2005). Op. cit. and International Crisis Group (2003). Op. cit.

111 According to a leading *mubashingantahe* we interviewed, while women were already admitted to the institution, they were not yet vested with full ceremonial powers, including the ceremonial staff (*intahe*). However, he assured us that this was something that women would be able to achieve over the course of the next century. See also: T. Dexter and P. Ntahombaye (2005). Op. cit. p.10 and A. Naniwe-Kaburahe (2008). Op. cit. pp.167–168.

112 T. Dexter and P. Ntahombaye (2005). Op. cit. p.16.

but along with women they are also now being invested.¹¹³ Furthermore, efforts are being made by NGOs and international agencies to better interlink the various justice systems of legal aid providers, *bashingantabe* and the formal system.

4.4 Intergenerational dynamics

As highlighted by the above discussion around the role and position of the *bashingantabe*, gendered intergenerational issues play a key role in societal debates in post-conflict Burundi. Respect for one's elders has been and is a key feature of Burundian cultural norms, but the decades of genocide and conflict have also raised painful questions about the role of elders in perpetuating and reproducing cycles of violence and communal hatred. In addition to the more political forms of passing on violence and hatred through the respective Tutsi and Hutu 'mythico-histories',¹¹⁴ this also occurs in the form of socialisation into violence through witnessing domestic violence at home as well as being exposed to corporal punishment at home, in schools and by one's peers.

"No, even though we were young, we did not want to overthrow the elders, as we knew that we would need them later on [after the war] because they are the ones who hold our history. We respected them."

FEMALE EX-COMBATANT, BUJUMBURA

Demographically, Burundi is a young country. Since the legal definition of 'youth' encompasses anyone below 35 years of age, around 60% of the population falls into this category. The current national leadership is mostly drawn from the older segment of youth, many of whom spent their formative years in the insurgent groups or their political wings. As pointed out in the other studies of this series, 'youth' means different things for different social classes and genders. Urban, unemployed or informally employed men will often be considered 'youth' well into their 30s, while rural girls will be seen as adult women often after their first menstrual period. Respectable adulthood for both young women and men is linked to being married, which in turn has traditionally presupposed a certain degree of economic independence for men into which women would be expected to marry. Although the decades of violent conflict and displacement coupled with economic hardship have made living up to these ideals difficult for many, they continue to strongly influence gendered role expectations.

In Burundi, as elsewhere, much of the debate around 'youth issues' is often about young adult men, especially those of the urban underclass, and not about young rural women. 'Youth' are often cast both as the potential hope of the nation but also as an instability factor. This role is often reflected in the practice of political parties hiring young men, including ex-combatants, as electoral muscle through their youth wings in exchange for beer and money.¹¹⁵ Although urban, underclass youth are often viewed in the public mind as being rebellious, out of control, dangerous and irresponsible, those whom we interviewed reflected the opposite: they sought to find their way in life, to support themselves and their extended families, and to become respected members of society. However, the stereotypes of dangerous, criminal young men can become self-fulfilling to an extent, as potential employers shun them, leaving them with few economic options except to sell their physical capital as electoral muscle or to engage in petty criminal activities.

Young women and girls face different types of hurdles and disadvantages in balancing traditional expectations of submissiveness with the socio-economic necessities and gendered obligations of providing for their extended families. As mentioned, women with children born out of wedlock, survivors of SGBV, and those abandoned by husbands or boyfriends are often in extremely

113 A. Naniwe-Kaburahe (2008). Op. cit. p.170.

114 L. Mätkki (1995). Op. cit. uses the term to refer to narratives that contain both factual and fictional elements adapted by ethnic entrepreneurs to offer the respective ethnic group a "retrospective validation of its own interpretation of the genesis of ethnic conflict".

115 Interview with young male ex-combatant, 17 May 2013, Bujumbura.

vulnerable positions and may be blamed by their families and communities for their situation.¹¹⁶ Young women and girls may also be at an increased risk of SGBV due to misguided sexual beliefs – such as the belief that sex with young girls is less risky in terms of HIV/AIDS (or could even be a ‘cure’ for it) or that sex with young girls helps men to regain their youth.¹¹⁷ On a more positive note, however, expectations regarding age, gender roles and relations are also changing slowly towards a more equitable understanding, as evidenced through the work of AFRABU, CEDAC and AHCVF, and also backed by studies such as Uvin.¹¹⁸

116 See, for example: Acord (2007). *Op. cit.* p.20.

117 *Ibid.* pp.9, 18.

118 P. Uvin (2009). *Op. cit.*

5. CONCLUSIONS

Both the conflict and post-conflict situations have created new, gendered spaces for agency and new vulnerabilities for different men and women. While some vulnerabilities have been reduced, others have continued unabated or have been exacerbated, such as those of widows, single mothers, male survivors of sexual violence or SGM. While the de facto gendered and age-related division of labour and access to power and resources has changed, traditional gender ideologies have remained strong; for some, they have become something to aspire to in the name of re-establishing ‘normality’. As such statements are common in the fields of peacebuilding and development, and are often invoked almost ritualistically and without a connection to the actual lives of the people referred to, we have sought here to raise *some* of the issues faced by *some* Burundians as they strive to rebuild their lives after the conflict and genocide, against economic odds and under the spectre of future violence.

“Many of our leaders espouse the language of modernity but resist actually changing the gendered power dynamics of our society.”

FEMALE RIGHTS ACTIVIST, BUJUMBURA

Changing the gendered power structures and dynamics goes to the very heart of a society, and gendered identities constitute the very essence of the self. The political and sensitive nature of working on gender in peacebuilding should therefore be acknowledged, and its transformational goals can only be achieved with and not against the wills and interests of the beneficiaries. This requires time both for the analysis and the implementation, as well as a willingness to question simplistic gender stereotypes. We believe that the gender-relational approach allows for the undertaking of the necessary comprehensive analyses as well as finding approaches that accommodate the views and needs of different women of a variety of ages, social classes and so on.

In spite of some relatively limited international support, most of the practical efforts of building a more inclusive, peaceful and equitable society have fallen on the personal and community-level activities of Burundians. Through these processes, they have had to navigate issues of victimhood and culpability, overcoming longstanding cycles of ethnic violence, reintegrating returning ex-combatants, IDPs and refugees (some of whom have never lived in Burundi), while seeking to rebuild livelihoods, attend to land disputes and deal with trauma, frustrations and interpersonal violence. In facing these challenges, some see the solution in a return to an imagined patriarchal ‘golden age’ of the past, while others seek salvation in the new social models promoted by born-again Christian churches. Some seek to overcome the gendered mind-sets that they see as perpetuating inequality and different forms of violence in society, or they may see the solution in a combination of these and other gender ideologies. However, many Burundians need to compromise between their aspirational notions of appropriate gender identities and norms, regardless of what these may be, and the harsh socio-economic conditions they face.

As the examples of AFRABU, CEDAC and AHCVF show, gender-relational approaches can start to lay the foundations for a more inclusive, peaceful and equitable society at the very basic level – in the home, in the rural *collines* and in the urban *quartiers populaires*. In addition, the work of such organisations has sought to aid the economic recovery of communities, as well as increasing daily political participation at the local level, making concerns heard at the national level, reducing violent behaviour, and providing medical and psychological support.

