



EXPLORING SOCIAL NORMS IN BURUNDI

A report on the first phase of research

Contributors: Kara Hooser, Chantal Kanyange, Beatrice Nijebariko, and Teri Murphy
September 2021

ABOUT

In March 2021, researchers and practitioners from The Ohio State University and Christian Aid-Burundi began a journey to explore the challenges and opportunities for women’s meaningful participation in peacebuilding throughout Burundi. The formative phase of that research concluded in June.

This report reflects on the lessons discovered so far, with a keen attention toward distilling and naming what we have learned from work that is very much still in progress. In the spirit of *research as learning*, we aim to capture our thinking and use this report to reflect on our experiences thus far as an international, women-led, collaborative team.



CHRISTIAN AID

Christian Aid (CA) is an international relief, development, and advocacy agency that seeks to end poverty and injustice. Working in partnership with local organizations, as well as with governments and the private sector, CA consists of several country offices around the world.

In 2016, Christian Aid-Ireland (CAI) took the lead in developing the wider organization's global strategy for tackling violence and building peace. Together with in-country staff, the team in Ireland supports locally driven civil-society initiatives focused on challenging the key drivers of violence.

The aim of these efforts is to promote transparency, justice, and the inclusive building of lasting peace and security for all, especially vulnerable women, and men. Currently, CAI is accompanying projects in Malawi, DRC, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Burundi, IoPt, and a regional program in Latin America.

Christian Aid-Burundi (CAB) has been present in the country since 1995, responding to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and opening a regional office supporting Burundi, Rwanda, and DRC with emergency relief and trauma healing programs.

Since 2015, CAB has been involved in several humanitarian responses, supporting a resilience program in the south, and building the capacity of grassroots structures.

CAB became more acutely involved in tackling violence and building peace after the recent election cycle conflict erupted in 2015. They now work with a wide network of partners who have long-term experience in peacebuilding activities throughout the country.

CONFLICT TO PEACE LAB

C2P is an initiative at The Ohio State University's Mershon Center for International Security Studies that brings together people and partners to catalyze change in the communities they serve. By combining the expertise and perspectives of local partners, researchers, peace practitioners, policymakers, and funders, C2P works to encourage communities toward peaceful solutions.

Efforts include identifying underlying causes of conflict, utilizing a trauma-informed and conflict-sensitive approach to program design, and developing evidence-based evaluations of policy and intervention models. Using a participatory approach, C2P collaborates through these learning exchanges in a spirit of co-creation to produce valuable insights and support the design of innovative peacebuilding and social cohesion programs in communities affected by persistent insecurity and political violence.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, Burundi has made major advancements in the areas of women's participation, access to leadership roles, and involvement in the public space. Efforts across civil society have focused on capacitating and educating women, empowering women economically, advocating for the protection of women against gender-based violence (GBV), and also fostering positive masculinities among Burundian men.¹ Despite efforts to transform attitudes about gender equality and women's participation, and impressive advocacy for gender-sensitive national policies, women still report a gap between participation and actual empowerment. For example, while women are increasingly found in peacebuilding forums across Burundi,² whether their voices are heard or if they carry real influence in those rooms is contested.

In March of 2021, a collaborative team of researchers and practitioners from Burundi and the U.S. came together to explore this gap further. Christian Aid (CA), an international NGO with an office in Burundi (CAB), and The Mershon Center's Conflict to Peace Lab, sought to better understand how to design effective intervention programming to strengthen women's roles in bringing peace to their communities. To design effective programs, we needed to learn more about the everyday obstacles women face, the social and behavioral expectations placed on men and women, and the ways deeply-held beliefs and long-standing traditions might offer both opportunities and obstacles for nurturing more meaningful participation for women.

The focus of our project soon turned to social norms, especially gender social norms and the ways men and women think about and act upon expectations from the people and communities around them.³ We concentrated on social norms because, by definition, social norms are deeply embedded within societies and tend to be more resilient than personal attitudes or preferences. We noted programming in Burundi that has considered the role of, for instance, masculinities and femininities, has typically focused on changing individual attitudes. Further, we found social norms research in Burundi was scarce, so organizations hoping to think more critically about gender as a social structure had limited resources to help inform their thinking. We were curious—what might be holding particular behaviors in place? What larger, cultural building blocks remain as challenges, even when good programming exists for transforming individual attitudes?

As we explored these issues, a collaborative research agenda emerged. The team came together around a central research question: *What social norms in Burundi are connected to the exclusion of women or the lack of meaningful participation by women in peacebuilding spaces?* Our goals were two-fold. First, we aimed to systematically map gender social norms in Burundi, especially understanding how societal, traditional, and cultural expectations about how men and women can and should behave impact women's experiences as peacebuilders in their communities. Second, we hoped to use this mapping to imagine creative ways to transform

¹ Stefanik, L. & Hwang, T. (2017). Applying Theory to Practice: CARE's Journey Piloting Social Norms Measures for Gender Programming. *CARE: Gender Justice*.

² For example, the UN's Peacebuilding Fund has trained 500+ women mediators across Burundi (see <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/11/women-mediators-promote-peace-in-burundi>). Additionally, the traditional conflict resolution council known as the Bashingantahe has implemented new gender policies in the last 10 years that offers women membership and more active roles in the structure.

³ Cislighi, B. & Heise, L. (2016). Measuring Gender-related Social Norms, Learning Report 1. Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-related Harmful Practices of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. *STRIVE*.

gender social norms and foster more effective strategies for addressing stubborn norms that prevent broader social change.

The report that follows details the first stage of this research. We discuss the social norm theory our research is grounded in, detail our methodology, and offer some key takeaways from this initial phase. Special attention is placed on *how* we conducted the work, particularly the lessons that emerged around cross-cultural collaboration and the dynamics of conducting online fieldwork during a global pandemic. Central to our efforts has been a spirit of shared learning, a keen attention to local ownership, and an emphasis on reflexivity and the forms and functions of power that exist with and between our collaborators and the participants we have welcomed into this project. As women, we are committed to the goals of this work and look forward to continuing to grow and learn alongside one another.

BACKGROUND

Since gaining independence from Belgium in 1962, Burundi has been a country wracked by repeated cycles of violence and political instability. Within these cycles, Burundians have quietly worked to forge a path toward a more peaceful future. Since the signing of the Arusha Peace Accords in 2000, efforts across the country carried out by a variety of local, regional, and international actors have focused energy toward rebuilding the bonds that hold communities together and fostering the sort of trust necessary for Burundians to live together without fear or hate. In recent years, an agenda centered on women's empowerment and inclusion has emerged. This emergence is inspired by a belief among many Burundians that women have a special role to play in growing peace in their communities. It also reflects UNSCR 1325's global call for more effective inclusion of women in the peace sector.

Women's and girl's lives in Burundi have been shaped by gendered expectations both during times of conflict and in the moments after widespread violence has quieted. Women make up a large portion of displaced peoples (refugees and IDP's) effected by war, and violence against women persists with limited legal recourse.⁴ Norms related to gender roles are strongly patriarchal, with men afforded most of the authority in the household, especially as it pertains to making decisions and controlling household finances.⁵ Women are often expected to carry out a disproportionate burden of family work with little say or influence in the day-to-day decisions of that same household. According to a report by CARE Burundi, men have used violence to both punish women and to ensure women perform their duties as assigned by men in their lives.⁶ Domestic violence is pervasive and often described by men, and even women, as necessary.

The prevalence of GBV is also strongly linked to gender inequality across Burundi. Girls have unequal access to educational opportunities and tend to have higher illiteracy rates compared to boys. Economically, women are disadvantaged, having unequal access to sources of income and limited property and inheritance rights. By and large, women are excluded from land inheritance rights, and, despite popular support for gender equality in surveys, the majority of Burundians

⁴ Cazabat, C. (2020). Hidden in Plain Sight: Women and Girls in Internal Displacement. *International Displacement Monitoring System*.

⁵ Gahungu, P., & Kazoviyo, G. (2011). La problématique de la succession pour la fille au Burundi.

⁶ Stefaniak, L. & Hwang, T. (2017).

(especially men) have expressed an opposition to women's rights to inherit land.⁷ While women constitute 90 percent of Burundi's food and export jobs and 55.2 percent of the Burundian workforce, only 17.7 percent of the country's landowners are women.⁸

In the public space, women's participation is stunted or underdeveloped. A common saying in Kirundi illustrates this issue well: "The hen does not sing when the cock is there." For many, this proverb represents a key issue—women are quiet in the presence of men. In other words, women are silent or excluded even when they are present. Physical presence, itself, is not a guarantee of their meaningful participation. While constitutional gender quotas (30 percent) are respected in Parliament, they are rarely taken into account below the national level. Women remain mostly excluded from colline level positions, the level of government that works closest with communities. When women are included in elected positions, important committees, and other critical leadership roles, they face a number of obstacles, including having limited influence despite their position, enduring rumors about how and why they have received that position, and assumptions that they are incapable of handling the tasks related to their position. In short, inclusion does not automatically translate to empowerment or influence. The settings women find themselves now entering are static and resist adjusting to the new presence of women in the room. Broader gender social norms and structures are left untransformed, so women are (sometimes) included but they still must fight to be heard.

Though our project takes an interest in the lack of Burundian women's inclusion and meaningful participation in peacebuilding, we would be remiss if we did not honor the progress that has been made by and for women in recent years. Women's presence in government (though still underrepresented) has increased dramatically since the 2005 institution of gender quotas — jumping from 12 to 36.8 percent in the Executive Branch, and from 19 to 31 percent in the National Assembly.⁹ Women have served as Speakers of the National Assembly, as well as 2nd Vice President of the Republic.¹⁰ Further, women make up at least 30 percent of members at important national institutions, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR Burundi), the National Independent Commission on Human Rights (CNIDH), and the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI Burundi).¹¹ In recent years, women's involvement in Bashingantahe, a traditional Burundian dispute-resolution council, has increased significantly. And the UN Women-supported mediator network has trained over 500 women mediators and addressed over 5,000 conflicts under the leadership of women.¹²

Women's inclusion in decision-making processes is expected to decrease gender inequality and transform policies where women are present. In fact, research suggests that a 'critical mass' of women's representation in decision-making (30-35 percent) has a measurable impact on the content of those decisions.¹³ However, results in Burundi so far are mixed. Women's representation has been linked to crucial policies related to GBV, exploitation and trafficking, and adultery. At the same time, women are still excluded from inheritance rights, GBV remains

⁷ Ndikumana, A. (2015). Gender Equality in Burundi: Why Does Support not Extend to Women's Right to Inherit Land. *Afrobarometer*.

⁸ Thelwell, K. (2019). The Importance of Women's Rights in Burundi. *The Borgen Project*.

⁹ Nzoyisenga, F. (2020). 15 Years of Gender Quotas in Burundi: What's the Impact? *Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace, and Security*.

¹⁰ Nzoyisenga, F. (2020).

¹¹ Nzoyisenga, F. (2020).

¹² UN Women. (2016). Women Mediators Promote Peace in Burundi. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/1/women-mediators-promote-peace-in-burundi>

¹³ Kanter, R. M. (1977a) 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life', *American Journal of Sociology*, 82 (5), 965–90; Kanter, R. M. (1977b) *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books; Dahlerup, D. (1988) 'From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11 (4), 275–97; Dahlerup, D. and Freidenvall, L. (2005) 'Quotas as a "Fast Track" to Equal Political Representation for Women: Why Scandinavia is No Longer the Model', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7 (1), 26–48.

underreported and under-prosecuted, and, perhaps as an illustration of the obstacles women still face, a 2017 presidential decree prevents women from even touching sacred Burundian traditional drums.¹⁴

Our team recognizes and celebrates the hard-fought accomplishments women across Burundi have achieved. At the same time, our aim is to uncover what might still be holding women back from deeper engagement and influence, and especially unpack how embedded social norms remain a challenge for women as they navigate this changing social landscape. Burundian women continue to prove themselves smart, capable, strong, and deserving; however, the paths to leadership roles for women are fraught with twists and turns. Our project hopes to find some creative ways to make those paths less cumbersome so women can enjoy not just a seat at the table, but an influential voice in the room.



¹⁴ Mbonyingogo, A., & Constantin, N. (2020). Beating Drums or Beating Women? An Analysis of the Drum Universe in Burundi. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing and World Literatures*, 1(1), 15-30. Retrieved from <https://royalliteglobal.com/world-literatures/article/view/50>

SOCIAL NORMS THEORY

Our project is informed and shaped by social norms theory. Inspired by the groundbreaking work done by the Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-based Violence¹⁵ and CARE,¹⁶ we designed our project to explore gender social norms related to women's inclusion in peacebuilding efforts. We are particularly interested in social norms as an opportunity to understand why sometimes, even when policies are evolving and individual attitudes might be shifting, change is curtailed. We were led by an assumption that something deeper in society, something that shapes and informs daily interactions and choices, needs to change in order to truly transform the social landscape surrounding women in Burundi. We hope that mapping gender social norms related to women's inclusion will offer an integral stepping stone toward seeing that transformation achieved.

Social norms are rules for behavior that are considered acceptable in a given group.¹⁷ They help define what is 'normal' or 'appropriate' behavior for a particular community or subset of a community and can come from a number of social spaces in life, including cultural norms, religious norms, and traditional norms. Social norms are not always negative—they can often help provide order in society. Sometimes, however, they are harmful and encourage behaviors in a community which hurt some or all of a group's members. They are driven by people's desire to receive approval and feeling of belonging in a group or community.¹⁸ Norm-breakers may face social backlash, which usually involves losing or gaining power and status in a community.

People learn these 'rules' mainly from watching what happens around them—social norms are less about direct instruction (like laws) and more about what we see happening in the social world and interactions around us. To learn a social norm, people tend to observe and then develop two beliefs:

1. What other people do in a given situation, and
2. How other people react when someone does X behavior in a given situation

This means social norms are about (a) expected behaviors in a community or group and (b) the consequences, positive and negative, of complying or not complying with those behaviors. Of course, even though they are considered 'rules,' norms can and do change based on the environment, situation, and culture in which they are found. Further, social norms may also change or be modified over time. When interventions are designed to change or shift norms, research suggests that creating a new norm is easier than directly transforming an existing norm.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cislighi, B. & Heise, L. (2016).

¹⁶ Stefanik, L. & Hwang, T. (2017).

¹⁷ Legros S, Cislighi B. Mapping the Social-Norms Literature: An Overview of Reviews. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2020;15(1):62-80. doi:[10.1177/1745691619866455](https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619866455)

¹⁸ Cislighi, B. & Heise, L. (2016).

¹⁹ Cislighi, B. & Heise, L. (2016).

SOCIAL NORMS ARE EXPLORED THROUGH THESE ELEMENTS:

1. What I believe others do
2. What I believe others think I should do
3. What I believe will happen if I comply with others' expectations and what I believe will happen if I do not comply

Often, social norms are split into two groups. First are the social norms captured by the question “What I believe others do.” These are called descriptive norms. They describe the world ‘as is’ or how I think the world actually looks. Second are the social norms captured by the question “What I believe others think I should do.” These are called injunctive norms. They describe how the world ‘should be’ or how I think my group thinks about *ideal* behavior.

Reference groups are an important part of social norms research. A reference group is the group or community from which a given social norm comes. Different reference groups with different social norms can exist within the same community. For instance, reference groups within a community might include your family, your friends, your religious institution, and your political party. Social norms between those groups or organizations might actually differ, or at times contradict or compete with one another.

Social norms are distinct from other important social factors that influence our behavior. For instance, social norms are not individual attitudes or beliefs, although a group might carry a social norm that also influences personal attitudes. A key piece of identifying a behavior as a social norm is to ask whether individuals believe the behavior is expected of them by others, and whether individuals believe there will be consequences within their community if they do not comply. Even if a behavior is common, it might not rise to the level of being considered a social norm.

For our purposes, it is critical to also understand that social norms interventions are distinct from traditional behavior-change interventions. Traditional interventions focus on changing individual personal attitudes and behaviors, typically through awareness-raising efforts. Social norms interventions, on the other hand, recognize that social norms can often block pathways for change at the individual level. A person can dislike or even disagree with a social norm, and therefore accept the lessons of an awareness-raising intervention, but still follow that social norm to avoid social backlash and maintain belonging in a group. As a result, social norms interventions target some of the more intractable stubborn behaviors and aim to transform them within a large portion of a referent group.

Gender social norms in particular deal with notions of man-ness (masculinities) and woman-ness (femininities) and the ways gender can be deeply hierarchical, with a tendency to privilege men/masculinities over women/femininities.²⁰ Gender social norms are the rules and expectations that maintain this gender hierarchy, or the rules men and women believe they are expected to follow to fulfill their roles as man and woman.

²⁰ Cislaghi, B. & Heise, L. (2020). Gender Norms and Social Norms: Differences, Similarities, and Why They Matter in Prevention Science. *Sociology of Health and Wellness*, 42(2), 407-422.

QUESTIONS WE CONSIDERED FOR EXPLORING A SOCIAL NORM:

1. What social norms are at play for a specific behavior?
2. Who are the most influential reference groups for that norm?
3. What consequences are anticipated for deviating from the norm?
4. Is the norm consistently applied or does it differ across contexts? Across reference groups?
5. Are there pockets of contestation?
6. Are consequences strong or weak?

According to Cislighi & Heise,²¹ there are four important features of gender social norms:

1. They are socialized from childhood and reinforced (and sometimes contested) by family, school, work, religion, the media, and other social institutions.²²

2. They tend to perpetuate inequalities, especially disadvantaging women.²³

3. They are embedded in and reproduced through institutions, meaning they are also structural. These include national policies and decision-making institutions that reinforce and codify gender norms.

4. Social interaction plays a central role in producing and reproducing gender social norms as people engage in behaviors that either represent or defy commonly accepted notions of maleness and femaleness.²⁴

²¹ Cislighi, B. & Heise, L. (2020).

²² Tenenbaum, H.R. and Leaper, C. (2002) Are parents' gender schemas related to their children's gender-related cognitions? A meta-analysis, *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 615–30.

²³ Connell, R. (2014) *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

²⁴ West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H. (1987) Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 1, 125–51.

METHODS

Our core research team consists of two NGO-based Burundian women practitioner-researchers and two university-based American women practitioner-researchers. Our approach to this project and our methodology is informed by our commitment to ethical, participatory research practices and a desire to maintain attention to power dynamics, both within our own team, between our team and the communities we work alongside, and within those communities themselves. The decisions we made to shape our research design were, therefore, heavily influenced by our desire to honor local women’s knowledges and experiences and de-center the Western understandings and biases of our American team members whenever possible. We learned many lessons as we adapted and worked to stay reflexive, as detailed in the section “Reflections on Methods.” Here, we describe the tools we used for the first stage of our research, including why and how we used these approaches within the spirit of our participatory and locally-sensitive ethos.

The first phase of our project was formative — focused on learning and gathering baseline information. We began by eliciting feedback from key Burundian women to better understand their experiences and impressions of other women’s experiences in the context of leadership and peacebuilding. We started an iterative process of core research meetings with our four team members alongside the implementation of a Gender Advisory Platform (GAP). The GAP was made up of our research team plus four influential Burundian women, including (1) a prominent academic, (2) a leading member of the Bashingantahe conflict dispute resolution institution, (3) a key member of a respected faith-based CSO, and (4) a gender specialist coordinating a national program related to climate change. The women were chosen because of their experience addressing gender-based issues – they offered a wealth of knowledge and expertise to our group, and they came from diverse leadership roles that could provide us with a broader picture of women’s experiences.

Over the course of six weeks in May and June 2021, the GAP met via ZOOM a total of four times for two hours at a time. The core research team met an additional five times to discuss, analyze, and adapt our research design based on feedback from the GAP. The GAP meetings had two central goals: (1) to test our research design with four women familiar with conducting research in Burundi and get their informed feedback on our approaches, and (2) to foster a space for the participating women to hear one another’s stories and share their experiences as women who, against many obstacles, have achieved important leadership roles in their communities.

The GAP was an innovative approach to research design that we reflect on more in the next section. Our intention was to grow our research questions and methodology organically from the lived realities of women in the communities we work with. We began by co-exploring and co-analyzing gender social norms related to the exclusion of women in a small working group, with the aim to use the learnings from this group to develop continuing research. The women who made up the GAP were invited to share personal experiences, reflect on potential pathways for answering our central research question, and ultimately, take on roles as researchers themselves as the project continues to broaden in scope. A major priority was to develop a shared ownership over the project, so that, moving forward, women in the GAP would be the main faces and researchers associated with the project in their communities. This decision was especially reflective of our desire to keep the project as Burundi-owned, Burundi-informed, and Burundi-sensitive as possible.

Given our central focus on social norms and peacebuilding, our first task was to devise a methods toolkit that could best capture the knowledge we were looking for in an environment where ‘research’ can be perceived as suspicious, colonial, and even risky. We noted that, first, research on social norms in Burundi was highly limited, and second, most of the reports were testing whether a behavior was a social norm or something else (like a personally-held attitude). Our team was interested in building on these approaches and moving toward unpacking the many layers of gender social norms—How stubborn are they? Have any of them ever shifted? Who reinforces these norms? What opportunities exist to spur norm change?

From the outset, we knew focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) would be crucial to our participatory, grounded approach. We felt a relational methodology centered on deep listening was (and is) the most appropriate approach for learning how Burundians make sense of the world. It would also allow us to engage in research rooted in interaction and dialogue, rather than interrogation and extraction. From the beginning, we aimed to weave a particular ethical sensibility across our work, one that recognized what a privilege it is to hear the stories of everyday Burundians and to honor the wisdom of women (and later men) over the course of our project. A major concern that arose early in the project was how to carry out a relational research design in a place filled with legacies of (gendered) violence and unspoken fears. In other words, how do we best explore sensitive issues around gender in a way that honors our participants and respects their boundaries? We turned to vignettes as our main tool.

EXPLORING VIGNETTES

Vignettes are a common approach to exploring social norms in research literature. A vignette is a realistic, hypothetical story that uses concrete examples of people and their behaviors. Participants offer comments or opinions based on these scenarios.

Vignettes may be used for three main purposes in social research:

1. To explore social behaviors in context;
2. To clarify people’s judgements;
3. And to provide a less personal and therefore less threatening way of exploring sensitive topics

COMMON QUESTION STYLES IN VIGNETTES INCLUDE:

- What do you think this character will do?
- What will women in the community expect the character to do?
- What might be the consequences if the character does not do the expected behavior?
- When women do not do that expected behavior, are the consequences always negative?
- Are there situations where the character’s unexpected choice would be acceptable?

It is an especially useful approach when discussing sensitive topics where individuals might be uncomfortable or feel unsafe sharing personal opinions. This is because vignettes take the onus off the respondent to provide their own personal opinions and allow them to imagine scenarios with fictitious characters that still strongly resemble potential events in the world around them. In the context of Burundi, our team found vignettes to be a reliable way for ordinary people to highlight the expertise of their own lived realities in a less intrusive way, and at the same time, provide opportunity for our participants to choose when, if ever, to introduce their own experiences as part of their responses.

Each of our core research members designed one or two vignettes, which were shared and tested within our team to determine (1) whether it was realistic, (2) whether it was coherent, (3) whether it captured an expected social norm, and (4) whether it could show us opportunities for catalyzing norm change. After team feedback was incorporated, the vignettes were then taken to the GAP to again test their feasibility and applicability. Additionally, GAP women were invited to *act as focus group members* and answer questions in the vignettes as pilot subjects. Our iterative process emphasized adaptability, strategic testing, and re-assessments to ensure maximum effectiveness in our vignettes. This process also helped maintain a spirit of collaboration and mutual learning, since our team was consistently incorporating cycles of feedback into our research tools. The GAP's discussions resulted in seven vignettes to be tested in FGDs in Bujumbura in September (see Appendix A).

At the heart of our methodology in this initial phase of research was what we have called an Ethics of Humility. By Ethics of Humility, we understand that everyone is an expert on their own lived realities. We also recognize the critical value of local knowledges, especially the power of local knowledges in the practice of building peace, and we bring a sincere commitment to learn from and with the communities we work inside. We position ourselves not as experts, but as learners eager to help uncover pathways for transformation.

THE 5 KEY STEPS TO WRITING A VIGNETTE:

Step 1: Introduce a hypothetical scenario

Step 2: Ask questions exploring the participant's expectations related to behavior in hypothetical scenario ("What I think others do?" and "What I think others expect the character to do?")

Step 3: Twist in the scenario—a character does not comply with the norm

Step 4: Ask questions on (1) consequences the participant expects the character to face ("What would others think about her non-compliance?") and (2) the character's reaction to the consequences ("Would the opinions and reactions of others change her mind?")

Step 5: Explore when breaking the norm would be acceptable

REFLECTION ON METHODS

Our collaborative, power-aware, and digital approach to this project –in the midst of a global pandemic – was an eventful, if not at times frustrating, learning opportunity. We have divided our lessons learned into two broad categories: reflections on our approach to collaboration across cross-cultural and geographic divides and reflections on vignettes as a tool for social norms research.

On collaboration

Online fieldwork is never simple. Combine online fieldwork with spotty internet connections, language barriers, and cross-cultural differences, and a project can quickly get complicated. Ours was and is no exception. When we began the work of collaborating from separate continents, a key goal of ours was to respect our Burundian partners invited to the GAP and try to maintain an eye toward staying flexible. The work of truly listening and connecting from places that sometimes feel worlds apart is difficult, especially when weak internet networks keep us from even seeing each other's faces, laughs, smiles, frowns, and body language. Our core researchers and the women invited to the GAP did not all share a common language — a point we felt was crucial to ensure inclusion and not limit the GAP to only English-speakers. We quickly learned to de-center English (and our English-speaking team members) during GAP meetings, opening up opportunity for our Burundian team members to facilitate discussions and take on crucial leadership roles in the development of the project. It was and continues to be a learning process, but our team is proud of our ability to adapt quickly, recognize our strengths and weaknesses, and remain nimble.

Power and paying attention to power was a consistent concern in our approach to collaboration. We grappled with issues surrounding language and which language to use, time commitments and personal boundaries, how to truly co-design and co-explore alongside one another, and how to balance roles on the team in a reflexive way. These are all important and necessary issues to think about in any collaborative endeavor; they become even more crucial in a team divided by time, space, language, and culture. We didn't always get it right, but we remained committed to one another in the journey and acted with humility. As a team, we continue to bring our whole selves to this work, with all the complicated and beautifully messy ways that we are humans in this world. Mutual respect lies at the heart of our efforts.

Juggling the two main goals of the GAP proved tricky. Originally, we were hoping to both use the GAP as a platform to test and co-design our larger research project and create opportunities for sharing and connecting as women on issues and experiences important to our lives. It seems the online approach demanded by the COVID-19 pandemic undermined the second goal. While we had insightful and wise discussions about the research design and the construction of the vignettes, fostering a community of dialogue was more difficult. Attendance wasn't always consistent, nor were the network connections of both our Burundian and American researchers. Because meetings often needed to be translated in real time, conversations were mostly hub-and-spoke style, with GAP participants answering questions to the facilitator one at a time, followed by pauses to catch the English-speaking researchers up with where the conversation had traveled. Admittedly, the urgency of the project's timeline seemed to have taken precedent, and eventually the focus shifted in our GAP meetings to accomplishing the first goal. This has led to what we feel is a strong and powerful research protocol for the second phase of the project,

and a distinct centering of our Burundian team members' skills and leadership capacities, but it would be worthwhile to revisit our second goal for the GAP and consider what we could have done differently.

What does it mean to be in relation with individuals, teams, and communities across geographical separation? How do collaborators build trust and rapport between themselves and the communities they work alongside without being together physically? How does (or doesn't) virtual research allow for the fostering of a trauma-sensitive, relational methodology? These are questions we grappled with throughout the first phase of our research. Certainly, online collaboration and online fieldwork limits the ways we were and continue to interact and be in community with one another. We worked hard to create opportunities for our team to build relationships and be our whole selves (and not just our researcher selves). We approached our relational methodology with a sincere commitment to honoring and celebrating the stories of the women invited to the GAP, but it is fair to say this process was complicated by the virtual nature of our work thus far and relationship-building was at least somewhat stunted by our inability to truly sit and be with one another. In response, the majority of the second phase of our project is set to occur *in person* and places our Burundian team members at the center of the work. Ultimately, we remain committed to our relational methodology, but recognize that, even in the most convenient of times, cultivating trust and building relationships in the context of research takes consistent effort and sustained reflexivity.

On vignettes

Vignettes were a new and exciting research tool for our team, and we learned several lessons as we developed and tested our vignettes with the GAP. First, we quickly learned that vignettes, though strategically written to fit a research design, must allow opportunity for respondents to think differently and develop their own opinions. Some of our initial efforts were perceived as too leading or having had "a clear agenda." In that way, the vignettes had to balance being realistic, useful to the research question, and yet not so obvious that the respondent feels compelled to answer in particular ways. As a team, we noted how we all brought to the table our own feminisms and desires for action leading out of this research. This is not to say that we needed to approach vignette design as objective, distanced researchers. We felt quite the opposite—that our subjectivities were crucial to an effective, informed, and grounded project design. We focused on editing vignettes so that our participants did not immediately read an agenda onto the vignette themselves and provide responses they felt were expected or desirable. Open-endedness and simplicity became key to this approach.

We also grappled with the complexity of storytelling as a method, especially the idea that telling stories through vignettes offers quite a rich landscape from which to learn, but also complicates analysis. The more details a story includes, the more variables introduced into our analysis. If we tell the respondent the main character is a woman, 35, educated, a mother, and living in Bujumbura, we have quickly made analysis more difficult. Are the respondent's reacting to her gender or her age? Or maybe her occupation? Intersectional analysis is crucial to this type of approach, and the facilitator plays a major role in exploring these questions with participants.

Our team leaned toward maintaining simplicity, especially because our vignettes were designed to be read out loud in communities with lower literacy rates. To achieve more complexity, we introduced questions that invited respondents to consider whether a new variable might change their responses. For instance, we asked in one vignette about a husband's reaction to his wife's participation in a community dialogue program. After gathering initial reactions where respondents had the freedom to make their own assumptions about the characters and

circumstances of the scenario, we then asked them to consider whether the content of the dialogue program matters—what if the dialogue program was about family issues? Land and property issues? In that way, the vignette remained simple, and we were able to control the introduction of key variables while still allowing participants to interpret scenarios based on their own lived experiences. This last point was especially important for the vignette as a method, and the facilitator’s role was crucial here. The purpose of a vignette is to allow respondents to interpret what is both said and what is left unsaid and fill in the gaps. For robust analysis, the facilitator must be able to tease those assumptions out and guide the group through exploring when and how they filled in the story with their own interpretations and expectations.

We also learned that the gaze from which a vignette is written matters. By gaze, we mean two things. First, who is the author of the vignette? How does their positionality impact the way they’ve constructed the vignette, the scenario they’ve chosen to portray, and the questions designed around that scenario? How do choices in language and perspective change when the vignette is written by an American team member versus a Burundian team member? And second, from who’s perspective is the vignette written? What role does the protagonist’s gender play (i.e. the female gaze versus the male gaze) in how the vignette is received and interpreted by respondents?

We reflected as a team on how our own positions in the world, and the many layered identities we carry, influence possibilities for imagined scenarios. We both celebrated our positionalities as opportunities to build vignettes with integrity rooted in our own lived experiences, but also held room to be cautious and aware of how our specific situatedness shaped and informed our imaginations. In many ways, the process of writing vignettes together allowed us to reflect on our own lives in important new ways. At the same time, we quickly came to understand how our imaginations are sometimes limited by our experiences as well, and by working as a group, we were able to crack open those limitations.

Overall, the vignettes have proven so far to be a rich and powerful tool for exploring gender social norms. In the context of Burundi, where ordinary citizens are suspicious of research and are reluctant to share controversial opinions or insights, the vignettes offer an important tool for exploring sensitive subjects in a way that honors our participants. We also find that vignettes are an excellent opportunity to open up those difficult conversations in a more natural way. Our GAP members began our vignette conversations discussing the merits of the method and whether the scenarios we presented were believable and effective, but as time went on, they began to openly reflect on their own experiences and relate those experiences to the stories we were telling in our research. Whether and when to share personal experiences is entirely left up to participants. In that way, the vignette as a research method feels gentler and respects the boundaries of our participants in crucial ways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Our team emphasizes research as a *learning process*, rather than one of *knowledge production*. Though we feel our learning has only just begun, some key takeaways have emerged from our work, and especially from the GAP thus far. These include:

1. There is no single way to ‘be a woman’ in Burundi. A multitude of factors shape our lives and how we think about ourselves as women. This reality carries over into how we might analyze gender social norms with an understanding that what it means to act like a woman or act like a man is fluid, if not sometimes contested. Social norms, then, are dynamic rather than static. They ebb and flow depending upon place and company. For instance, what we might consider a social norm at the park might be wholly unacceptable at a religious service. Simply put, the ‘rules’ of social norms are sometimes highly contextual, and we need to stay cautious of tendencies to essentialize women’s experiences. Women in the GAP indicated on several occasions that the experience of ‘being a woman’ in Burundi has never fit just one box, that women’s experiences are defined by multiple layers and intersections of their identities and circumstances, and this will be crucial to understanding opportunities for and challenges to norm change as the project moves forward. In particular, as we begin to think about the potential pathways for intervention design, those programs will need to critically examine intersectionality and the inherent complexity of gender and gendered experiences.
2. Exclusion must be understood broadly. Our research question asks about women’s inclusion in *peacebuilding*, but what we discovered is that multiple facets of women’s lives that might seem unrelated to their potential as peacebuilders shapes the way they act and interact with the world around them. Our vignettes captured women’s experiences in a broad swath of situations, including everything from female mediators to women’s experience with domestic violence and forced marriage. Gender role expectations, internalized oppression, in-group sanctioning, and the potential for gender violence can all play a role in inhibiting women’s participation. When we talk about inclusion in peacebuilding, what that means to the very women who inform our work is highly varied—for some, peace brings up issues of harmony in the home and in the family, and for others, peace is a policy issue for the highest levels of government. We aimed in our vignettes to explore some obvious connections to more Western understandings of peacebuilding (like participation in civil-society-based peace programs), as well as capture some of the nuanced and often overlooked ways that women’s everyday experiences and encounters with gender social norms might impact their inclusion in decision-making processes at all levels of society.
3. Constraints on women’s participation come from all levels of society and are linked closely to economic empowerment. Participants offered four major points of challenge for women’s inclusion:
 - a. Culture: Our GAP participants suggested that deeply-held traditions and culturally-embedded practices related to gender and gender roles were persistent and stubborn, particularly in, but not limited to, rural areas. And there is (justified) fear of change. As one woman said—“I have travelled to sensitize women around the country, and the women say to me, you are trying to create conflict with our brothers. They do not want to engage in a fight...this is not an easy task.”
 - b. Inferiority to men and the actual feeling of *being* inferior: Long-standing enforcement of gender hierarchies and the sustained subordination of women can and does lead women to accept their own inferiority. Simply put, if someone is told long enough that they are inferior, then they will come to believe it is true. According to our participants, work needs to be done to build

women's self-confidence in a place where, as one participant noted, "she is not master of her own life."

c. The burden and preoccupation of household duties: This tension emerged as a key theme across our discussions. Women carry the majority of responsibility for all household duties. While there seemed to be some agreement that husbands can be open to women's participation as peacebuilders in their communities, the consensus was that this is only acceptable if those activities do not interfere with her household burden. For instance, in one vignette, the GAP participants suggested that a 5:00 p.m. start time for a peacebuilding activity would cause serious concerns for a Burundian husband since his wife is meant to be home at that time preparing dinner and tending to the children. For many women, the immediate concerns of everyday life take precedence over all else, and, in fact, participation in peace programming might be seen by both men and women as a frivolous distraction.

d. Economic limitations: The GAP indicated on multiple occasions that women's exclusion from decision-making opportunities is closely tied to economic inequality. Women have limited access to assets and are mostly excluded from inheritance rights or the ability to make decisions about household finances. This is true even when women earn an income for that household. One participant noted, "The wife is not free to decide upon her life. She cannot do anything without her man and depends on her man." According to our GAP, this sense of dependence and exclusion from key financial decisions both binds women in situations where they have few other options and harms their self-esteem. It also decreases learning opportunities and experiences in leadership or decision-making outside the home.

4. Power matters *between women* as much as it matters between women and men. Our GAP participants expressed an understanding that, as educated women, they do not always face the same obstacles as other Burundian women. Some were keen to point out that their challenges and day to day experiences were not as difficult as women without access to resources, support networks, and education. Moving forward, we are especially aware that stark differences are likely to appear between rural and urban women, their experiences, their needs, and their visions for the future.

5. While women are increasingly present in prominent institutions across Burundi, their inclusion is often different than men's in important ways. One GAP participant described how the Bashingantahe institution inducts men with the offering of a spear (symbolizing the power to lead) but women with the offering of a basket (symbolizing the expectation on women to keep household secrets). In some ways, this has represented to women that their role in the institution is meant to be different from a man's role, and often when we are referring to gender hierarchies, "different" tends to suggest subordinate. Inclusion in recent years has mainly meant *presence* and is enforced in major institutions through gender quotas.²⁵ Discussions with the GAP suggested that there are key differences between inclusion and meaningful participation. While inclusion has become increasingly accepted, women's meaningful participation still faces major obstacles. One participant explained, "A woman is always behind the man. She cannot speak in front of her husband. And if she does, he may even confront her at home. This is even if she has proven she has the same capacities." In that way, women can and are increasingly present in decision-making contexts, but their voices are quieted by these persistent gender social norms that dictate how a woman can exist in those spaces.

6. Everyday resistance and the need to prove oneself were major themes in the GAP. Women described gender-based obstacles as expected ("This is normal") and indicated that women must

²⁵ Notably, legal gender quotas are only enforceable in the Government and Parliament. Some organizations and structures have independently established their own gender quotas.

continually prove they are capable and deserving of the leadership roles they occupy. Awareness of a whole array of factors must be maintained, including how you dress and speak and how you demonstrate your abilities. Women are given little to no room to make mistakes when they venture outside their traditional gender roles and take up leadership positions in their communities. The strength and patience it takes to succeed given these factors should not be understated. One GAP participant noted, “In the case you do not fill expectations, it destroys yourself. Women are not allowed mistakes. They worry ‘what if I don’t succeed’ because there is no middle. And if she does succeed, this can instigate jealousy even among women. They will ask how did she do that and who does she know.” The inference is that she did not earn her own success.

7. Similarly, a question emerged around what it means to prove oneself and how women practice everyday resistance in the face of such high expectations. GAP discussions emphasized “being prepared,” “to know what to say and when to say it,” “to be accurate in your speech,” “to understand your community well,” “to be more than a regular woman,” “to rally the support of colleagues,” and “to be agile.” As one woman suggested, it is not easy to be and do all these things at once. As our research continues, further attention might also be paid to the gendered essence of these expectations—is proving oneself and earning a place directly linked to ‘being like a man’ or are women able to forge their own paths?

8. Gender norms research often places the onus of change on men and negative masculinities. However, the GAP revealed that women frequently challenge one another as well. Women are just as likely as men to hold strong opinions about and commitments to traditional social norms. And sometimes women are hardest on other women who violate those expectations. Discussions often showed that women can sometimes normalize domestic violence, for example, and even encourage other women to show their strength and commitment to the family by enduring violence. In that way, women are also gatekeepers for gender social norms, and consideration must be given to how this impacts potential pathways for change.

9. In a related way, programs looking to effect social norm transformation must listen closely to women on the ground—what are their hopes, their visions for the future? And also, what are their fears? Not all women have the same ambitions, and violence is a realistic consequence for challenging the status quo. This type of work must be cautious and intentional in its efforts to truly hear women and what they want for their lives and the communities around them. We cannot assume one woman’s feminist agenda fits well with another woman’s life experiences. Future programming must be designed in a participatory way that answers the needs of the women it serves, rather than enforcing expectations or calling for change that isn’t necessarily desired in the community in the first place. The key is to listen closely to communities and respond with interventions that reflect the lived experiences of people on the ground, which might sound simple but is actually an indictment of Western tendencies to champion women’s rights initiatives dangerously removed from the lives of ordinary women.

10. GAP discussions also revealed a particular way of talking about men’s transformation and how to involve men in the process of transforming women’s inclusion. Men are a major part of the puzzle when related to women’s meaningful participation in any social context. They can act as spoilers or as allies, and the expectations placed on men *to be men* are just as important for determining the staying power of social norms. Our GAP participants emphasized a need to sensitize men on issues related to women’s exclusion, with a particular focus on convincing men that it benefits not just women but also themselves to see women progress across Burundi. In some ways, this seemed to suggest a need to make women’s progress palatable to men by framing it as in the best interests of men. As one woman put it, “We need to raise awareness that it is an advantage to their family and show them that some traditional norms are harming not just

women but harming themselves. There are men who prohibit their wives to take part in even development programming because they might pick up bad behaviors. This harms the whole family.” In that way, women’s inclusion should be communicated not as a ‘special interest’ but as a whole-of-society and whole-of-family issue that can improve lives across the board.

11. And finally, faith leaders act as an important referent group that needs more exploring. There is some concern that faith leaders can be spoilers to social norm change and are more likely to remain strongly attached to traditional gender expectations. At the same time, the GAP recognized faith leaders as an *opportunity* for catalyzing social norm change, especially because faith leaders carry immense influence in the lives of ordinary Burundians. In response to this learning, several of our vignettes incorporated questions about the role and expectations of faith leaders in various scenarios. We hope to better understand how and in what ways faith leaders influence norm stickiness and where there might be opportunities for faith leaders to encourage new norms.

NEXT STEPS

Our journey to better understand gender social norms and their relationship to women’s meaningful participation in peacebuilding in Burundi continues into a second phase beginning in September 2021. This phase builds on the methodological lessons learned from our GAP and aims to explore the function and form of gender social norms across communities in Burundi. Using the vignettes built in the first phase, we plan to conduct 15 focus groups across three provinces (Bujumbura, Rumonge, and Makamba), reaching approximately 150 individuals. Keeping with our commitment to locally-informed and locally-owned research, our focus groups are (a) run exclusively by Burundian men and women, (b) build on the lessons we have learned so far about sensitive and ethical research practices in vulnerable communities, and (c) intentional to include men and women from diverse religious, ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Carefully capturing a range of grounded voices is our top priority.

Additionally, our team will conduct key informant interviews (KII’s) with 10 individuals in these same provinces, especially focusing on cultural and community gatekeepers. Through these interviews, we aim to understand in more depth how critical actors in the community understand women’s participation, as well as potential pathways for increasing meaningful participation. In particular, our KII’s will offer an important opportunity to explore spoilers and gain insight into specific points of interest for future program designs (i.e. faith leaders, colline representatives, civil society, etc.).

Ultimately, our main goals in the second phase of research are to maintain our commitment to research as a learning process, especially centering the expertise of lived, Burundian experiences; to capture the stories and understandings of Burundians from a variety of walks of life; and to crack open possibilities for gender social norm transformation. On this last point, we hope that by mapping gender social norms across Burundi, we can work alongside these three communities to begin building up new, transformative norms that make room for women to participate more meaningfully.

APPENDIX A: VIGNETTES

We devised and tested the following vignettes with our gender advisory platform.

VIGNETTE 1:

Leoncie has been asked to co-facilitate a Dialogue Peace Platform in Bujumbura alongside a gentleman named Christophe. Both were chosen because they are well-respected by their communities and are known to be people with integrity and honor.

On the first day of their hosted Peace Platform, Leoncie notices that Christophe is doing most of the talking. He is always the first to speak, he sometimes talks over or interrupts Leoncie, and most of the platform participants address their comments to him.

Q1: What do you think Leoncie will do? How would most women in Leoncie's place respond to this situation?

Q2: What do you think Christophe expects Leoncie to do? What about the platform participants? What would the women in the peace platform expect Leoncie to do? What about the men?

Leoncie decides at the next platform that she will say something to Christophe if his behaviors are the same. During the platform, he interrupts Leoncie while she is in the middle of speaking with a small, mixed-gender group of platform participants. She says, "Excuse me, I was still speaking. Please let me finish."

Q3: What do you think Christophe will do or say in response? What about the platform participants—what will they think? What might the women in the peace platform say? The men?

Q4: How might Leoncie's decision impact the platform? Do you think she should have done anything differently?

Q5: Do you expect the reactions of Christophe and/or the peace platform participants to influence Leoncie's behavior moving forward?

VIGNETTE 2:

Charles is a 45-year-old, married, father of three. His wife Lydia recently came to him with news that she has been invited to take part in some community dialogues about issues related to family conflicts in their colline. The meetings will occur at 5:00 p.m. once monthly. Charles prays about the invitation and tells Lydia he has decided she will not participate.

Q1: Why do you think Charles has told Lydia no? Do you think most men in Charles' position would also say no?

Q2: What do you think Lydia will do? What would most women in Lydia's position do?

Q3: What advice might Charles and Lydia's faith leader give about their situation? What advice would other men in the community give about their situation?

Despite what Charles said, Lydia decides to accept the invitation. She tells her husband it is an honor she should not refuse and she hopes he will support her decision.

Q4: How will Charles react? What might he say or do?

Q5: What might Lydia's and Charles' faith leader say about her decision? What would other men in the community think? What about Charles' family?

Q6: Are there any circumstances where it would be acceptable for Lydia to go against her husband's wishes?

VIGNETTE 3:

Maria is a member of the Bashingantahe institution in Mugamba and has been approached around a conflict case. Maria would like to call upon other Bashingantahe members (men and women) to settle on the case under her leadership.

Q1: In your opinion, what would be the reaction of those Bashingantahe to being called to hear a case under a woman's leadership? And why?

Q2: Would the reactions be different if the case was about a family conflict? What about a property conflict?

Q3: What would you advise Maria to do?

Q4: In your opinion, what would be the reaction of the other members of the community to this news that a woman Bashingantahe member would be leading a case? And why?

VIGNETTE 4:

Keza comes from a traditional family. She was in love with a boy and got pregnant. He refused to marry her. Keza's family is concerned she will be ridiculed for being a single mother, so they decide to quickly arrange a marriage with her cousin Toyi.

However, Toyi already has a girlfriend and does not want to marry Keza. He decides to take his case before a community conflict management structure.

Q1: What do you think the community conflict management structure will decide? What expectations would Keza's family have for the community conflict management structure?

The community conflict management structure decides Toyi will marry Keza, despite his desire not to marry her. After their wedding, there is domestic violence within their relationship.

Q2: Would most other men in Toyi's situation react the same way? Why do you think Toyi has been violent?

Q3: What might Keza's family think about the situation?

Toyi's violence against Keza continues, and she decides she needs to seek help from a community conflict management structure.

Q3: Would most other women in Keza's situation react the same way?

Q4: What will Keza's family say about her decision? What about her neighbors? What do you think other women will think about her?

Q4: What do you think the community conflict management structure will decide?