

# THE CHALLENGES OF GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY IN THE CENTRAL REGIONS OF MALI

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## I. Introduction

Mali's central regions of Mopti and Ségou have attracted considerable attention in the past few years from both governmental and international actors engaged in the country's development and stability. Since 2015, they have become insecurity hotspots where jihadist threat, military operations, intercommunal violence, and conflicts between pastoralists and farmers converge. With the state failing to demonstrate effective authority and exercise the monopoly of force in these regions, chronic insecurity reigns and undermines prospects for peace, socio-economic development and respect for the rule of law.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the deteriorating security situation, national and international interventions have been reoriented towards the central regions of Mali in recent years. These interventions cover the full range of actors and sectors. In addition to international and subregional military operations aimed at countering terrorist activities (the French-led Operation Barkhane and the Group of Five, G5, Sahel Joint Force) or maintaining peace (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA), there is a wide range of initiatives carried out by multilateral and bilateral assistance agencies, as well as international non-governmental organizations, to support national stabilization strategies.<sup>2</sup> These strategies include strengthening state institutions through governance reform, security sector reform (SSR), decentralization and upholding the rule of law. They also include peacebuilding initiatives, namely mediation and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)—which are part of the 2015 peace agreement between the Malian state and armed groups

<sup>1</sup> Jourde, C., Brossier, M. and Cissé, M. G., 'Prédation et violence au Mali: élites statutaires peules et logiques de domination dans la région de Mopti' [Predation and violence in Mali: Fulani statutory elites and the logic of domination in the Mopti region], *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, vol. 53, no. 3 (2019); Bleck, J., Dembele, A. and Guindo, S., 'Malian crisis and the lingering problem of good governance', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Nov. 2016); and Human Rights Watch, 'Mali: Events of 2018', *World Report 2019: Events of 2018* (Human Rights Watch: New York, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The G5 Sahel Joint Force is a regional security framework that brings together troops from Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad to combat terrorist and criminal groups. In June 2019, the French-led Operation Barkhane opened a new base in Gossi, in the Gourma region of Mali, enabling it to better deploy its operations in central Mali.

## SUMMARY

● Since 2015 Mali's central regions of Mopti and Ségou have become insecure hotspots at the confluence of interconnected challenges in terms of governance, development and security. Although international interventions involving a full range of actors and sectors are being increasingly reoriented towards these regions, the sustainability of the responses depends on their ability to draw on the needs and priorities of local communities.

This SIPRI Insights is based on a study that combines both quantitative and qualitative data to provide an evidence-based analysis of local perspectives in Mopti and Ségou. It highlights how the people there understand and respond to the governance, development and security challenges they face.

**Box 1. Methodology**

SIPRI and its partner organization in Mali, Point Sud (a research institute based in Bamako), have chosen to carry out a mixed-method study that combines quantitative and qualitative data. The study emphasizes a bottom-up approach to knowledge production and aims to better understand the perspectives of local populations in central Mali, as a first step to including them in building long-lasting solutions to the security and development challenges they face.

In February 2019, SIPRI and Point Sud collected quantitative data in the first round of a recurring survey, which is used to monitor and compare developments in three composite indices: governance, socio-economic development and security. The three indices are composed of a broad range of security and development indicators (indicateurs de sécurité et de développement, ISD), which are measured using different survey questions (76 main questions) and form benchmarks for analysis. The study relies on 30 trained facilitators, all of whom are familiar with the local context, to administer the survey in the 15 cercles of Mali's central regions (8 in Mopti and 7 in Ségou).

The baseline of the study (Q0) involved 2097 randomly selected households, and the main findings are presented in this paper. Data collection at the household level enables disaggregation, where relevant, based on a set of criteria such as age, gender and geographical location. The quantitative survey data is supplemented by qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions, which included participants of all ages, genders and social status, and also by occasional 'deep dives' in the form of thematic questionnaires and in-depth qualitative studies.

The study's analysis is based on primary research material, namely statistical data and focus group transcripts. Given that both the quantitative and the qualitative data were collected at the same stage, in February 2019, it is possible to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate findings from one method with those from another.

in northern Mali—and development initiatives to foster job creation, food security and public service delivery.<sup>3</sup>

However, for these interventions to be effective and sustainable beyond immediate tactical gains, in-depth empirical knowledge of the local context must inform responses and be drawn from local people's perceptions of the governance, development and security challenges in central Mali. Individuals' perceptions can vary greatly given that people have different life experiences, levels of education and personal factors (e.g. attitudes, interests and motives). In order to capture these variations, SIPRI has chosen to carry out a bottom-up, evidence-based analysis of local perspectives, with the aim of better understanding how people in the regions of Mopti and Ségou make sense of the various challenges they face and how they respond to them.<sup>4</sup>

This type of bottom-up, evidence-based approach is needed for a number of reasons. First, it is necessary to identify priorities in a context where everything seems to be an emergency. Second, despite the urgency of the situation, it is necessary to ensure that interventions are in line with the principle of 'do no harm' and to understand how interventions could affect other, connected factors. Third, it is necessary to understand how security, governance and development issues are linked from the perspective of communities directly affected by conflict, and for whom sectorial interventions do not necessarily make sense. Fourth, while immediate responses are needed to meet the security and humanitarian needs of the population, the modality of these

<sup>3</sup> The Malian Government has reinforced its policy architecture for stabilization in the area through the Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions (Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre, PSIRC) in 2017 and the appointment of a High Representative for central Mali in 2019.

<sup>4</sup> SIPRI's research in Mali and the broader West Africa and Sahel region aims to support local initiatives and global strategies for peace, security and development in conflict-affected countries. Working with local partners and grassroots networks of trained facilitators, each project benefits from access to all parts of the region and a great diversity of populations. Collected data and analysis are accessible on SIPRI's website, and disseminated through reports and during public events in each of the region's countries.



responses and how their beneficiaries view them will be key to ensuring their sustainability and acceptance. In a troubled and unstable context, security and development strategies must be viewed as legitimate and sound in order to be sustainable and contribute to the renewal of the contract of trust between the people and the state.<sup>5</sup> Finally, any programmatic response to the situation in central Mali should aim to address both structural factors (e.g. state fragilities, environmental stress, historical grievances, high population growth, and rising inequalities and exclusion) and situational factors (issues associated with intercommunal tensions, e.g. violent extremism and organized crime) that affect deep-rooted dynamics of governance and poverty in Mali. Therefore, it is crucial to place local people and their concerns at the centre of the analysis.

Gathering data in central Mali, however, is challenging. Its regions are difficult to access for international organizations and researchers, and the people are often reluctant to share personal experiences with outsiders or express their opinions on politically sensitive issues such as security or state presence. Moreover, the populations of Mopti and Ségou are diverse—socially, ethnically, economically and geographically. Therefore, any analysis needs to be granular in its understanding of the various contextual dynamics covered. It must capture the social diversity of the regions and represent the perceptions of different socio-economic groups, varying by gender, age and from urban or rural populations. Given that the situation in central Mali can change rapidly, the research methodology needs to be responsive and able to monitor changes over time.

Between 2019 and 2021, SIPRI and its partner organization in Mali, Point Sud, are implementing a three-year research project entitled ‘Central Mali Project for Security and Development’ (Mali-Centre pour la sécurité et le développement), which is funded by the European Union. The project covers Mali’s two central regions, Mopti and Ségou, and aims to monitor emerging trends in governance, development and security through the quarterly administration of a perception survey (see box 1). Between February 2019 and February 2020, five rounds of the survey were carried out (one approximately every two and a half months). This SIPRI Background Paper presents the findings of the first round (the baseline study), which took place in February 2019 and involved 2097 randomly selected households (see table 1). The survey questions focus on a set of security and development indicators (indicateurs de sécurité et de développement, ISD) developed by SIPRI and Point Sud. In addition to the quantitative data from the survey, the study uses qualitative data from focus group discussions held in the regions at the same stage of the project (in February 2019).

The following sections present the baseline study’s findings according to the three main indices that make up the security and development indicators: governance, socio-economic development and security (see box 2). Section II addresses the state of governance in central Mali based on survey responses to questions covering three subindicators: (a) trust in local authorities and participation in public life; (b) the effectiveness of institutions responsible

*It is crucial to place local people and their concerns at the centre of an analysis of Mali*

<sup>5</sup> Tobie, A., ‘Central Mali: Violence, local perspectives and diverging narratives’, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security Paper no. 2017/5, Dec. 2017, pp. 17–18.

**Table 1.** Key information from the sample of households in Central Mali<sup>a</sup>

	Global (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Sample (no. of households) <sup>b</sup>	100	57	43
Region of Mopti (%)	51.9	61	39
Region of Ségou (%)	48.1	52	48
Adult (> 35 years, %)	77.5	64	36
Young people (≤ 35 years, %)	22.5	33	67
Rural population (%)	83.8	56	44
Literacy rate (%)	43.2	68	32

<sup>a</sup> The household is the basic unit of analysis. It refers to people who live in the same housing unit and compose a family. In Mali's central regions, a family household consists of two or more individuals related by birth and/or marriage (father, mother, brother, sister, grandparents, etc.), although it may include other unrelated individuals. For this survey, only household members who were family relations and aged 18 years and over could answer.

<sup>b</sup> The total number of households sampled was 2097; the median age of the sample was 45 years old (50 years old for men, 40 years old for women).

for delivering public services; and (c) respect for the rule of law and human rights. Section III considers the socio-economic development of the two regions and includes findings related to (a) the different economic sectors and (b) the impact of instability on the economy. Section IV presents findings on questions related to security, including (a) perceptions of security at the national, local (village or neighbourhood) and individual levels; (b) strategies for coping with insecure external situations such as conflict and violence; and (c) perceptions of the state, regional and non-state security actors. Section V then draws some brief conclusions.

## II. Governance

Central Mali lacks public services, particularly security and infrastructure, and the poor provision and limited effectiveness of the institutions responsible for delivering public services are reported to have serious effects on people's livelihoods. The absence of state authorities in many parts of Mopti and Ségou limits people's engagement with the state and, according to this study, has been found to increase their interactions with local authorities. Rather than turning to the state, people mostly rely on traditional authorities, who play essential roles and hold significant power in their communities. For example, people in these regions claim to trust the customary justice system and perceive it as more impartial than the modern justice system.

### Trust in local authorities and participation in public life

The results of the survey indicate that local authorities—figures such as the mayor, the village chief or the neighbourhood chief—generally enjoy the trust of their local population (see figure 1). Indeed, nearly 44 per cent of the survey respondents said they always trust them and 25 per cent said they often trust them. Almost 20 per cent of respondents said they have little or no trust in the local authorities in their village or neighbourhood (another 11 per cent did not know or did not respond).

Although citizens have opportunities to get involved in the public life of their local communities and influence decision-making processes, public

**Box 2. Key findings***Governance*

State authorities are relatively absent from the regions of Mopti and Ségou in central Mali. Instead, local authorities (e.g. the mayor, village chief or neighbourhood chief) enjoy the trust of residents (according to 69 per cent of respondents).

Basic public services (particularly security and roads) are mostly unavailable in the localities surveyed, and the management of available services does not meet local expectations.

People mainly turn to customary and religious authorities to resolve minor conflicts. Even in the case of serious crimes, customary authorities remain the most common choice, ahead of state authorities such as the police. Customary justice systems are also considered more impartial than religious or state systems.

*Socio-economic development*

Economic activities in central Mali mostly focus on feeding the family (95 per cent), rather than on capital accumulation (1 per cent) or improving living conditions.

More than 77 per cent of the population in the two regions rely on agriculture and are highly dependent on precarious resources: only 12 per cent of agricultural farmers hold legal titles for the land they farm; for irrigation, 77 per cent are dependent on rainwater and 21 per cent on river, stream and canal water.

According to 60 per cent of respondents, the security situation has a direct impact on their economic activities, especially agriculture (35 per cent) and trade (31 per cent).

*Security*

About 30 per cent of respondents believe that security has significantly deteriorated at the national level, but they are more likely to report an improvement in their immediate locality (about 41 per cent).

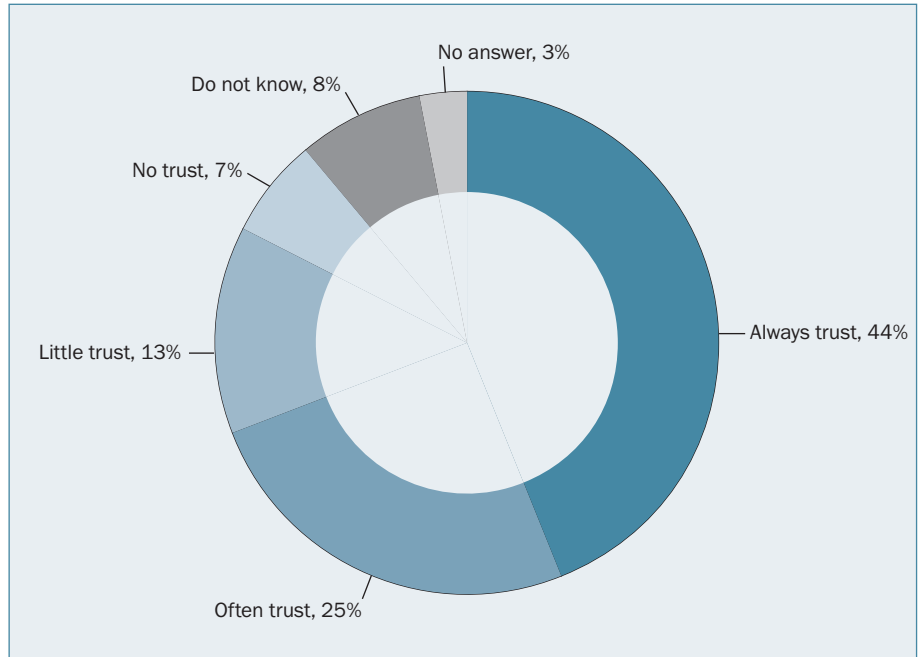
Populations in central Mali grant a high presumption of effectiveness to non-state security actors, whereas international and subregional actors are considered to be the least effective.

participation remains relatively low: only 38 per cent of the respondents had participated in a consultation meeting with local authorities on subjects of common interest in the three months before the February 2019 survey. The reasons for this are not clear, but this low participation is not due to a lack of freedom of speech: 72 per cent said they feel free to express their views in their village or neighbourhood, including in the presence of the authorities. This sentiment was also reflected in the focus group discussions. Given the importance of public participation in enhancing democratic governance, the low citizen involvement in local decision-making processes may be a missed opportunity to bring about greater acceptance of public decisions and broader legitimacy.

**Effectiveness of institutions responsible for delivering public services**

The survey respondents underscored the lack of and poor accessibility to many essential public services in their regions and localities, including security (e.g. police and military) and road. Although some infrastructure is in place, for example within healthcare, its condition and the services it delivers are widely considered as not meeting the needs of the local populations.

People's dissatisfaction also extends to the education system in central Mali. Numerous reasons have been provided, including the absence of schools in some localities for over three years and the recurrent targeting of schools by violent extremist groups. Although the lack of security is admittedly a general problem that affects access to education, the survey data shows that



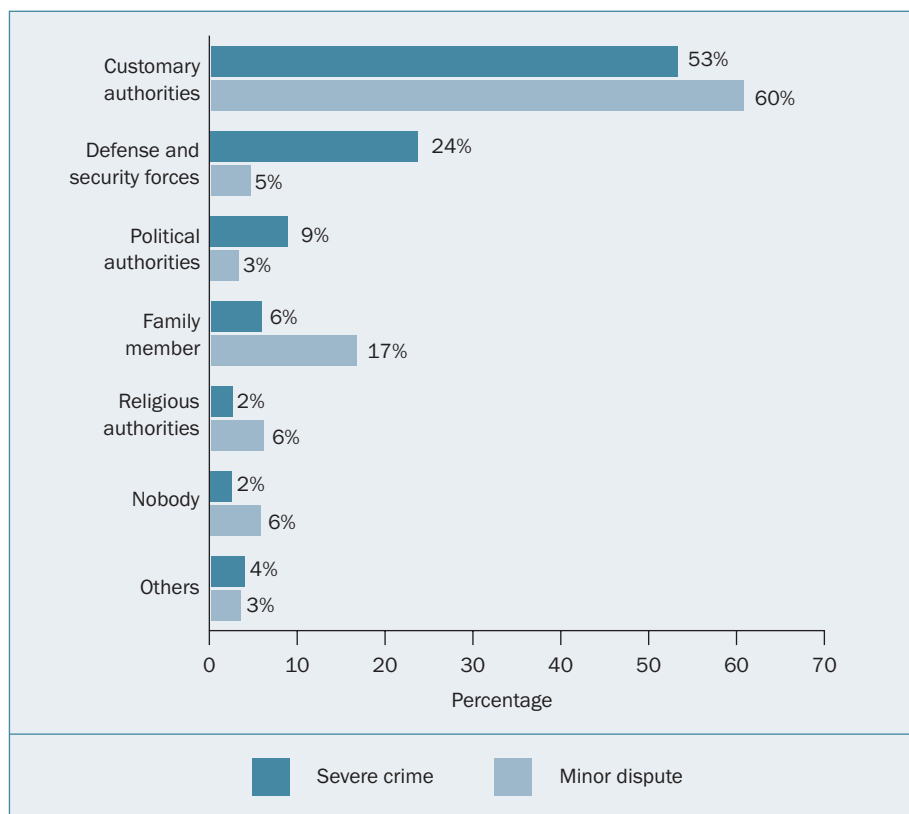
**Figure 1.** Answers from 2097 respondents to a survey question related to their confidence in community representatives

more structural factors are also at work. Indeed, respondents claimed the leading impediment to their children’s schooling was the teachers’ strikes that affected the country for several months in 2018 and 2019. Teachers were demanding better working conditions, including housing stipends, documentation bonuses and travel allowances, and new rules regarding the nominations of education officials.

There is a close link between the management model of the different services and the level of satisfaction of the respondents. More specifically, services which are primarily managed by local management committees score higher levels of satisfaction. With regard to the management of public services, these committees are generally composed of representatives of the population, technical and administrative personnel, and political authorities. To the extent that they are inclusive bodies, the committees provide social accountability and participate in enhancing the quality and responsiveness of both public services (e.g. health and education) and, in some cases, non-public services (e.g. mosques). The majority of focus group participants reflected this feeling of satisfaction with locally managed services. For example, in the village of Soubala in Mopti, the different services work because they are run by members of very active local management committees. One focus group participant described their functioning as follows: “First of all, with regards to the school, the management committee assists with the enrolment of children in school, the school’s maintenance, the recruitment of teachers, awareness-raising among parents, the regular monitoring of school children, conflict management within the school. Concerning other existing services—namely wells, boreholes, mosques—management committees provide maintenance, cleaning, policing, sharing information with villagers and so on.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Focus group participant, Soubala, Bankass cercle, Mopti, Feb. 2019.





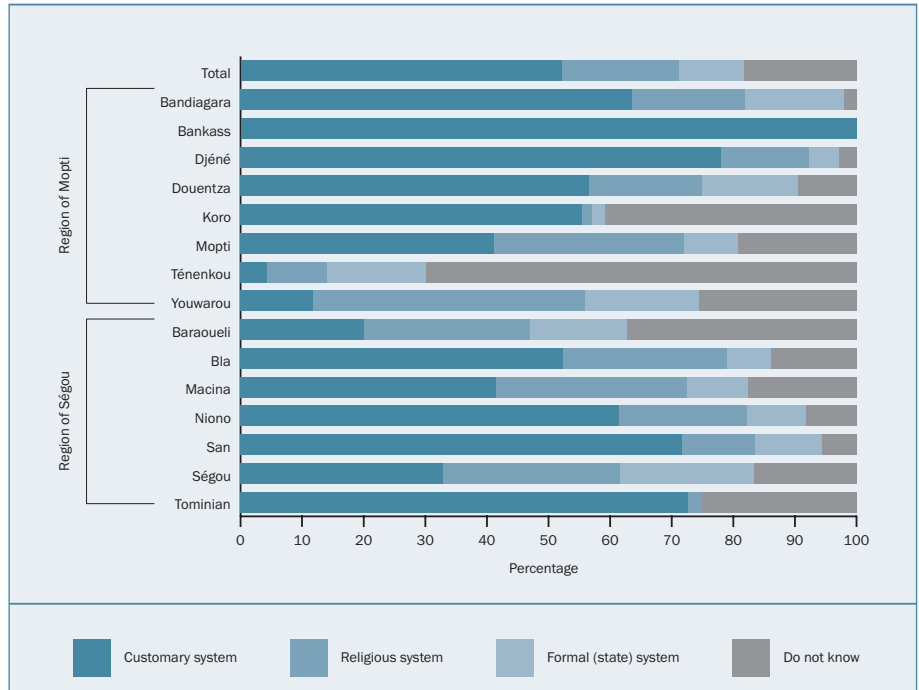
**Figure 2.** Answers from 2097 respondents to a survey question relating to which authorities they consulted in the event of a severe crime or a minor dispute at the local level

### Respect for the rule of law and human rights

The findings of the study highlight the predominant role of traditional authorities (e.g. traditional chiefs) in conflict resolution at the local level in Mali's central regions; however, the choice of preferred authority differs according to the type of conflict.

Approximately 60 per cent of the survey respondents said they prioritize consulting traditional authorities for minor conflict resolution (see figure 2). Family and other community members were cited in second and third place respectively, followed by religious authorities in fourth place. The defence and security forces (military, gendarmerie, police and national guard) were cited as the fifth and final resort in cases of minor conflict. The fact that people prefer traditional mechanisms for minor conflict management is not an isolated or new fact. During a focus group discussion held in the village of Dimbal in Mopti, the participants indicated that disputes are usually settled customarily and amicably by consulting caste men (e.g. griots and blacksmiths), the Council of Elders and cousins. They also pointed out that there is an association of older people, *Hogon Kan Mina* ('The Voice of the King' in the Dogon language), which carries out reconciliation efforts in the event of land disputes, failed marriages and so on. Clearly, the use of traditional authorities for minor disputes is common in most localities where formal services are not present or poorly represented.

Similarly, the majority of respondents (53 per cent) said they also turn to these traditional authorities in the event of a serious crime. The defence and



**Figure 3.** Survey answers to a question relating to which justice system individuals considered the most impartial, by total (2097 respondents) and cercles by region

security forces came second (24 per cent) and political authorities came third (9 per cent) in this regard. The data points to the existence of an institutional duality of traditional and state authorities, with respondents expressing mistrust for the latter.

Due to a weak physical presence in the two central regions, state legal institutions do not exercise all of their sovereign functions, leaving the initiative to traditional, local institutions.<sup>7</sup> The survey data shows that respondents perceive traditional legal institutions as being more legitimate than state ones. This dependence on service provision by non-state (local) authorities impacts relations between the population and the formal justice system. As a direct consequence, the customary system is perceived as more impartial by 52 per cent of the population surveyed, well ahead of the religious system (19 per cent) and the formal system (10 per cent). In other words, a total of 71 per cent of respondents regard local customary and religious authorities as more impartial in terms of court decisions.

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the Bankass and Djenné cercles in Mopti and the San and Tominian cercles in Ségou, and is linked to respondents’ lack of confidence in the state judicial system (see figure 3).<sup>8</sup> The current situation in Mopti and Ségou, characterized by a precarious security environment and the lessening credibility of state institutions, may

<sup>7</sup> Bleck, J., and Michelitch, K., ‘On the primacy of weak public service provision in rural Africa: Malians redefine “state breakdown” amidst 2012 political crisis’, Afrobarometer Working Paper no. 155, 2015; and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), ‘Étude de cas 4 : Autorités traditionnelles et religieuses dans la gouvernance locale au Mali’ [Case study 4: Traditional and religious authorities in local governance in Mali], SDC/Institute of Development Studies(IDS)/ Helvetas/Swisspeace case studies, Oct.–Dec. 2015, pp. 13–14.

<sup>8</sup> A cercle is a subdivision of a region. Mali is divided into 10 regions (and 1 capital district, Bamako) and 56 administrative districts known as cercles. Mopti has 8 cercles and Ségou has 7.





further encourage people's recourse to traditional and religious institutions, with potential long-term implications for the legitimacy of the state and its administration.

### III. Socio-economic development

The study's findings show that economic activities in central Mali focus almost exclusively on feeding the family, rather than accumulating capital for future investments or improving living conditions. The economy is essentially based on the primary sector and dependent on precarious resources: poorly secured land titles, and limited access to water resources, markets and economic inputs. The populations in Mali's central regions are, therefore, particularly vulnerable to climate and security shocks, and have few alternative livelihoods in the event of a crisis.<sup>9</sup>

*Mali's central regions have few alternative livelihoods in the event of a crisis*

#### **Economic sectors**

Traditionally, the populations of Mopti and Ségou differentiate themselves from one another according to their dominant economic activities. However, community groups do not depend on a single economic activity, rather they diversify their livelihoods.<sup>10</sup> For example, 77 per cent of households in both regions practise agriculture (as agricultural farmers), 74 per cent practise animal husbandry (as herders or shepherds) and 13 per cent practise fishing (as fishermen). The survey results show a similar socio-occupational distribution across villages in the two regions, except for in the Koro cercle in Mopti, where the proportion of livestock owners outweighs that of farmers.

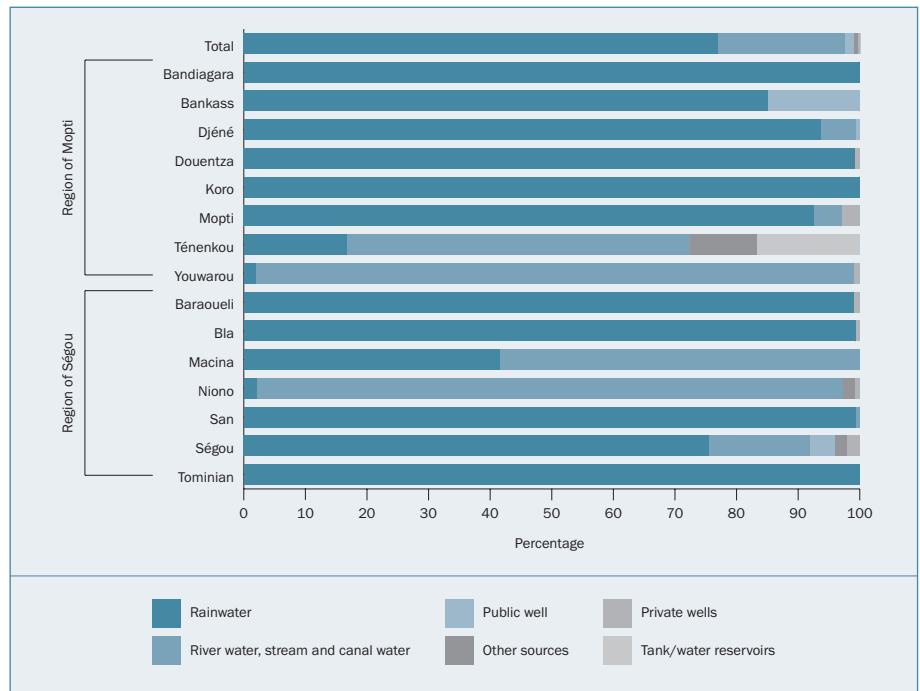
Agriculture is particularly dependent on rainfall and Malian land tenure regulations. About 87 per cent of agricultural farmers claim to own a field or agricultural area, but only 12 per cent hold a land title, and the majority of these (58 per cent) acquired this title as a family inheritance. Only 9 per cent of those who hold a land title were able to obtain it from taxes and domains services.<sup>11</sup> In other words, 88 per cent of agricultural farmers do not hold land titles for their farms, and the majority of those rent the land (68 per cent).

The survey results also highlight the high level of dependence on rainwater (77 per cent of respondents) and river, stream and canal water (21 per cent of respondents) for agricultural irrigation. This dependence on natural sources of water is an issue in all the cercles covered by the study (see figure 4). During one focus group discussion held in a village in Ségou, an adviser to the village chief stated the following: "We encountered difficulties due to the delay in

<sup>9</sup> Butt, T., McCarl, B. and Kergna, A., 'Policies for reducing agricultural sector vulnerability to climate change in Mali', *Climate Policy*, vol. 5, no. 6 (2006); and United States Agency for International Development, 'Mali climate vulnerability mapping', 18 Feb. 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Economic activities are not mutually exclusive in Mali's central regions. Many farmers produce both livestock and crops, and many breeders are farmers at the same time.

<sup>11</sup> Taxes and domains services are local units of the Malian Public Administration. They report to the Directorate General of Taxes (Direction Générale des Impôts, DGI), which is part of the Ministry of Finance. The DGI determines the bases on which taxes are levied: state taxes (corporation, income, value-added, and registration and stamp duties) and other local taxes (housing, municipal services and business).



**Figure 4.** Survey answers to a question regarding individual’s main source of water supply for agricultural production, by total (2097 respondents) and cercles by region

the irrigation of fields. There was not enough water in the canal to water the fields; agricultural work has been delayed . . . We had to use machines to pump water from the canal to supply the fields, and then transplant.”<sup>12</sup>

Few survey respondents reported using alternative sources such as private or public wells or water reservoirs, which actually dry up during the dry season. Concerns associated with the climate (e.g. drought, floods and storms) were also explicitly mentioned by 19 per cent of respondents as a primary difficulty in their practice of agriculture.

Considering that 95 per cent of respondents stated their crops were mainly intended for family consumption (compared to only 1 per cent who sell their products), it is clear that the populations in Mali’s two central regions are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks. In the current context of climate change and widespread instability, a poor harvest could have devastating consequences for farming households that do not have spare resources to allocate to the health or schooling of their children, and could plunge them into extreme food insecurity.

Animal husbandry (e.g. cattle, sheep and goats) is the second-highest form of economic activity (74 per cent of households) in the regions. Traditionally, families own herds of livestock, which usually belong to the head of the household and the shepherds in charge of their maintenance are the head’s children or relatives. Livestock ownership can also be concentrated in the hands of wealthy private investors (e.g. traders, elected officials and civil servants). They then entrust their cattle to the care of shepherds, mostly Fulani pastoralists, who lead them to pasture. However, the majority of

<sup>12</sup> Focus group participant, Adviser to the village chief, Missira K07, Niono cercle, Ségou, Feb. 2019.



those practising animal husbandry (64 per cent) said that animals are usually entrusted to them by a fellow villager, who asks them to take care of the livestock for a period of time. Some other respondents (18 per cent) indicated that livestock had been entrusted to them by a resident of another village.

### **The impact of instability on the economy**

The study shows that lack of stability due to the security situation has had a significant impact on the economy and people of central Mali. For 60 per cent of the survey respondents, the security situation has had an impact on economic activities. Agriculture and trade are the most affected, accounting for 35 per cent and 31 per cent of the responses respectively. The livestock sector has also been affected. Indeed, cattle raids have become recurrent in Mali's central regions and affected the pastoralist, mostly Fulani, communities there. Focus group participants in Soubala in the Mopti region described the impossibility of letting animals graze in the bush because of the risk of them being taken by armed bandits and how they have been forced to change their habits: 'We used to bring the herds of animals to the border with Burkina Faso. Now, with the current climate of insecurity, we lead the flock towards the Kany-Bozon areas.'<sup>13</sup>

*The security situation has had a significant impact on the economy—agriculture and trade, in particular—and people of central Mali*

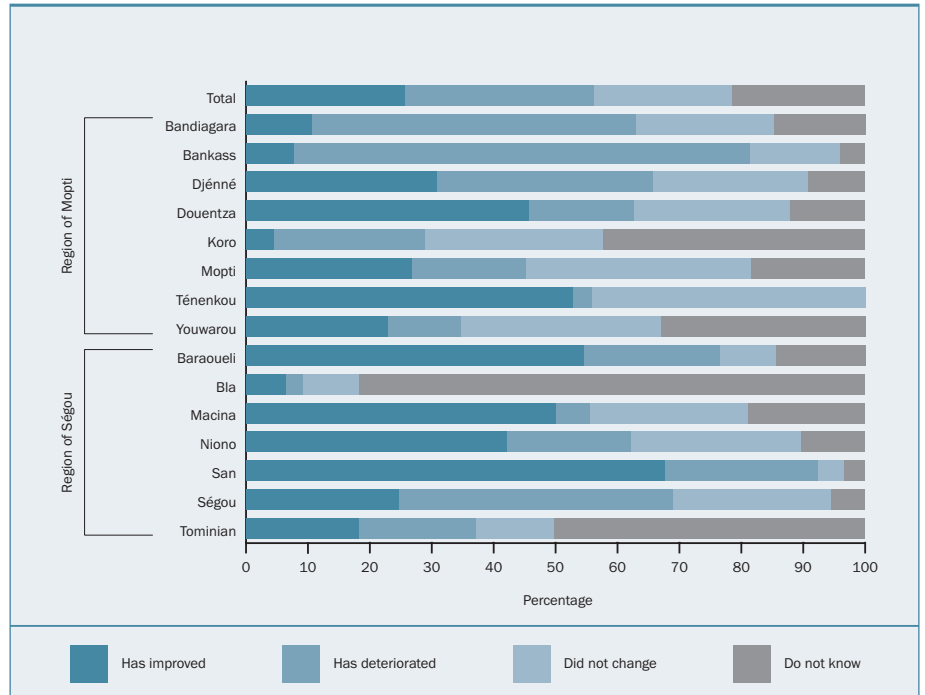
When asked whether security issues have affected genders differently, about 79 per cent of the respondents said that men and women have been equally affected, compared to 17 per cent who felt that men have been more affected.

## **IV. Security**

Overall, the baseline study shows that people in Mali's central regions tend to report a significant deterioration in security at the national level but a perceived improvement in their immediate environment (village or neighbourhood). Nevertheless, lack of security is a significant concern and a large proportion of survey respondents indicated that they feel personally in danger. This climate or widespread feeling of insecurity severely limits the movement of people and has a considerable impact on their access to services and mobility to carry out economic activities (e.g. access to markets and the exchange of goods).

Similarly, respondents presented a negative view of the effectiveness of institutional security actors. As a result, people seem to be increasingly turning to informal security actors, such as non-state armed groups, who are more present locally and considered to be more effective than the police, army or gendarmerie. This trend then further reinforces security risks, highlighting the lack of state capacity to provide security services.

<sup>13</sup> Focus group participant, Soubala, Bankass cercle, Mopti, Feb. 2019. For more information on increased armed banditry and cattle theft, see Thiam, A., 'Centre du Mali: enjeux et dangers d'une crise négligée' [Central Mali: Challenges and dangers of a neglected crisis], Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 19 Apr. 2017.



**Figure 5.** Survey answers to a question related to individual’s perceptions of the change in the security situation in Mali at the national level, by total (2097 respondents) and cercles by region

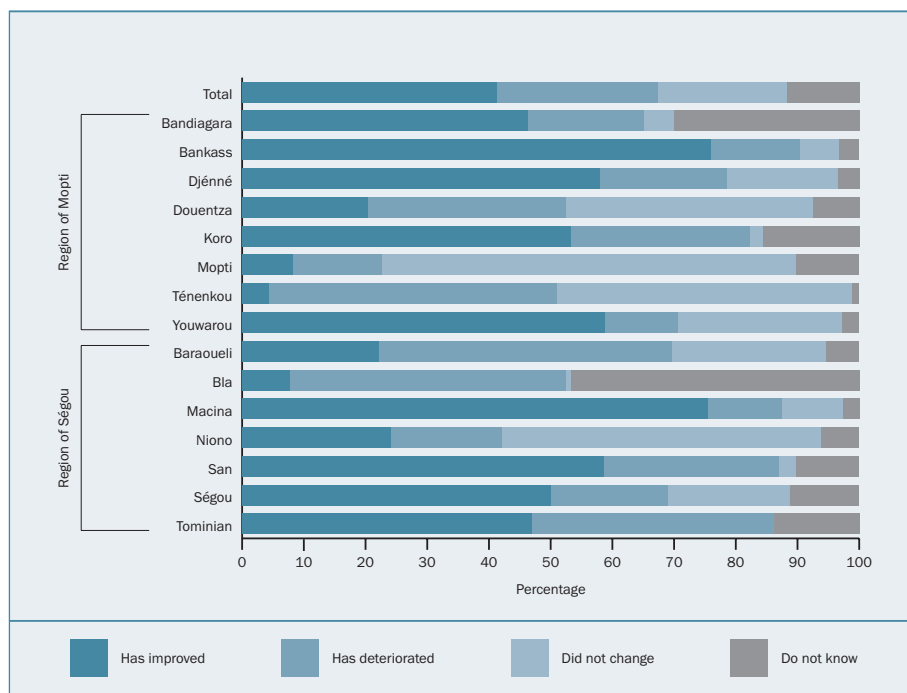
### Perceptions of security

In assessing Mali’s security situation, both nationally and locally, the survey responses show the power of perception among local populations in the central regions. When asked about developments in security in Mali as a whole from December 2018 to February 2019, about 30 per cent of the respondents thought security had deteriorated, compared to about 25 per cent who thought there had been some improvement (see figure 5). When asked the same question with regard to their own localities, 21 per cent said it had deteriorated, compared to about 41 per cent who believed it had improved (see figure 6).<sup>14</sup>

However, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database shows that there were 317 recorded fatalities in the regions of Mopti and Ségou between December 2018 and February 2019, compared to 217 in the 3 previous months (Sep.–Nov. 2018), which is an increase of 100 fatalities. These results clearly indicate that there is a gap between perception and reality. There were also some differences depending on which cercle respondents were in, for example, the national security situation was perceived more favourably by those in the cercle of Mopti than the situation in their own locality.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) website, <<https://www.acleddata.com/data/>>, accessed 9 Dec. 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The cercle of Mopti is one of the eight administrative subdivisions of the Mopti region.



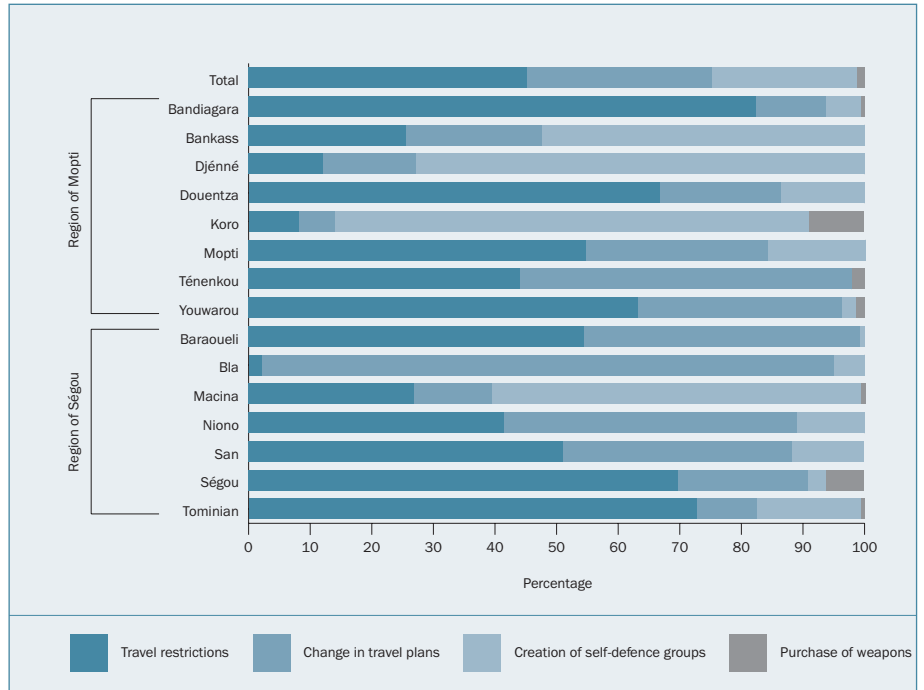
**Figure 6.** Survey answers to a question related to individual’s perceptions of the change in the security situation in Mali at the local level, by total (2097 respondents) and cercles by region

**Strategies for coping with security threats**

In order to adapt to security threats and circumvent danger to themselves, the populations in Mali’s central regions have changed their habits and made their own security arrangements. Among the most common strategies are restricting travel (45 per cent of survey respondents) and changing travel patterns (30 per cent) to bypass areas at risk (see figure 7). Although the survey did not address this issue in any more depth, it is likely that these changes to movement have had consequences for people’s access to market-places and public services, especially for those located in remote rural areas. In fact, satellite imagery has shown how agricultural land use has been limited by the ongoing insecurity: land further away from dwellings has been progressively less cultivated as violence has spread through central Mali.<sup>16</sup>

The creation of self-defence groups also appears to be a key way in which people are dealing with security threats. Indeed, 23 per cent of respondents reported that they have turned to such non-state groups for safety purposes, particularly in the cercles of Bankass, Djénné and Koro in Mopti, and Macina in Ségou. This trend was also reflected in the various focus group discussions held in the regions, where it was claimed that more and more young people are setting up watch groups to protect their villages against possible attacks, particularly at night.

<sup>16</sup> World Food Programme Mali, ‘Analyse satellitaire des dynamiques de culture dans la région de Mopti’ [Satellite analysis of crop dynamics in the Mopti region], 10 Dec. 2019.



**Figure 7.** Survey answers to a question related to selected strategies for coping with security threats, by total (2097 respondents) and cercles by region

### Perceptions of security actors

Survey responses indicate that different security actors vary in their presence in Mopti and Ségou and do not enjoy the same presumption of effectiveness. Since the beginning of the crisis in Mali in 2012 and the rapid deterioration of the security environment in Mopti from 2015, the state’s retreat in parts of the north and the centre of the country has created a security vacuum. This has prompted people to organize themselves, and resorting to non-state security actors is clearly linked to people’s perceptions of the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of formal security actors. One participant in a focus group of young people from a rural community made the following comment on the perceived lack of support from the Malian Army: “There is no more security in our locality. At the beginning of the crisis, the national defence and security forces came from time to time to keep us safe. They left a free phone number in case of insecurity. Once, when a village was attacked, the Malian Army was informed immediately but it did not come.”<sup>17</sup>

According to respondents, the security actors that are least present in the two regions are international actors, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force and MINUSMA, and state actors, such as the police and customs. Among the state security actors that respondents perceive to have an intermediate level of presence are the gendarmerie, water and forestry agents, and the Malian Army. However, these security actors are perceived to be less present in central Mali than non-state security actors, such as armed militias and self-defence groups.

The perception of the level of effectiveness of security actors also depends strongly on their status: state versus non-state. Indeed, the populations in

<sup>17</sup> Focus group participant, Group of young people, Koubewel Koudia, Douentza cercle, Mopti, Feb. 2019.





central Mali grant a high presumption of effectiveness to non-state security actors, whereas international and subregional actors are considered the least effective. The proximity of self-defence groups to a specific community, in particular, confers a level of trust in the non-state armed groups. National defence and security forces, on the other hand, are often considered as foreigners and external to the local contexts.<sup>18</sup>

To the extent that non-state security groups are created to defend given populations, the security situation in central Mali could be further complicated by the absence of a security policy that allows the state to regain control over the legitimate use of force. In other words, these self-defence groups could continue to fill the void created by the weakness or absence of state authority in these regions, with all the consequences that this implies in terms of confrontations between different militias, extrajudicial executions or disregard for human rights.

## V. Conclusions

The security situation in Mali's central regions remains highly volatile with a number of threats directly impacting the populations of Mopti and Ségou, especially the most vulnerable groups such as agricultural farmers. Other long-standing and interconnected challenges, particularly those of governance and socio-economic development, continue to hinder sustainable development in the two regions and hamper their return to peace and stability. These challenges need to be better understood, but poor access to the country's central regions has resulted in a knowledge gap regarding people's needs, priorities and expectations, all of which are crucial for successful intervention strategies.

The security and development indices that SIPRI has developed in collaboration with Point Sud have been designed to fill this knowledge gap and have formed the basis of the study presented in this paper. Using a bottom-up, evidence-based approach, which is built on inputs taken directly from local perspectives every three months, these indicators allow for the constant monitoring of changing trends and situations. Once translated into concrete, locally driven recommendations, they represent a powerful instrument for supporting the policy-making process in Mali and provide a basis for engaging in an evidence-based dialogue on sustainable strategies for peace and development.

*Long-standing and interconnected challenges continue to hinder sustainable development in Mopti and Ségou and hamper their return to peace and stability*

<sup>18</sup> Tobie, A. and Sangaré, B., The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2019), p. 11.

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# THE CHALLENGES OF GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY IN THE CENTRAL REGIONS OF MALI

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