

Study on Gender and Conflict in the Casamance, Senegal: Summary of Findings

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Background

Senegal's Casamance region is the site of Africa's longest-running conflict, one that has caused serious political disruptions and posed severe development challenges, in addition to taking an immense humanitarian toll. As many as five thousand people have been killed, and 65,000 are estimated to have been displaced. Amid recurrent efforts to negotiate a lasting peace agreement, the situation in the Casamance remains fragile. Knowledge of the gender dimensions of the conflict is limited. The region is home to various ethnicities, religions, cultures, and traditions; and related gender dynamics vary significantly.

Objectives

- To examine the conflict in the Casamance region from a gender perspective;
- To develop a framework for understanding the associated issues, challenges, and opportunities; and
- To make recommendations on how to address identified gender-specific development issues.

Methodology

Research questions were developed to identify and differentiate between (i) gender-based roles within the conflict and (ii) the effect of the conflict on gender relations. Research was conducted in June 2012 across seven villages that had experienced relatively high levels of insecurity; that contained many displaced populations, refugees, or returnees; and that represented the various cultures and geographic localities within the region. Qualitative data were collected through focus groups, semi-structured narrative interviews, expert interviews, and participatory observation.

Key findings

The conflict has had an impact on gender dynamics. Gender roles have shifted, with many women having acquired greater responsibilities within the household and for income generation. The real and perceived socioeconomic position of men appears to have been challenged by this shift.

Vulnerable groups. Key groups identified as particularly vulnerable are refugees, displaced populations, and people living in border areas. Within these populations, the following groups experience particularly high levels of vulnerability: single mothers, children and "social youth" (those who have not yet reached adulthood as defined by traditional markers, particularly men), women with disabilities, and the widows of combatants.

Gender-based violence (GBV). Awareness of GBV is limited within the community, with a low level of reporting and a general lack of data. Equally, treatment and response services—particularly medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance—are scarce. Emerging findings indicate that GBV is perceived as unrelated to the conflict, a finding that requires further examination. Impunity is the norm for perpetrators. Although there is no clear trend in terms of their identity or motivation, anecdotal evidence points to a range of perpetrators: domestic partners, gang members, and armed men.

Young men at risk of engaging in conflict. Young men are particularly affected by the lack of economic opportunities and their related inability to meet the traditional expectations associated with manhood, leaving them particularly susceptible to recruitment for illegal activities by criminal armed gangs.

Women and peace-building. Women are not engaged in the conflict as combatants but do provide support through other means such as food, shelter, and moral and spiritual support. Women are nonetheless perceived to be neutral within the conflict and therefore have the potential to play a role as peace-builders and mediators.

Recommendations

All recommendations must be applied with consideration for the heterogeneity of the Casamance region and thus must be carefully tailored to reflect local contexts.

Research. With respect to GBV, a prevalence study should be conducted in selected areas, accompanied by an assessment of the availability and quality of services for GBV survivors. A knowledge, attitude, and practice study on sexual violence should also be carried out. With respect to at-risk young men, research should be done on criminal armed gangs to guide related programming designed to prevent recruitment and reduce violence.

Livelihood strengthening. Men and women alike would benefit from the creation of associations and cooperatives through which micro-credit and vocational training could be provided, along with training in leadership, entrepreneurship, and ad-

ministration. Efforts should be targeted to reach identified subgroups of vulnerable women, refugees, and people living in border areas (through cross-border activities). Holistic programming targeting young men at risk of engaging in criminal acts should combine livelihood strengthening with behavioral change activities.

GBV. Comprehensive services (including specialized medical, psychosocial, and legal services) should be provided to respond to the needs of GBV survivors. Where such services exist in nascent or rudimentary form, they should be expanded. Community sensitization and awareness-raising targeting men, women, boys, and girls should be provided.

Women in peace-building. Women's neutrality in the conflict should be harnessed to promote their role as peace-builders. A training program for existing women's organizations should be established, along with networks to build capacity in advocacy, public relations, and project planning. External expertise should be made available for the design and monitoring of the program and networks.

For further information, including access to the full analytical report and research material please contact the World Bank's LOGiCA Program at: ereessmith@worldbank.org and pbance@worldbank.org