

# 'HAND IN HAND': A STUDY OF INSECURITY AND GENDER IN MALI

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## I. Introduction

### Context and summary

Mali has grappled with an evolving security crisis and parallel peace efforts since 2012. Long-standing political and economic grievances in the North spurred rebel and jihadist factions to overthrow state control, and violence has spread throughout the North and Central zones of the country, with attacks also occurring in the city of Bamako.<sup>1</sup> Successive governments in Mali have been unable to implement sustainable development and maintain national unity.

Processes of conflict and peacebuilding present unique opportunities to shift societal status quos and question power structures. A demonstrated motivation from women at the local and national levels to respond to a burgeoning crisis runs in parallel with significant international pressure to involve women in peacebuilding.

The following study presents research from the project 'Building a Sustainable Peace in Mali: Civil Society Contributions to Security Policies', which was carried out by SIPRI and the National Coalition of Civil Society for Peace and the Fight against the Proliferation of Light Weapons (CONAS-CIPAL) from 2016 to 2019.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines when and how gender plays a significant role in Mali's conflict through an assessment of various populations' perspectives on security developments and local priorities.

### *Legal context for women's rights in Mali*

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 underscores the importance of integrating gender perspectives into peacebuilding and serves as the first of 10 resolutions making up the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.<sup>3</sup> While the WPS agenda has a global reach, it is essential to

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, Mali is divided into 3 regions according to boundaries from Nov. 2017: the North zone (the regions of Taoudéni, Kidal, Gao, Ménaka and Timbuktu), the Central zone (the regions of Mopti and Ségou) and the South zone (the regions of Sikasso, Kayes, Koulikoro, and the district of Bamako).

<sup>2</sup> This project was supported by the Swedish Embassy in Mali and followed on from an earlier 3-year project (2013–15), which was also funded by the Swedish Embassy. For more information on SIPRI's research on Mali see the SIPRI website.

<sup>3</sup> The 10 resolutions in the WPS agenda are UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 Oct. 2000, Resolution 1820 of 19 June 2008, Resolution 1888 of 30 Sep. 2009, Resolution 1889 of 30 Sep. 2010,

## SUMMARY

● Mali has experienced protracted insecurity since 2012. Despite a heightened security presence and a peace agreement signed in 2015, root causes underpinning insecurity hinder effective and inclusive conflict resolution. Recognizing gender inclusivity as critical to lasting peace, the Malian Government adopted a National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2013 to operationalize the global Women, Peace and Security agenda and augment participation of women in national decision making. Provisions, however, remain sparsely implemented and progress towards gender equality faces significant resistance from traditional power holders.

This SIPRI paper investigates gender dimensions of conflict in Mali by comparing the roles of women and men as observers, victims, actors and agents of change. The study finds region and community type more indicative of observations and experiences of conflict than gender. However, gender remains a determining factor for roles of engagement in conflict and peacebuilding processes. While they suffer elevated levels of conflict-related gender-based violence, women also play key roles as informants for insurgent groups and exert significant influence over security decisions in the private sphere. In governance and law, the current peace process could also afford some opportunity to shift societal status quos.



integrate perspectives at national and local levels to best support gender rights and peacebuilding in Mali.

At the national level, social, traditional and religious norms continue to hinder the participation of women in conflict management in Mali.<sup>4</sup> Mali has ratified the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the 2008 Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights, but has yet to enact key legislation at the national level. In fact, the Malian Government was found in violation of the Maputo Protocol by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in May 2018 for allowing child marriage for girls, not always requiring consent for marriage, and discriminating against women in inheritance statutes in the Malian Family Code.<sup>5</sup> An attempt to revise key provisions of the code in favour of greater equality in 2009 was blocked by wide-scale protests, led by religious leaders who dissuaded the president from signing off on the amendments (see annex 1).

The Malian Government adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) on Resolution 1325 in 2013, which was updated for the 2015–17 period.<sup>6</sup> The plan provides a rubric for increasing the participation of women in national decision-making processes and ensuring their rights and needs are taken into account through five priority areas: conflict prevention and prevention of conflict-related sexual violence; protection and rehabilitation of survivors; participation and representation; promotion of gender and female autonomy; and monitoring and evaluation. The NAP aims at operationalizing the global WPS agenda within Mali's national policy. Yet WPS resolutions have been sparsely and inconsistently carried out because of a lack of political pressure and resources, and a lack of coordination and implementation avenues at the local level.<sup>7</sup>

However, the peace process has sparked recent and consequential advancements for gender equality. These include a December 2015 decree calling for a 30 per cent quota for female appointments to national institutions and on electoral lists, a 2017 law reserving 10 per cent of arable governmental land for women to farm, and the creation in July 2018 of a women's consultative forum to monitor the implementation of the peace accords emanating from the peace talks in Algiers. But respect for the 30 per cent quota has been

Resolution 1960 of 16 Dec. 2010, Resolution 2106 of 24 June 2013, Resolution 2122 of 18 Oct. 2013, Resolution 2242 of 13 Oct. 2015, Resolution 2467 of 23 Apr. 2019 and Resolution 2493 of 29 Oct. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD), *Etude sur la participation des femmes dans la gestion des conflits et la consolidation de la paix au Mali* [Study on the participation of women in conflict management and peacebuilding in Mali] (ACORD: Bamako, 2016), pp. 17–18.

<sup>5</sup> Lorentzen, J., Toure, N. and Gaye, B., *Women's Participation in Peace and Reconciliation Processes in Mali: Perspectives from Segou, Mopti and Tombouctou* (Peace Research Institute Oslo, PRIO: Oslo, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Malian Government, 'Plan d'Action National pour la mise en œuvre de la Résolution 1325 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies sur les femmes, la paix et la sécurité 2015–2017' [National Action Plan for the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2015–2017], 2015.

<sup>7</sup> A UN Women assessment of the Malian NAP conducted in 2018 found only 50% of the planned activities had been carried out. Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye (note 5), p. 10; and Olsson, L. and Gizelis, T. I., 'An introduction to resolution 1325: measuring progress and impact', eds L. Olsson and T. I. Gizelis, *Gender, Peace and Security Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2015), p. 12.



inconsistent, notably among peacebuilding bodies and mechanisms linked to the accords.

### *Key findings*

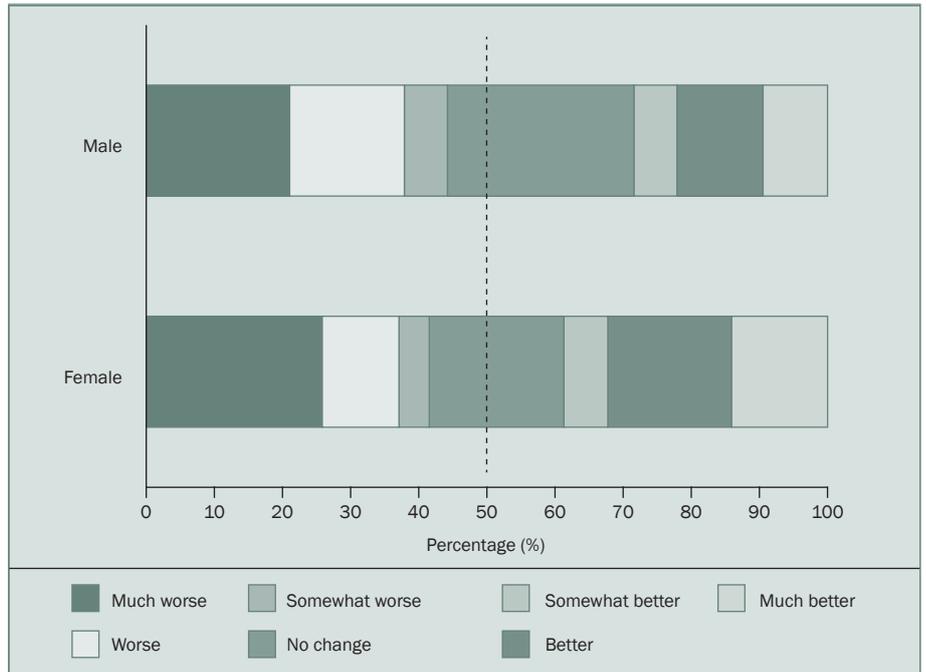
The results of the present study show that while not always visible within formal structures, women in Mali form important opinions about the conflict and retain a paramount influence over husbands and sons. The analysis finds internal formulations of conflict more dependent on regional and community variation (localized reality) than on identity factors such as gender and age. Women's opinions reflect, and could credibly represent, their broader communities in asserting local priorities and in assessing current and future responses to crisis. This supports an intersectional approach to analysing and resolving different facets of the conflict.

Yet gender appears a key influencing factor with regard to active engagement in the conflict and conflict mitigation processes, linked with societal power structures. Women function primarily as informants or in other supporting roles within armed and jihadist groups, rather than as active combatants. Underlining the importance of local dialogue in the peacebuilding process, the women interviewed stressed a strong desire to become more involved in decision making but said that they encounter significant obstacles and resistance. Nevertheless, analysis indicates a window of opportunity to further women's participation in local dialogue, especially as they are shown to be among the most influential voices in decisions to join, leave or remain in violent groups. While the weakness of state structures limits the progression of gender equality by consolidating a reliance on traditional mechanisms, informal peace initiatives could also afford women a pivotal role in turning the tide of conflict.

### **Study design**

The findings of this paper are based on data generated over three cycles of research, conducted in October 2016, March 2017 and November 2017, with a focus on the third cycle. The research took a bottom-up approach using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodology supported by a network of 36 Monitoring Groups for Peace and Security (MGPS) and 15 facilitators from 10 regions in Mali. Each MGPS comprised a women's representative who conducted the study in her locality, a youth representative and a local community leader. Together, they provide gendered insights on security dynamics from different communities across Mali.

The latest questionnaire was administered in November 2017 in each of the 36 localities, to an average of 7 women and 3 men by a female representative of each locality. In total, 387 people were interviewed: 281 women, 102 men and 4 people who did not select a gender. The female representative then conducted a homogenous focus group among the women in the locality. Questionnaire respondents came from all 10 of Mali's regions: 172 participants from the North zone (the regions of Taoudéni, Kidal, Gao, Ménaka and Timbuktu), 113 participants from the Central zone (the regions of Mopti and Ségou) and 101 participants from the South zone (the regions of Sikasso,



**Figure 1.** Perceptions of changes in security in Mali, by gender, November 2017  
*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘What is your perception of the current security situation compared with Mar. 2017?’ The dotted line denotes 50% reporting or the median response.

Kayes and Koulikoro, and the district of Bamako) were interviewed.<sup>8</sup> The average age was 42 years.

Three qualitative studies were also carried out by Malian researchers.<sup>9</sup> The themes, formulated and voted on by the MGPS women’s network, focused on the role of women in the conflict and local peace processes, gender-based violence, economic impacts, and opportunities for women during times of insecurity. The initial results of the quantitative and qualitative studies were presented in Bamako to all the project actors, as well as local gender experts, for validation. The following analysis explores the roles of women and men as observers, victims, actors and agents of change in Mali’s conflict, and highlights avenues for involving women in peacebuilding.

## II. Results and analysis

### Observers of insecurity

Perceptions about the conflict show that women and men form similar opinions as observers of conflict dynamics. This means that differentiations are primarily determined by external factors rather than identity-based ones.

<sup>8</sup> One person in the original sample group did not provide a response.

<sup>9</sup> Barka, J. and Siré Kone, M., ‘Implication dans la lutte contre les violences basées sur le genre en période de conflit’ [Involvement of women in the fight against gender-based violence in periods of conflict], Project Report, May 2018; Fomba, D. and Niambele, M., ‘Droits socio-economiques et capacités de resilience des femmes face au conflit’ [Socio-economic rights and resilient capacities of women in conflict], Project Report, May 2018; and Traoré, H. and Dolo, R., ‘Rôles et capacités d’influence des femmes en temps de conflit’ [Roles and influential capacities of women in times of conflict], Project Report, May 2018.



Given that the characteristics of conflict vary across geographical areas, it is significant that female and male participants in each area shared similar opinions on the conflict dynamics, and also on responses and community avenues to address insecurity.

#### *Observations of conflict dynamics*

Responses from women and men indicate that the security situation—understood as a nexus of ‘hard security’ and ‘human security’—is worsening (see figure 1), yet the primary factors of fragility vary by region and urban or rural environment. The majority, particularly among urban communities in the North and Central zones, reported further security deterioration. Generally speaking, women had a slightly higher tendency than men to report that the security situation was either ‘much worse’ or ‘better’, whereas a more significant percentage of men than women reported ‘no change’ (see figure 1).

Fifty-two per cent of respondents from Northern Mali and 50 per cent from Central Mali reported that the security situation had deteriorated since the previous survey in March 2017. The most common grade assigned to this deterioration was the most severe.<sup>10</sup> In the South, which experiences a lower presence of non-state armed groups and better access to state services, only 20 per cent noticed greater insecurity since March 2017, and 51 per cent reported that the security situation had improved. Urban populations noted greater degradation of the security situation in the past eight months than rural populations, whose mean score indicated no change.

#### *Perceptions of security actors*

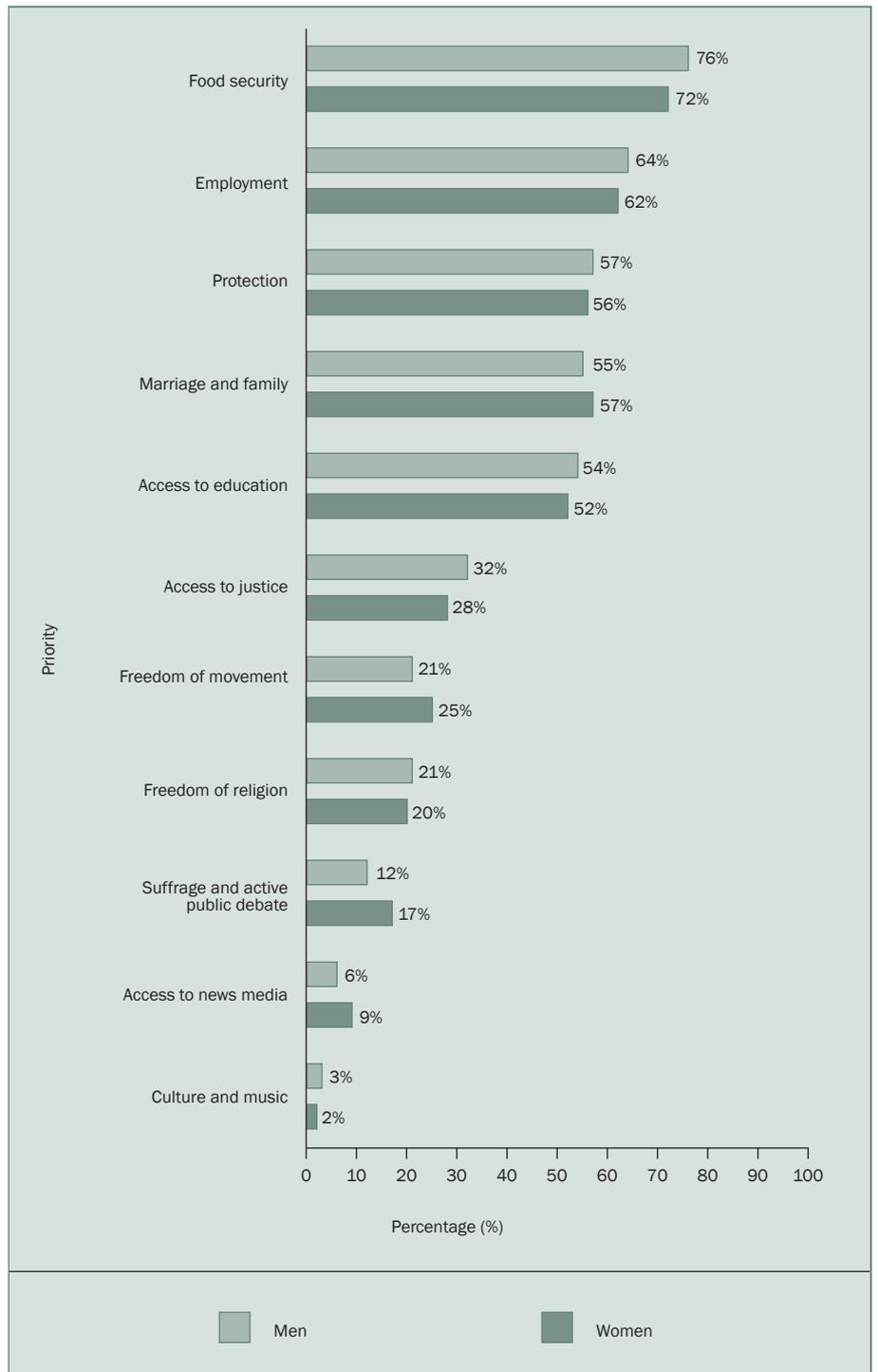
Participants’ opinions about the effects of various actors (international, Malian and civil society) also showed few significant differences between women and men, and greater regional variation instead. Women and men evaluated how each of nine listed actors affected their sense of security within a 0.2 margin of each other on a five-point scale—except for ‘family members’, which made women feel a bit more secure (3.9/5) than men (3.5/5).<sup>11</sup>

An attenuating confidence that exogenous security forces can provide security was coupled with a cautiously positive view of the Malian Army (more positive in Timbuktu, Sikasso and Gao) and national security forces among both men and women.<sup>12</sup> Irrespective of their gender or age, respondents perceived a security vacuum with little guarantee of protection. Most reported feeling less secure, not more, in the presence of the UN Multidimensional

<sup>10</sup> Of the overall sample, 25% (the most common response) selected 1 on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 as the maximum degradation and 7 as the maximum improvement of the security situation. In the Mar. 2017 survey, 51% of Northern Malians and 55% living in the Central zone reported further deterioration from the first survey in Oct. 2016, when 93% in the North zone, 48% in the Central zone and 60% in the South zone already remarked that ‘the level of violence has increased since a year ago’.

<sup>11</sup> The actors included the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Operation Barkhane, non-state armed groups, civil security forces, the Malian Army, jihadist groups, family members, civil society organizations, and others.

<sup>12</sup> Malian security forces (police, gendarmes and national guard) and the army each received a mean score of 3.6 out of 5, where 1 corresponds to feeling much less secure, 5 to much more secure and 3 to neutral.



**Figure 2.** Community priorities in Mali, by gender, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘What are your top community priorities?’ Respondents could select up to 4 options.



Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).<sup>13</sup> The results were neutral for the French Operation Barkhane. Perceptions of MINUSMA and Barkhane were slightly more favourable in the North and among non-youth.

Rural communities demonstrated more favourable attitudes towards the exogenous security forces, the Malian armed forces and non-state armed groups. However, few respondents rated these forces as substantially improving their sense of security.<sup>14</sup>

### *Opinions of community priorities*

When discussing security priorities, the civil society network conceptualized security as extending beyond protection from physical violence to include many developmental factors.<sup>15</sup> Food security, employment, protection, marriage and family, and access to education ranked among the highest priorities nationally, regardless of gender (see figure 2).

The participants of focus group discussions conducted in each locality by female representatives expressed concerns about access to healthcare: ‘Even if you have a patient that you would like to accompany to the health centre, you cannot pass as long as the bad people do not give you access’, stated one woman from Mopti. ‘Sometimes the sick die this way, and they refuse to give them permission to pass’, she added.<sup>16</sup>

Differences in needs and priorities were more pronounced by region than by gender (see figure 3). Male and female participants from Northern Mali underlined protection as critical, whereas Central and Southern Malians put more of an emphasis on employment and food security. Food security and access to education appeared as high priorities across the populations, especially in rural communities, whereas urban populations were more likely to cite access to justice and liberty of movement than their rural counterparts.

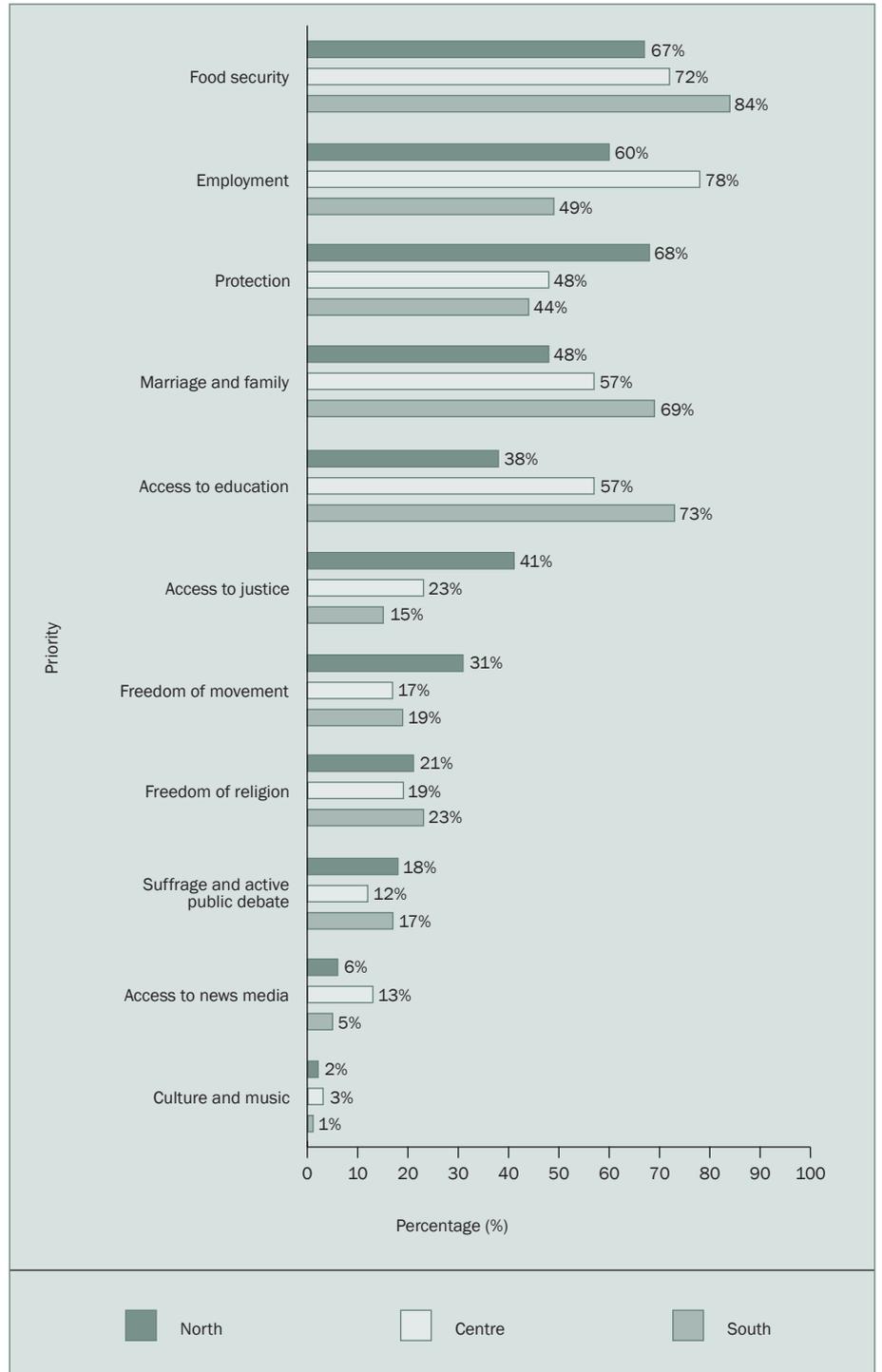
In answering what role civil society can play in improving the security situation, respondents (both men and women) most commonly selected the option to ‘establish dialogue mechanisms between populations and the security forces’ (see figure 4). Platforms for democratic discussions give

<sup>13</sup> Civil society actors in the Central zone alleged that MINUSMA appeared to have failed to intervene in several attacks in Mopti and populations had started to lose confidence in the mission. A female MINUSMA official interviewed in Sep. 2018 explained how the force’s operational readiness to protect, including search and rescue capabilities, had worsened over time with an increase in violent incidents in Mopti. The regional office was faced with a lack of adequate equipment and communications, and a demining team had to check routes for improvised explosive devices. The focus on protecting peacekeepers in a hazardous environment has a strong impact on the capacity to protect civilians. The perceptions of MINUSMA in this study represent a departure from the favourable view most respondents held of MINUSMA during the Oct. 2016 survey, which civil society leaders attributed to developmental benefits; see Tobie, A., ‘A fresh perspective on security concerns among Malian civil society’, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2017/2, July 2017.

<sup>14</sup> The pro-government Imghad Self-Defence Group and Allies (Groupe d’autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés, GATIA), formed in 2014 and operating in northern and eastern Gao, has proved instrumental in blocking Northern militant groups under the Coordination of Azawad Movements from establishing a separatist state. However, GATIA also had ambitions in negotiating to restructure its own power positioning within clan hierarchies through peace talks. Tobie, A. and Chauzal, G., ‘State services in an insecure environment: Perceptions among civil society in Mali’, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/7, Dec. 2018.

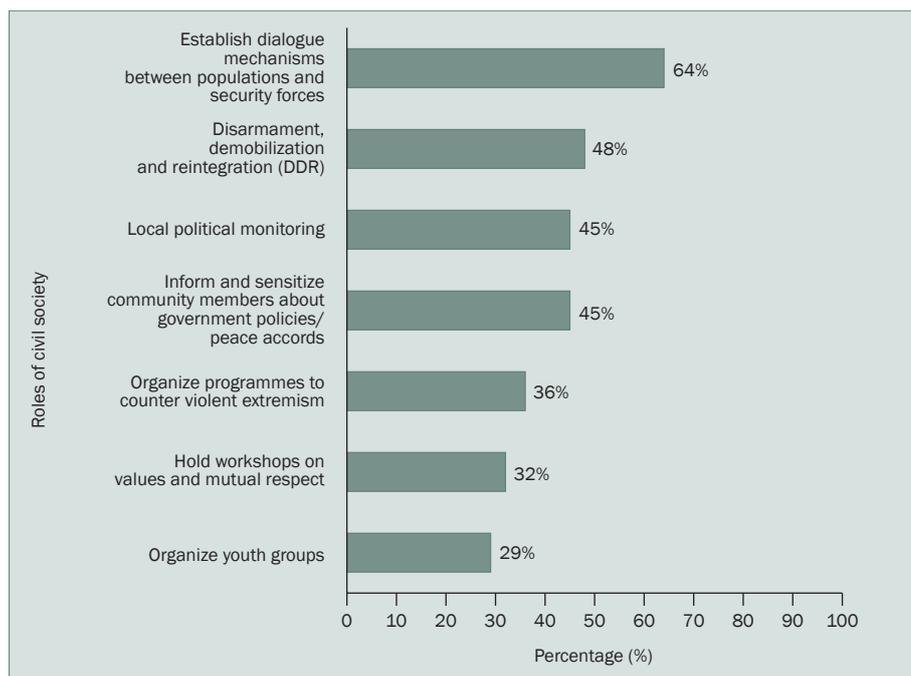
<sup>15</sup> Tobie (note 13).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Même si tu as un malade que tu veux accompagner au centre de santé tant que les mauvais gens-là ne te donnent pas l’autorisation, tu ne peux pas passer, et des fois les malades meurent comme ça par ce qu’ils refusent de donner l’autorisation de passer’. Female focus group participant, Mopti, Apr. 2018.



**Figure 3.** Community priorities in Mali, by region, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘What are your top community priorities?’ Respondents could select up to 4 options.



**Figure 4.** Perceptions on the role of civil society in improving security in Mali, November 2017

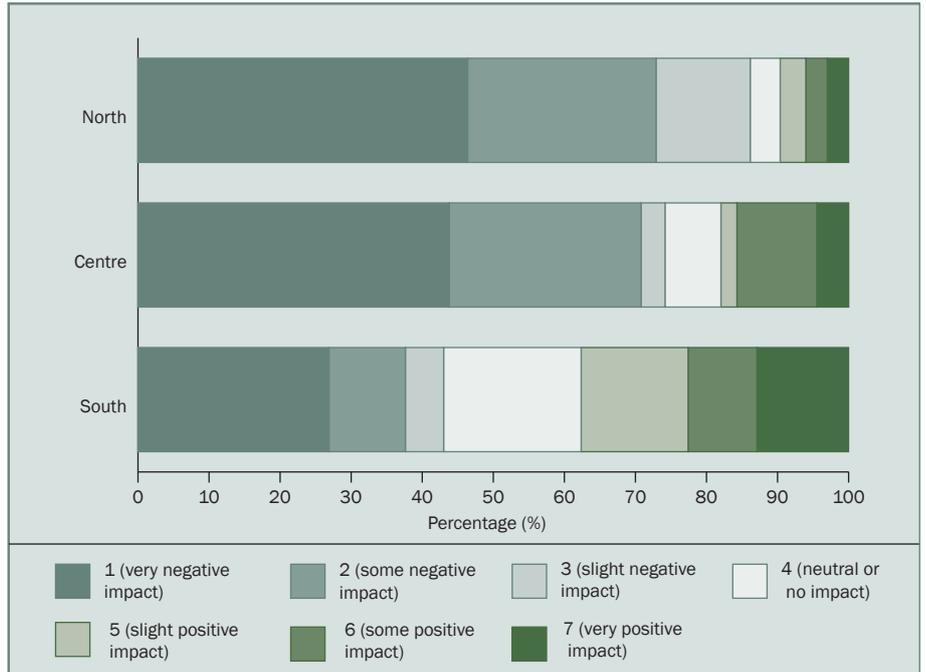
*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘What role should civil society play in improving the security situation?’ Respondents could select up to 3 options.

citizens the opportunity to raise concerns and critique political leaders, and men and women agree on the importance of dialogue mechanisms. Gender differences among survey respondents calling for other strategies (multiple options possible) all fell within a 4 per cent margin, except that women (35 per cent) more often emphasized holding workshops on values and mutual respect than men (21 per cent). Regional differences, however, were more pronounced. In the North, where women participated in numerous disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) initiatives during the 1990s, such initiatives supplanted dialogue mechanisms as a top priority among respondents (58 per cent of respondents from the North selected dialogue mechanisms while 65 per cent selected DDR initiatives). In Central Mali, populations stressed that informing communities about the peace agreement and political processes would have a salutary effect (51 per cent of respondents from Central Mali). Fifty per cent of youth respondents (across all regions) suggested that civil society should conduct political monitoring.

### Victims of conflict

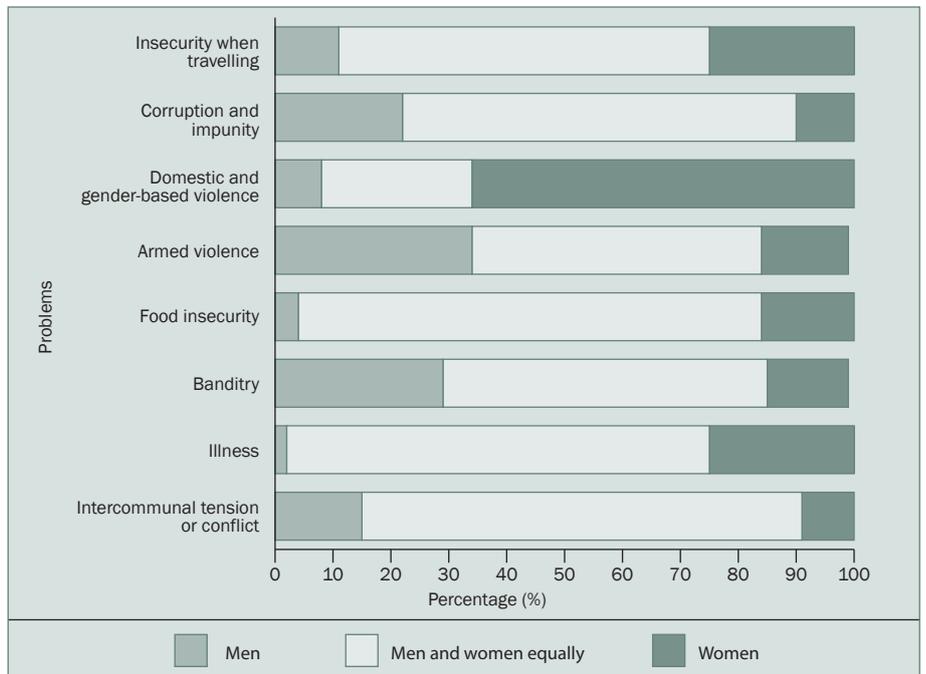
Most female members of the MGPS defined themselves as direct or indirect victims of the conflict.<sup>17</sup> Qualitative studies and focus groups placed an emphasis on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and economic insecurity, which affect women in unique ways.

<sup>17</sup> Results from the Mar. 2017 survey showed 77%, 89% and 62% of respondents from the North, Central and South zones, respectively, defined themselves as either direct or indirect victims of the conflict, with no notable gender variation.



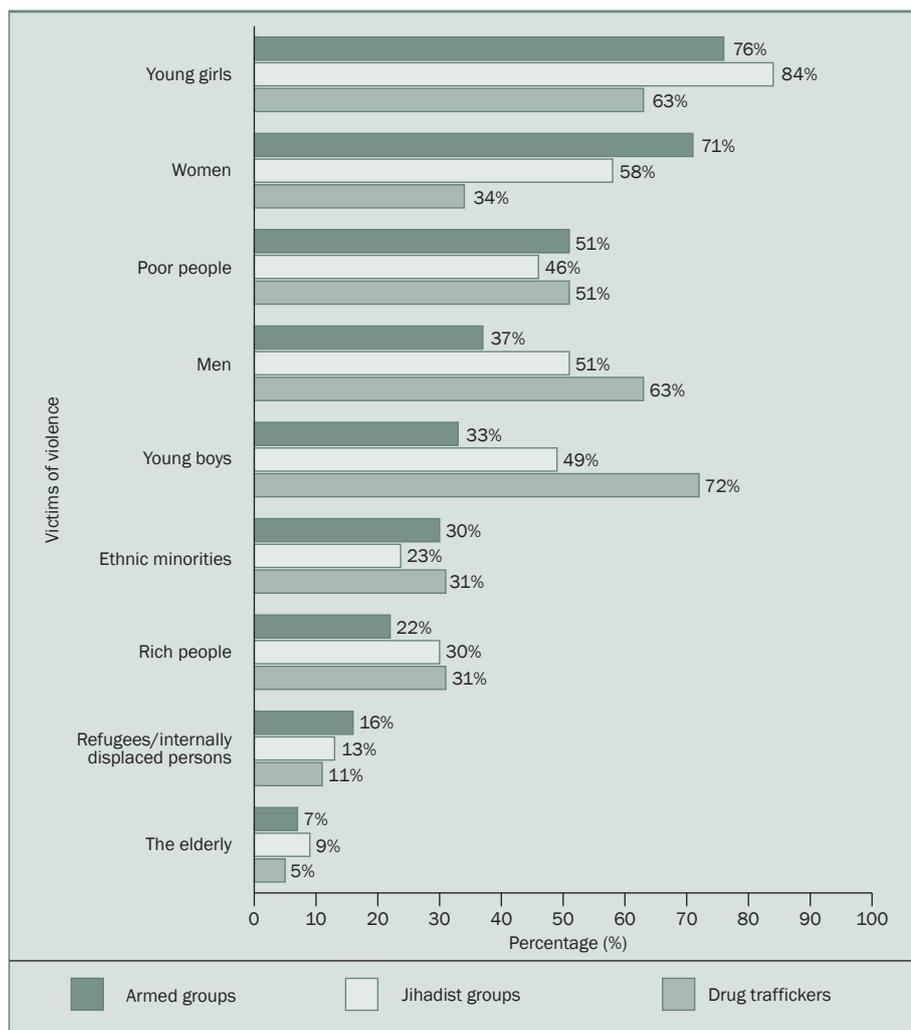
**Figure 5.** The impact of conflict on personal life in Mali, by region, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘What impact has the conflict had on your personal life?’ Respondents selected a number on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 rated as a ‘very negative impact’ and 7 rated as a ‘very positive impact’; 4 was rated as ‘neutral or no impact’.



**Figure 6.** Perceptions of the effects of conflict on women and men, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘Which of the 8 listed problems has the most impact on men, women, or men and women equally?’ The responses to some problems do not add up to 100% because respondents did not provide an answer in all cases.



**Figure 7.** Principal victims of violence in Mali, November 2017

*Note:* Respondents could select up to 4 categories to describe the populations most vulnerable to violence from armed groups, jihadist groups and drug traffickers.

*Impact of conflict: quantitative trends*

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 rated as a ‘very negative impact’ and 7 rated as a ‘very positive impact’, 72 per cent of respondents stated that the conflict has had some level of negative impact on them personally, with a more notable regional than gender variation (86 per cent in the North, 74 per cent in the Central zone and 43 per cent in the South). The most common impact rating in all three regions was 1—the most negative on the scale (see figure 5).

Most types of insecurity listed appeared to affect men and women almost equally, except for SGBV (see figure 6). In the Central zone, men appeared to be the principal target of bandits.

The study asked participants to identify the principal victims of physical and sexual violence by armed groups, jihadist groups and traffickers (see figure 7). Women (particularly unmarried women) and young girls were among the most vulnerable to violence from armed and jihadist groups, whereas drug traffickers appeared to target young people, especially boys. Conversely, young boys, men and the poor ranked the highest as most susceptible to recruitment into all three categories of criminal groups, and

**Box 1. Sexual and gender-based violence in Mali**

The following provides testimony from women and men on escalating sexual violence in the regions of Mopti, Ségou and Gao. These statements were made during focus group discussions and qualitative interviews conducted by local researchers on behalf of the study.

‘Violence happens during the occupations, the rural exodus of girls to the city, forced marriages, even when the woman goes into town and returns home, she is abused. Because the woman is defenceless, everyone thinks it is normal.’<sup>a</sup>

‘In the village of Niono (Ségou), a woman performing washing duties for some soldiers was raped by them. Another woman who had also been raped crossed the entire village crying and threw herself on the village chief expecting solace. But the silence she received in return plunged her into profound desolation.’<sup>b</sup>

‘Rape has become a sort of weapon of war. In addition to bandits and armed groups, the civilian population has been implicated, notably young people under the influence of drugs.’<sup>c</sup>

‘The perpetrators of rape are diverse: they are not only terrorist groups; we are concerned because research has shown that even certain members of our national armed forces are implicated... I work on a project tackling the sexual exploitation of girls for commercial means. We have noticed that since 2013 our target groups are only multiplying. Because of the conflict, families are unable to pay their expenses and some girls turn to prostitution to meet their needs and help their families.’<sup>d</sup>

‘These cases of gender-based violence existed well before the crisis. But since 2012, they have become the norm. Nobody is spared. Even women in their 60s are violated... The aid that we bring today to survivors of SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] is not enough. Moreover, with a bit more means, a serious effort for socio-economic reinsertion could help survivors of SGBV to achieve autonomy and return to them enjoyment of life.’<sup>e</sup>

Notes: Original quotes in French, translations provided by the author.

<sup>a</sup> ‘Les violences arrivent pendant les occupations, l’exode rural des filles vers la ville, mariages forcés, même lorsque la femme est allée en ville à son retour au foyer elle est violentée. Parce que la femme est sans défense tout le monde pense que c’est normal.’ Female focus group participant, Mopti, Nov. 2017.

<sup>b</sup> ‘A Niono, une femme qui faisait la lessive pour les militaires a été violée par les mêmes militaires. Une autre femme violée a traversé tout le village en criant pour aller se jeter sur les genoux du chef de village pensant être consolée. Mais le silence obtenu en retour l’avait plongée dans une situation de profonde désolation.’ Female member of the Collective of Women’s Associations and NGOs (Coordination des Associations et ONG Féminines, CAFO), Ségou, May 2018.

<sup>c</sup> ‘Le viol était devenu une sorte d’arme de guerre. Les gens se servaient de cela pour sévir. En plus des bandits et groupements armés, la population civile s’en est mêlée, notamment les jeunes sous l’emprise de stupéfiants.’ Female Coordinator of the NGO Women’s Action Research Group for Studies and Training (Groupe de Recherche d’Études de Formation Femme Action, GREFFA), Gao, May 2018.

<sup>d</sup> ‘Les auteurs des viols sont divers, il ne s’agit pas seulement des groupes terroristes, nous-mêmes, nous sommes concernés par ce que les recherches ont montré que même certains membres de nos forces armées nationales font partie... Je suis sur un projet axé sur l’exploitation sexuelle des filles à des fins commerciales. Nous avons remarqué que depuis 2013 nos groupes cibles ne font qu’augmenter. A cause du conflit les familles n’arrivent plus à assurer correctement leurs dépenses, certaines filles ont viré dans la prostitution pour subvenir à leurs besoins et aider leurs familles.’ Male interviewed in Ségou, May 2018.

<sup>e</sup> ‘Ces cas de VBG existaient bien avant la crise. Mais depuis 2012, c’est même devenu une mode. Personne n’est épargné. Même les femmes de 60 ans ont été violées... L’appui que nous apportons aujourd’hui aux survivantes des VBG n’est pas suffisant, mais permet tout au moins de les apaiser. Cependant, avec un peu plus de moyens, la réinsertion socio-économique, si elle se fait sérieusement, pourra autonomiser les survivantes de VBG et leur redonner goût à la vie.’ Third adjunct to the mayor (female), Gao, May 2018.

poverty had a significant positive correlation with victimization and recruitment among all group types.

SGBV stood out in the quantitative data as disproportionately affecting women. Due to significant stigma and historic underreporting, a qualitative approach of network meetings, focus groups and local research was used to explore these results further (see box 1).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Qualitative studies conducted by Malian researchers at SIPRI and in the CONASCIPAL network found 333 community-reported cases of SGBV in Gao between 2012 and 2017 (including 155 rape cases); and 512 cases of physical aggression committed against women and young girls in Mopti in 2017 (including 12 rape cases). However, the research teams believe most cases go



Interview participants noted a spike in rape cases during invasions of Gao and Timbuktu dating from 2012 and within forced marriages under jihadi occupation. While some forms of SGBV associated with the occupation of jihadist groups seem to be diminishing, harassment and intimate partner violence is reported to be increasing on a national scale. Domestic violence tended to increase when women were displaced to live with distant relatives, and when occupying groups began to lose footing and frustration simmered among their members.<sup>19</sup> However, populations perceived a decrease in forced marriages, cases of exile (in all regions except Taoudéni, Kayes and Mopti) and confinement cases (everywhere except in the far North).

Women identified collecting water and wood, washing, tending fields, and at night when husbands were absent as vulnerable times for aggression and rape. Some described women being publicly raped after criminal groups took control of public buses, then scarred with heated knives. A woman interviewed in Mopti in April 2018 stated: 'Because of the insecurity, women are afraid to go to the markets. About a month ago, the bandits captured some women and burned their arms with heated knives to scar them.'<sup>20</sup> Perpetrators of SGBV included armed group members and bandits, but also members of the armed forces and family members. Focus group accounts of SGBV during dancing and cultural evenings indicated a general banalization of many forms of SGBV, and previous studies have shown familial violence can also occur by women against other women or children.<sup>21</sup>

The capacity of survivors to seek out justice and treatments is limited by the dependence on families, societal stigma, normalization of violence, and lack of healthcare and judicial institutions able to handle issues of SGBV.<sup>22</sup> Women are currently offered no protection from domestic violence under Malian law.<sup>23</sup> Study participants stressed that families often discourage victims from denouncing perpetrators of sexual violence for fear of tarnishing the girl's prospects for marriage and worsening intercommunity relations.

When asked where to advise a friend who had experienced SGBV to seek aid, the majority of respondents advised the courts or judicial council (54 per cent), a traditional authority (52 per cent) or both (multiple options possible).

unreported. See also Cohen, D. C. and Nordås, R., 'Sexual violence in armed conflict: Introducing the SVAC dataset, 1989–2009', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 51, no. 3 (May 2014). For the complete dataset see the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict website.

<sup>19</sup> Possémé-Ragneau, G., 'Alliance Stratégique: La part des femmes dans l'implantation des jihadistes au Mali' [Strategic Alliance: The role of women in the establishment of jihadists in Mali], United Nations Development Programme, 2013, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> 'A cause de l'insécurité, les femmes ont peur de se rendre aux foires. Il y a environ un mois, des bandits armés ont enlevé des femmes et leur ont fait des balafres sur le corps avec du couteau surchauffé.' Female interviewee, Mopti, Apr. 2018.

<sup>21</sup> See Feldman, N., 'Violence domestique des femmes au Mali' [Domestic violence of women in Mali], ed. C. Cardi, *Penser la violence des femmes* [Thinking women's violence] (La Découverte: Paris, 2012), pp. 231–44. This study examines the family unit of the *galotigo*, or village chief, of Bako in south-west Koulikoro.

<sup>22</sup> Mali welcomed the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since 2012. However, so far the ICC has posted no convictions on conflict-related sexual violence. Lorentzen, J., *Women and the Peace Process in Mali*, PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) Brief 02/2017 (PRIO: Oslo, 2017), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Dicko-Zouboye, F. and Sangaré-Coulibaly, K., *Genre et sécurité au Mali : État des lieux et nouvelles perspectives* [Gender and security in Mali: State of affairs and new perspectives] (Programme Gouvernance partagée de la sécurité et de la paix au Mali/DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance: Bamako/Geneva, 2011).



The engagement of traditional authorities in countering impunity remains inconsistent across localities. Some participants cited chiefs ignoring the allegations; while others noted that some villages implemented reporting structures through networks of local female focal points who could elevate cases through the chief to the regional authorities, orient victims to judicial and health services, and discuss preventative strategies.

#### *Erosion of economic and social capital*

Despite the importance of bolstering socio-economic autonomy among victims of violence, widespread fear of rape and aggression has a profound impact on women's already disadvantaged economic and educational opportunities.<sup>24</sup> The conflict and peace processes have also impacted women's social capital, in many cases negatively, with reduced opportunities to engage in society. However, in some instances, resilient women-led initiatives at the community level have helped to boost trust and credibility.<sup>25</sup>

Insecurity has prompted the closing of 1051 schools in Central Mali (as of December 2019), along with credit agencies, night classes for women and girls with daytime domestic obligations, and leadership training.<sup>26</sup> With fewer employment opportunities, women rely on agricultural and market activities for economic and social empowerment—both of which are sectors severely harmed by the conflict.<sup>27</sup> Despite a 2017 law reserving 10 per cent of arable governmental land for women to farm, focus group participants indicated that women are continually denied land access or cannot carry out agricultural activities safely.<sup>28</sup>

According to a female focus group participant from Gao:

The conflict has had a negative impact on our right to work. [During the occupation, if jihadists] saw you in the company of a man, they would bring you to the commissariat. And they did not want women to go to the markets to sell products even though most women here are merchants. For them, a woman must not work. She must stay at home and take care of her husband and children. Now even when you go out looking for wood, people attack and rape you. Presently, we are still living with these difficulties.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Slegh, H. et al., *Men, Gender Equality and Gender Relations in Mali: Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (CARE: May 2013)*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> According to Caroline Moser, social capital is defined as 'the rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations, social structures and a society's institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives'. She further divides economic capital into physical ('man-made'), human (e.g. education) and natural (resources) elements. Moser, C., 'The gendered continuum of violence and conflict: An operational framework', eds C. Moser and F. Clark, *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (Zed Books: London, 2001), p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Information gathered during a qualitative study for the SIPRI-CONASCIPAL project in Apr. 2018 on the economic impacts of the crisis on women in Mopti, Ségou and Gao. See Fomba and Niambele (note 9). See also UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Mali: Rapport de situation' [Mali: Situation report], 6 Dec. 2019.

<sup>27</sup> National literacy levels among women are an estimated 22%, while among men they reach 45%. USAID Mali, 'Addendum to the 2012 Gender Assessment', May 2015. Some 95% of working women are confined to sectors of agriculture, herding, fishing, commerce, processing, and domestic and hotel activities. Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (note 4).

<sup>28</sup> A woman interviewed in Gao in Apr. 2018 stated that 'There are many issues accessing water because MINUSMA retains privileged access in the distribution process to the detriment of most homes'. Fomba and Niambele (note 9).

<sup>29</sup> 'Le conflit a eu un impact négatif sur le droit au travail. Quand les djihadiste étaient là... s'ils te voient avec un homme, ils vous amènent dans leur commissariat. En plus ils ne voulaient pas que les femmes aillent au marché pour vendre alors que la plupart des femmes sont des commerçantes. Jusqu'à présent nous avons des problèmes même quand tu sors pour aller chercher du bois non loin



Nevertheless, some women have proved resilient to many of these challenges. In Ségou, women rent out abandoned fields near their homes for cultivation during the off season, and in Mopti they have developed a door-to-door strategy for relaying information on Resolution 1325 and leadership training.<sup>30</sup> The conflict has also indirectly encouraged ethnic mixing and the exchange of ideas as women are sent to live in other parts of the country for work, marriage or safety. These qualitative examples demonstrate the challenges that populations face and their coping mechanisms. Female victims of conflict experience some unique effects, even if many types of insecurity affect women and men to an equal extent.

### **Actors in the conflict**

The results showing how men and women engage actively in the conflict present more striking differences in terms of gender. Gender roles and relations appear to most directly affect the actions and choices of an individual, rather than their observations of external circumstances. This section discusses women as both direct and indirect actors in the conflict, including their profound influence over others involved.

#### *Prevalence, motivations and roles of women in armed conflict*

A small sample of respondents answered a question on how many people they knew from their commune who had joined an armed or jihadist group. Fifty per cent of those who chose to respond indicated that they knew 10 or more people. However, 76 per cent of respondents knew no women or only one woman that had joined. There was one notable exception: a markedly elevated number of women were reported to have actively joined armed and jihadist groups in the Liptako–Gourma region, an area connecting Mali’s Gao region, Burkina Faso and Niger and a security priority for the Group of Five (G5) Sahel.<sup>31</sup>

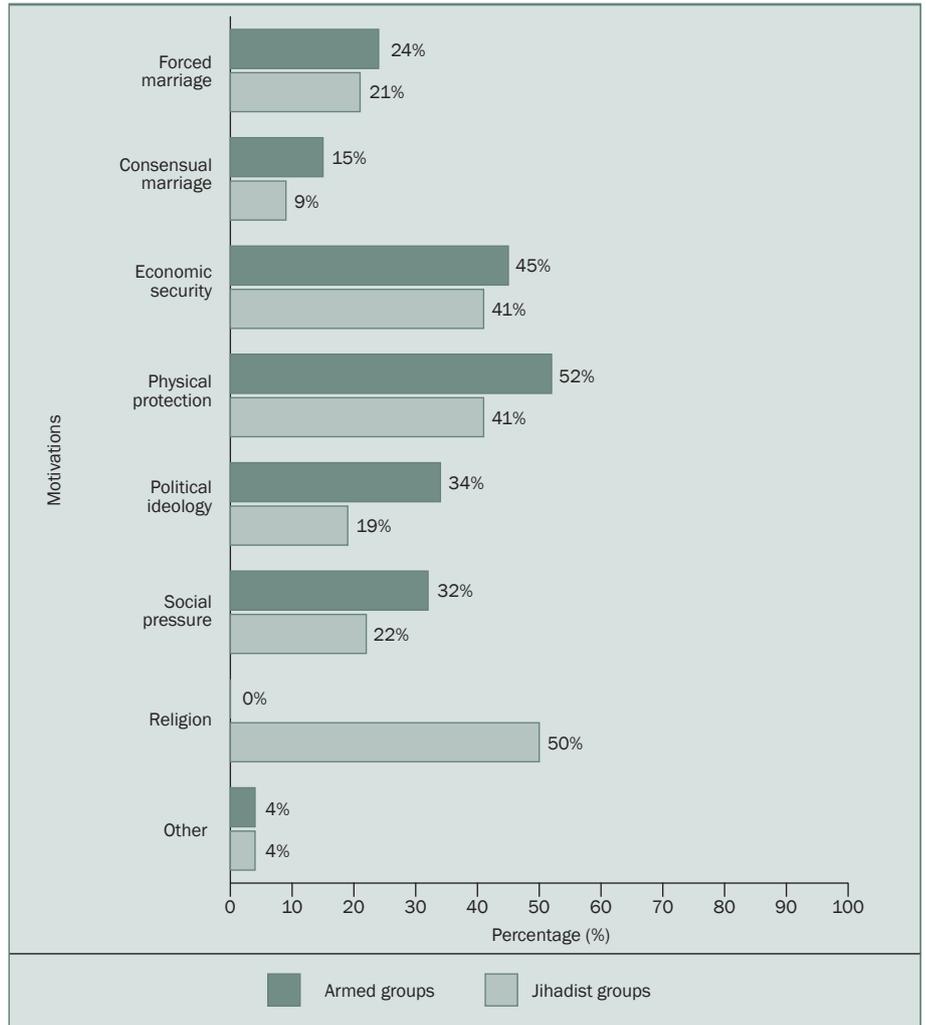
Across the pool of respondents, religion stood out as the primary motivating factor for women to join jihadist groups (see figure 8). Physical protection and economic security were most commonly reported as the primary drivers for recruitment to armed groups and also significant secondary or parallel motivators for jihadist recruitment. Religion in Mali has been shown to legitimize daily struggles, reformulated as tests to merit salvation and to reinforce self-esteem among women.<sup>32</sup> While a majority cited religion as important to them, study participants perceived jihadists as foreigners, whereas non-state armed groups and military militias were better integrated into communities.

de ton domicile on t’attaque et on te viole. Pour eux la femme ne doit pas travailler, elle doit rester à la maison et s’occuper de son mari et de son enfant. Jusqu’à présent nous sommes en train de vivre ces difficultés.’ Female focus group participant, Gao, Apr. 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Focus group participants, Mopti and Ségou, Nov. 2017. Insecurity during transit and closed-down credit schemes have rendered access to economic opportunity and leadership less attainable, and therefore inspired ingenuity in select communities.

<sup>31</sup> Several participants and the facilitator of the commune of Ouatagouna reported knowing up to 30 women and girls to have joined an armed group, whereas no other response in the sample exceeded 4, and most were zero or blank.

<sup>32</sup> Konaré, D. and Moro M., ‘Souffrances psychiques et refuge dans la religion : parcours de femmes au Mali’ [The physical suffering of women in Mali and refuge in religion], *L’Autre*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2014), pp. 188–96.

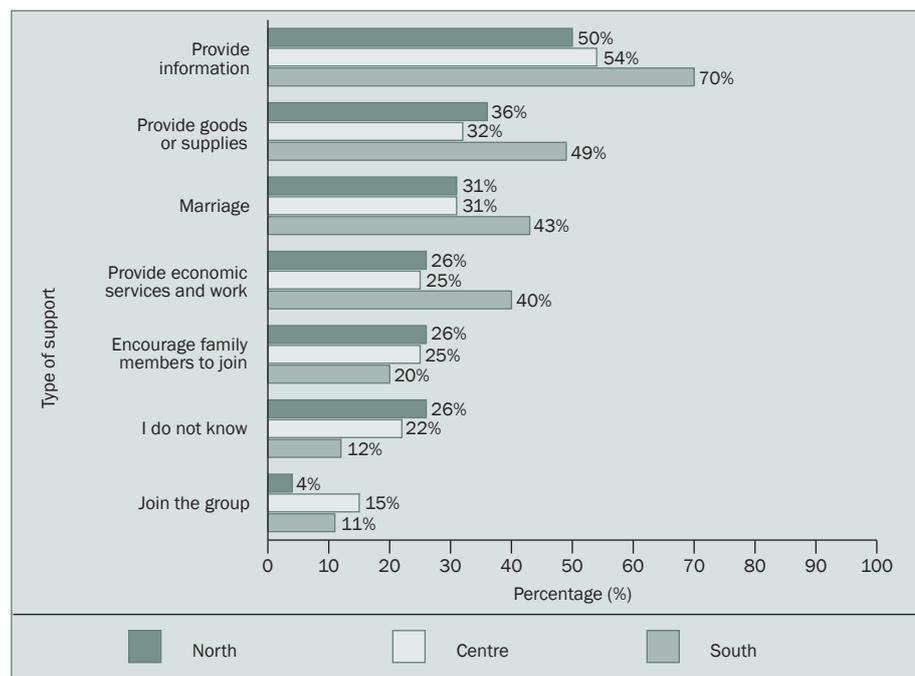


**Figure 8.** Primary motivations for women to support various groups in Mali, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to 2 questions: (a) ‘What are the main motivational factors for women to support an armed group?’; and (b) ‘What are the main motivational factors for women to support jihadist groups?’ Seven options (including ‘Other’) were listed for question 1. ‘Religion’ was added as an option for question 2. Respondents could choose multiple options.

Female respondents also cited social pressure as a noteworthy driver for armed group recruitment (33 per cent), and youth tended to point to economic security (50 per cent) more often than non-youth (41 per cent), who gave more weight to physical protection. Men tended to see being forced into marriage with a combatant as a more significant pull factor for women to join armed groups than women themselves, who cited forced and consensual marriages nearly equally.

Women serve primarily as supporters rather than as combatants. Respondents in all regions highlighted the important role played by women as informants (see figure 9). Overall, 56 per cent of respondents noted providing information as one of several ways that women support armed groups. As they venture to collect water, women can spot militias and security forces accessing the water sources and make their presence known to affiliate groups; they are also often most capable of denouncing criminals hiding



**Figure 9.** How women support armed groups in Mali, by region, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘How do women support the armed groups?’ Seven options (including ‘I do not know’) were listed. Respondents could choose multiple options.

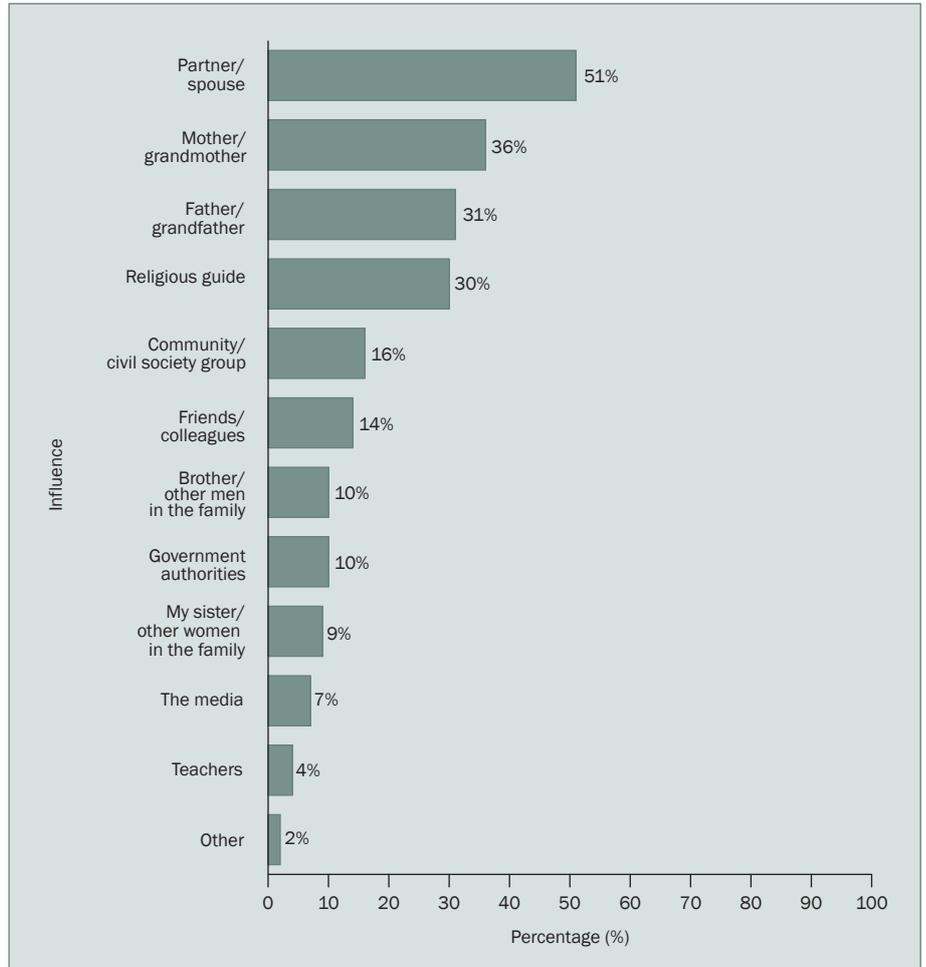
within communities or evading security controls to hide arms and supplies under their clothing.<sup>33</sup> Providing goods and supplies (38 per cent), marrying into armed groups (34 per cent), contributing economic services (29 per cent) and encouraging family members to join (24 per cent) all featured more commonly as roles that respondents perceived for women in armed groups than joining the group directly (9 per cent).

While motivations for joining a rebellion or supporting a certain armed group can be individual, they can also occur at the community level. Women in focus groups and in the civil society network often felt excluded from key community-level decisions about involvement or alliances in the conflict. However, in select villages, inclusive leadership structures have allowed them greater participation.<sup>34</sup>

‘Because of prejudice, the participation of women is judged useless, and as a result, it is not necessary to inform them [on security matters]’, noted one

<sup>33</sup> ‘Les contrôles sur les femmes sont moins rigoureux, elles profitent de cette faveur pour faire beaucoup de choses (acheminer les armes ...)’ [The controls on women are less rigorous. They take advantage of this for many things, for example to hide weapons]. Female focus group participants, Mopti, Nov. 2017.

<sup>34</sup> One woman in Tedjerert, Menaka stated: ‘Nous n’avons pas été informées de la préparation de la rébellion. Lorsque les hommes en parlaient, ils se taisaient quand nous approchions. C’est seulement après son déclenchement que l’on a appris ce que c’était. Nous avons eu très peur, mais nous avons compris et nous avons soutenu les hommes’ [We were not informed of the preparation for rebellion. When the men would speak of it, they would lower their voices when we approached. We only learned of the rebellion after its outbreak. We were very afraid, but we understood and supported the men], Female interviewee, Menaka, Nov. 2017. See also Grémont, C., *Liens sociaux au nord mali – entre fleuve et dunes* [Social links in Northern Mali—between river and dunes] (Karthala: Paris, 2004), p. 38.



**Figure 10.** Influence over the decision to support an armed or jihadist group in Mali, November 2017

*Notes:* The graph shows responses to the question ‘Which person had the most influence on your decision to support or not support a non-state armed group or jihadist group?’ Twelve options (including ‘Other’) were listed.

community in the Northern region of Taoudéni. But participants in a village in Sikasso held another view: ‘In our commune women give their opinions on all topics concerning village management to the village chiefs and their advisers (traditional authorities). The opinions are then raised with the regional authorities.’<sup>35</sup>

These accounts demonstrate that women’s involvement in conflict varies greatly across communities and is often tied to local leadership structures (see ‘Agents of change in peacebuilding processes’ below).

*The power of influence*

Perhaps more cogent than their direct roles within the conflict is the influencing power women possess over potential fighters in the private sphere.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Du fait des préjugés, la participation des femmes est jugée inutile, par conséquent il n’est pas nécessaire de les informer’ (Taoudéni); ‘Dans notre commune les femmes transmettent leurs opinions sur tous les sujets concernant la gestion du village aux chefs de village et ses conseillers (autorités traditionnelles). Les opinions sont alors remontées aux autorités communales’ (Sikasso). Focus group discussions, Taoudéni and Sikasso, Nov. 2017.



Elder women serve as mobilizers in communities to support political causes both in times of war and peace.<sup>36</sup> They might encourage men to take up arms in retaliation for wrongs committed against the family, to fulfil their role in the household or in search of glory and social elevation.<sup>37</sup> But wives and mothers can also dissuade men from resorting to violence to settle disagreements. In 2012, women in Kidal protested about an Ansar Dine embargo on their travel and shaped relations between the group and communities.<sup>38</sup>

According to the respondents of one of the project's three surveys, which was carried out in November 2017, a partner or spouse was the primary influencer for both men and women in the decision to join or to leave an armed or jihadist group.<sup>39</sup> After spouses, mothers ranked as the second most important voice, followed by fathers and religious guides (see figure 10).

Among male study participants, religious guides maintained a slightly stronger influence, after spouses, than parents in the decision to join a group. However, in the decision to stay or leave, mothers were the single most influential voice. The influence women already exert over local conflict dynamics highlights the importance of community-relevant, bottom-up peacebuilding strategies to promote women influencers as agents of change.

### Agents of change in peacebuilding processes

This section explores questions focusing on women's participation in peacebuilding and decision making, qualitative studies and focus groups, as well as trends in national politics and recent history. The findings provide a better understanding of prospects for integrating women into peacebuilding.

#### *Women in conflict resolution and the public sphere*

Women expressed a wilful determination to become personally involved in decision-making processes and peacebuilding.<sup>40</sup> However, they cited several elements tied to cultural and societal constraints, such as illiteracy, unwanted pregnancies, domestic obligations and little freedom of movement, which block their ambition.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Great heroes and leaders in Mali are often said to derive strength from their mothers. The 'hunchback buffalo woman' was prophesized to bear a great child who became Sunjata Keita, the founding emperor of the Malian Empire, while his rival, Sumangura Kanté, was believed to be the son of two mothers. Konaré, A. B., *Dictionnaire des femmes célèbres du Mali* [Encyclopaedia of famous women in Mali] (Editions Jamana: Bamako, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> Lackenbauer, H., Tham Lindell, M. and Ingerstad, G., *If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will: A Gendered Analysis of the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali*, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R-4121-SE (FOI: Stockholm, Nov. 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Ba, B. and Bøås, M., *Mali: A Political Economy Analysis* (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs: Oslo, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> This finding expands on a 2015 UN Women study, which found that while women were not the primary voice influencing the decision to join or rejoin an armed group, mothers have significant input in the decision to stay in or leave the group. Although participants were predominantly not party to an armed or jihadist group and had never lived that experience, the representative sample nevertheless retained implications for future recruitment patterns and avenues of resilience.

<sup>40</sup> A famous griot song about a persistent woman (Nyéba) articulates a tradition among women to challenge the status quo and the decisions made for them by men: 'If you leave Nyéba in peace/Nyéba does not leave you in peace/If you do not leave Nyéba in peace/Nyéba does not leave you in peace.' Konaré (note 36), p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> Focus group discussions, various regions in Mali, Oct. and Nov. 2017.

**Box 2. The iconoclasts of Gao**

Despite poor access to healthcare, food and water, the women of Gao are resilient, and develop their own strategies and initiatives to improve the conflict situation. Focus group participants referred to an intellectual renaissance for women in the region due to the needs created by the conflict, international programmes and their own drive to make a change:

People generally see women as weak spirits. But the crisis has revealed that women are dynamic spirits and invaluable to their communities. One of our strategies as women is strong solidarity, which allows us to come together in associations to share ideas. Through these associations and with the help of the DRPF EF, women were able to create the 'Cases for Peace' that intervened directly to negotiate peace between the belligerent groups of MUJAO and the MNLA.<sup>a</sup>

Women have played instrumental roles in convincing groups to disarm, as mediators in the negotiations of ceasefires and as organizers of civilian watch groups in collaboration with the youth. They have also reduced tensions among Tamasheq, Songhai and other ethnic groups, and have helped to bring rival groups into the Regional Coordination for the Case of Peace in Gao. By contrast, accounts from the civil society network indicate some 50 women have taken up arms in the region for non-state groups: 'Women no longer wait to be consulted before acting. They take the initiative to seek out information, in order to avoid surprises.'<sup>b</sup>

DRPF EF = Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family (Directions Régionales Promotion Femme, Enfant, Famille); MNLA = National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad); MUJAO = Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'ouest).

Notes: Original quotes in French, translations provided by the author.

<sup>a</sup> 'Les gens voyaient généralement les femmes comme des êtres faibles. Mais la crise a révélé que les femmes étaient des êtres dynamiques et très utiles à leurs communautés. L'une des stratégies des femmes est leur forte solidarité, qui leur a permis de se regrouper en associations pour se partager des idées. C'est à travers ces associations qu'elles ont pu créer avec l'appui de la DRPF EF les Cases de la Paix qui sont intervenues directement pour négocier la paix entre les belligérants de MUJAO et du MNLA.' Female focus group participant, Gao, Apr. 2018.

<sup>b</sup> 'Les femmes n'attendent plus d'être consultées avant d'agir, elles vont elles-mêmes à la recherche des informations, pour éviter d'être surprises.' Female focus group participant, Gao, Apr. 2018.

Seventy-four per cent of female respondents said they strongly agreed that they would like to be involved in the security decisions of their communities, compared with only 56 per cent of male respondents. Sixty-five per cent of men were also in strong agreement that women should be consulted more on local and national policy decisions. News radio stations encouraging political debate, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups can be used to share information on Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda. Among women interviewed, 41 per cent cited some knowledge of the resolution.<sup>42</sup>

When describing initiatives women had made in forming agricultural associations and soliciting finances from NGOs, interview participants in Ségou stated: 'We women, it's true that we suffer, but we have not given up.'<sup>43</sup>

In May 2018, women's network representatives in Mali outlined five priority action areas: (a) education, (b) participation in decision making, (c) SGBV, (d) protection, and (e) employment. Concrete policy recommendations included the continuation of night classes in troubled areas, the sensitization of traditional authorities on the importance of involving women in conflict

<sup>42</sup> 'En ce qui concerne la mise en œuvre de la R.1325 sur le plan régional je dirais que c'est quelque chose qui est en train d'aboutir petit à petit parce que ce n'est pas toutes les femmes qui ont la chance d'être intellectuelles. Cette minorité intellectuelle qui a été touchée par les formations ne dispose pas de tous les moyens pour former leurs sœurs des zones rurales' [With regard to the implementation of R1325 on a regional level I would say it is progressing little by little, for not every woman has the opportunity to be enlightened. The enlightened minority affected by the training sessions does not possess the means to train their sisters in the rural areas]. Female interviewee, Gao, Apr. 2018.

<sup>43</sup> 'Nous les femmes, c'est vrai que nous souffrons, mais nous n'avons pas baissé les bras'. Female interviewee, Ségou, Apr. 2018.



management and of prosecuting people who had committed SGBV, and the facilitation of land ownership for the economic empowerment of women.<sup>44</sup>

In the North, women set examples for transforming the status quo by participating actively in peacebuilding, in part because nomadic Northern power hierarchies and some liberal forms of Islam among Tuareg communities can be more permissive to women as strong figures within communities.<sup>45</sup>

Women in Gao have served as regulators in ceasefire negotiations, alerted self-defence groups about criminals (in collaboration with youth groups) and sought inclusion in the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants beyond initial disarmament (see box 2).

#### *Limitations at local and national levels*

The research shows how the rigidity or fluidity of society power structures varies across regions and communities, with particular barriers to women's participation in Central Mali and in the region of Kidal.<sup>46</sup> Qualitative studies comparing women's participation in Gao, Mopti and Ségou found that the relative liberty afforded to women in the North did not translate to the conflict in Central areas. Women risk losing social capital at the local level if they venture into public spaces. An MGPS women's representative at the study's Resolution 1325 workshop in Bamako in November 2017 stated: 'For us, the pressure of tradition is very strong. Is it desirable for women to be involved in peacebuilding? A woman's place is in the home.'<sup>47</sup> Focus group participants in Ségou quoted a village chief who thanked the women at a three-hour communal meeting for not opening their mouths once.<sup>48</sup> Men refusing the participation of women was a telling factor obstructing the engagement of women in the peace process (for 64 per cent of total respondents), especially in the Centre (for 81 per cent of respondents in Central Mali).<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, women in the South felt they had the greatest say in decisions concerning security and governmental relations (among urban women), perhaps because of the proximity to Bamako. Participants reported women retaining greater influence over agricultural decisions and access to justice in the North, but less over local politics. In the Centre they appeared to hold less sway over healthcare and educational concerns. Agricultural and judicial issues surfaced as priorities for Northern Malians in the civil society network, to a similar extent that healthcare and education stood out in the Centre. This indicates that women in the North involved themselves in some of the region's most pressing issues, whereas in the Centre they were often

<sup>44</sup> These recommendations were developed during a series of workshops among the women's network held in Bamako in May 2018.

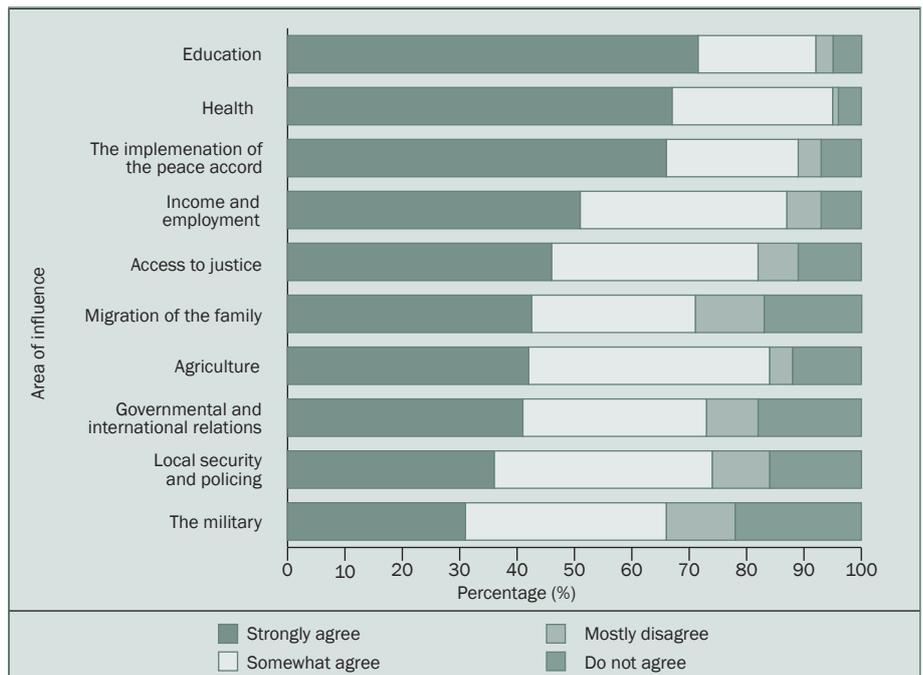
<sup>45</sup> Sidibé, K., 'Security management in northern Mali: Criminal networks and conflict resolution mechanisms', IDS Research Report no. 77 (IDS: Brighton, Aug. 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Women interviewed in Kidal declared themselves less present in local decision making than those in other Northern regions. See also Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (note 4).

<sup>47</sup> 'Chez nous, la pression de la tradition est très forte. La femme dans la paix, est-ce que c'est favorable? La femme, c'est à la maison.' Female representative from the SIPRI-CONASCIPAL civil society network at a validation workshop, Bamako, May 2018.

<sup>48</sup> 'Après trois heures de réunion villageoise, lors de la clôture, le Chef de village a dit qu'il commence par remercier les femmes de n'avoir pas ouvert leurs bouches durant les trois heures de réunion.' Traoré and Dolo (note 9).

<sup>49</sup> Tobie and Chauzal (note 14).



**Figure 11.** Perceptions of women’s influence over decisions in Mali, November 2017

*Note:* Respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed that women had the power to influence decisions in certain areas.

left out of these key decision-making processes. Overall, respondents perceived women as retaining more influence over decisions regarding health and education than other topics (see figure 11).

At the national level, women have struggled to gain entry and recognition throughout the peace process. Four women from civil society were compelled to force their way into ceasefire negotiations in Ouagadougou after they had been refused invitations. The presence of women in the Algiers peace talks was also met with resistance and relegated to a week of civil society ‘hearings’ during the second phase of the negotiations. The 2015 Bamako Agreement notably lay the foundation for Law 052 (2015), a governmental quota requiring 30 per cent female representation among appointed positions and on electoral lists, as well as a renewed NAP on Resolution 1325. Yet women continue to hold predominantly technical and administrative positions outside of the security sector.<sup>50</sup>

The government formed in September 2018 included 11 female ministers out of a total of 33 ministers.<sup>51</sup> It was notable that there was a first female Minister of Foreign Affairs and a female Minister of Employment. However, in the last government reshuffle, in May 2019, the ratio was reduced to 8 female ministers out of 36. Women seeking political office continue to face

<sup>50</sup> Women’s participation in the mechanisms tied to the implementation of the 2015 Bamako Agreement remains at only 3%: Agreement Monitoring Committee, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the National Council on Security Sector Reform, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) and the establishment of interim authorities in the North. The CVJR has established a subcommittee on gender and a truth commission investigating violations of human rights, with particular attention on conflict-related sexual violence. Lorentzen (note 22).

<sup>51</sup> This represented a noticeable increase from the 5 out of 31 ministers in 2014.



many obstacles both internal and external to their political parties. Political parties do not have to guarantee representativeness at the local elections, and women experience discriminatory manipulation and open resistance to their candidacy on party lists.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout a series of workshops, female MGPS from across the country reiterated the phrase ‘la main dans la main’ (hand in hand) to indicate the importance of working together with other women and men to improve their participation in society. Malian women’s organizations such as the Collective of Women’s Associations and NGOs (Coordination des Associations et ONG Féminines, CAFO) have seen some success in promoting the rights and engagement of women along the lines of Resolution 1325. However, as the above analysis shows, women in Mali grapple with a regionally diverse set of issues beyond ‘women’s issues’, and opinions are not uniform. Study participants stated that insecurity is preventing women from becoming involved, as it can be dangerous and difficult to attend group meetings. They also cited a dearth of information shared with women’s groups from authorities resistant to change.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, women do not rely on collective power alone, but also seek to increase influence in the peacebuilding process through individual involvement and representation at the grassroots and elite levels.

### III. Conclusions

The conflict in Mali presents a potential window of opportunity for women, despite significant hurdles. Case studies across Africa show how women are able to make the greatest gains in confronting and changing power dynamics during and after conflict periods.<sup>54</sup> Women in Mali have notably advanced gender equality and participation at the legal, institutional and community levels during periods of conflict in recent history. One focus group participant from Mopti explained the current situation as follows: ‘Previously the men thought women could not do anything. But today, they are waking up to the idea that peace, as hoped for by the entirety of the population, cannot be obtained without full involvement of women.’<sup>55</sup>

Study participants nevertheless echoed a phrase that women in Mali are often reduced to their function as a mother. Yet their capacity to influence active combatants, their drive to become more involved in peacekeeping efforts, and their ability to observe insecurity and serve as representative voices for their communities show a potential to alter the status quo.

Mali was scheduled to undergo legislative and municipal elections in 2019 (now postponed to May 2020). These elections could be a crucial opportunity to increase female representation at the local level. Women currently

<sup>52</sup> One female focus group participant in Timbuktu during the Nov. 2017 survey remarked that some men threaten to divorce women who do not vote for their political party of choice.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Female interviewee (note 42); and box 2 in this paper.

<sup>54</sup> Of the 10 African nations with the highest rates of female legislative representation, 7 have experienced a major conflict within the last decade, and 75% of post-conflict countries in Africa mention specific quotas for female representation, whereas only 25% of non-post conflict countries do so. Tripp, A. M., *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Précédemment, les hommes pensaient que les femmes ne pouvaient rien faire. Mais aujourd’hui, ils se rendent compte que la paix, qu’espère la population entière, ne peut être obtenue sans la participation complète des femmes.’ Female focus group participant, Mopti, Nov. 2017.



occupy only 14 out of 147 seats in the National Assembly, less than 2 per cent of mayoral posts and 1 governor position. Further analysis is also needed to assess the extent to which female representatives at the national, legislative and municipal levels influence security decisions and cause trickle-down effects for power realignment and greater inclusivity throughout society.

As the country experiences significant demographic, security and economic changes, it will become increasingly important to track, understand and promote the changing roles of women in society. This study finds gender differences are most pronounced when examining how people engage actively in the conflict and peace processes, rather than their perceptions of insecurity, which vary more by geographical area across conflict-affected regions. The research also takes note of a persuasive call among people across Mali to improve dialogue between civil society and the security forces, and thereby broaden the range of policy actors involved in decision-making processes—a critical component of gender mainstreaming.

Evidence-based strategies for women targeted at different tiers of society, and both the formal and informal sectors, could tap into the potential of women in Malian society to influence change around them while addressing challenges and shortcomings. Analyses and programming involving men are also essential for ensuring that the strategies, such as literacy and leadership initiatives, take root, and traditional authorities can serve as potent allies or opponents for meaningful inclusion of women and youth in local decision making. Responding to the security and development needs of women while improving their capacity to engage could not only alleviate injustice, but also set a course in Mali for more inclusive and comprehensive peace.


**Annex 1. Timeline of selected notable events and initiatives by and for women in Mali, 1945–2015**

Year	Event/initiative
1945	Women march on Bamako prison to liberate Mamadou Sangaré and Abdoulaye Singaré, the director and the editor of the journal <i>L'Essor</i> , demonstrating the capacity of illiterate women to participate in the public sphere.
1946	The colonial constitution gives Malians citizens' rights under the French Union, including suffrage for all women.
1951	A women's network led by Aoua Keïta hand delivers voting cards taken from Sudanese civil servants; it also occupies voting sites to thwart electoral fraud and removes two military officers trying to force votes for the French party. The Jacquinet decree allows women of 21 years or older to freely choose husbands; and women are liberated from obligations of dowry.
1959	Aoua Keïta is elected to the National Assembly of the Mali Federation as its first female deputy.
1960	Mali gains independence from France.
1962	Women gain the right to consensual marriage; rape is made punishable by up to 20 years in prison; educational reform allows for mixed schools; and women create the Commission for Social Women in Mali.
1968	The first female minister is appointed to the government of Moussa Traoré.
1990–92	Women lead protest marches against Moussa Traoré in March 1991 and play key roles in initiating talks between the government and Tuareg rebels, including mitigating a hostage situation in Kidal.
1991	Women publish a declaration that calls on the president, the Ministry of Education and parents to respond to an educational crisis, denounce atrocities committed by public authorities during the last months of the Moussa Traoré administration, and form the Collective of Women in Mali (COFEM).
1996	Women in Timbuktu are instrumental in inaugurating the 'Flame of peace' ceremony of burning arms, which becomes an annual protest against small arms and light weapons.
1997	Creation of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family (MPFEF).
2001	Women organize 15 of 50 intercommunity meetings to repair social ties and implement long-term peace and reconciliation strategies.
2002–06	First action plan of MPFEF to address gender inequality.
2009–11	Proposed revisions to the Family Code that would have expanded women's rights concerning the legal age for marriage, custody for children and inheritance are watered down amid religious protests.
2011	Cisse Mariam Kaidama Sidibe serves as the first female prime minister and the first national policy on gender is adopted.
2013	Four women travel to Ouagadougou to demand a place in the peace process. The first National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 is adopted.
2015	The Bamako Agreement is signed in June; in December, national law enacts a 30% quota for women in appointed governmental functions and on electoral lists.

Source: Author compilation.



## Abbreviations

CAFO	Collective of Women's Associations and NGOs (Coordination des Associations et ONG Féminines)
CEDAW	1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COFEM	Collective of Women in Mali
CONASCIPAL	National Coalition of Civil Society for Peace and the Fight against the Proliferation of Light Weapons
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DRPFEF	Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family (Directions Régionales Promotion Femme, Enfant, Famille)
G5	Group of Five
Maputo Protocol	2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
MGPS	Monitoring Groups for Peace and Security
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad)
MPFEF	Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'ouest)
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
WPS	Women, Peace and Security



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# 'HAND IN HAND': A STUDY OF INSECURITY AND GENDER IN MALI

ZOË GORMAN AND GRÉGOR Y CHAUZAL

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