



**Helping Civil Society Leaders End Violent Extremism**

How can considerations of gender roles help prevent violent extremism? How can security providers such as police officers and soldiers help develop solutions? The *Thought for Action Kit*, created for USIP's Women Preventing Extremist Violence project, equips community leaders with answers from leading experts and with tools for trainings and dialogues.

**STATE OF THE FIELD**

Violent conflict upends and polarizes societies, disrupting social structures and gender roles. Projects and policies intended to assist communities that are fragile or affected by violence are more successful if they consider conflict's different effects on men, women, boys, and girls. Approaches to conflict resolution that account for gender issues and include a broader array of society reduce gender-based violence, enhance gender equality, defuse conflict, and lead to more sustainable peace.

**USIP'S WORK**

The U.S. Institute of Peace's research and on-the-ground programs strengthen the ability of people and organizations in conflict zones to create sustainable solutions for peace and equality. Through more than 50 projects worldwide, the Institute works with governments, international organizations, practitioners, and academics to expand the understanding of gender dynamics in conflict. USIP has played a significant role in helping the peacebuilding community expand the concept of gender to be inclusive of women, men, and other gender identities. The Institute's research brings field experience into policymaking in the U.S. and around the world. Recent work includes:

**Strengthening Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention.** USIP supports women in countries affected by conflict—for example, as mediators in Colombia, advocates for gender equality in Pakistan, and religious leaders across the Middle East advancing the rights of women and girls.

Through the Women Preventing Extremist Violence project, USIP supports women community leaders in Nigeria and Kenya looking to prevent radicalization. The project features a training program and facilitated dialogues that convene representatives from civil society and the security sector to understand the causes of violent extremism and devise solutions.

USIP is also the Secretariat of the U.S. Civil Society Working Group, which harnesses the experience of 36 NGOs with expertise on the impact of violent conflict on women and girls. This knowledge feeds into implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. The plan stems from United Nations Security Resolution 1325, a formal legal agreement that requires parties to a conflict to protect women and girls and ensure women's participation in peace negotiations and post-war reconstruction.

**Engaging Men in Peace and Security.** Men are usually seen as the primary perpetrators of violence in times of war. However, research shows that men are not inherently violent—and that they are also victims of violence. USIP has helped shift this narrative. The Institute works with local partners in conflict zones to develop more peaceful concepts of masculinity and to advance gender equality.

As one of the efforts of this Men, Peace, and Security initiative, the Institute works with the U.S. Agency for International Development on a pilot project in Afghanistan that supports men developing a new understanding of their identity as their countries transition out of war, as well as advocating for women's rights. In Ukraine, the Institute works with local NGOs to strengthen the ability of women and men to participate equally in reconciliation and peace processes.

**Pioneering Work in Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.** Since 2013, USIP has advanced research on the prevalence of sexual violence during conflict. By supporting on-the-ground initiatives that reduce this form of violence, USIP contributes to security and long-term stability.

One initiative is the Missing Peace Young Scholars Network, which comprises researchers from a range of academic backgrounds who analyze and help prevent sexual violence in war. Representing political science, public health, law, medicine, and other disciplines, the scholars research incidences of sexual violence in some of the world's most turbulent places. Annually, USIP brings these scholars together to glean insights and identify gaps in knowledge and policies.

USIP experts apply this knowledge in training peacekeeping missions to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse in countries across Africa. Such trainings help troops better understand such abuses, including the complex patterns of power and limited notions of masculinity that contribute to a cycle of violence.

## Defining Gender

Gender describes the roles and expectations that a society finds most appropriate and valuable for men, women, boys, and girls. During violent conflict, these gender norms can alter radically. Conditions—including access to resources, mobility, and personal safety—can particularly worsen for many women, girls, and sexual- and gender minorities. Because war often changes the norms of a society, it also provides an opportunity to improve the social status of women through education and legislation.