

**State building in post conflict Rwanda**  
**Citizen participation in local conflict mitigation**

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## Abstract

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The aim of this PhD dissertation is to understand state building at the local-level by focusing on citizen participation in local conflict mitigation. The involvement of ordinary people in conflict mitigation is motivated by the fact that in most cases citizens are the victims of conflicts and that therefore, they should participate in attempts to provide solutions to the conflicts within their communities. When studying local state building this thesis addresses the questions how does state led conflict mitigation in post conflict Rwanda work? How is it experienced by the citizens in terms of participation, accountability and local state legitimacy?

In terms of methodology, this is an explorative and an empirical study, which acknowledges that different stories can be told from a similar set of data. The study gathers data with an open mind, aiming at getting information and experiences for interpretation. Theoretically, the study engages with literature on state-building, decentralisation and local conflict mitigation. All in all, 308 interviews were carried out and 67 mediation sessions were attended. The study analyses the citizens and other local-level actors in relation to the mediation committees in Rwanda (MCs).

The study's findings have indicated that the citizens' contribution to local state-building was still modest due to low motivation among the citizens involved in the conflict mitigation process. This is as a result of insufficient resources and infrastructure in the conflict mitigation process, despite the fact that the state has granted legal authority, and there is a legal framework in which these committees operate. Another important finding is that heterogeneity of conflicts is an important factor in the understanding of local-level conflicts, and especially in relation to local-level state building.

The contribution of this thesis is to focus on the local perspective on state building, which has mainly been studied as a top-down affair. This thesis makes an empirical contribution through exploring the dynamics of local-level state building, where citizens are directly involved in mitigating conflicts at local-level as a way of building the state. The thesis makes its contribution to the literature on local-level state building highlighting the views and experiences of the victims of post conflict situations in countries like Rwanda.

**Keywords:** post-conflict Rwanda, state building, decentralisation, citizen participation, accountability, local state legitimacy, conflict mitigation, local mediation committees