



IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: Malian Women Share Their Views on Their Social, Civil and Political Roles

Findings from Focus Group Discussions with Women across Mali

Conducted April 22-26, 2014
Published July 2013

By Andrea L. Levy
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs



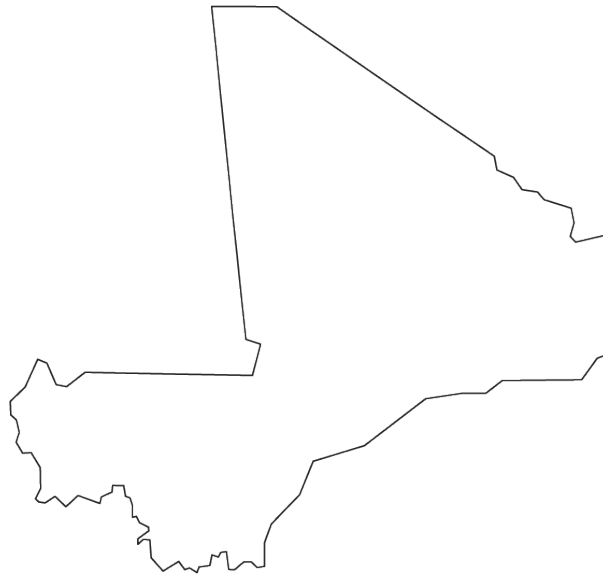
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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies. The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, please visit www.ndi.org.

This study was undertaken with the financial support of the Royal Danish Embassy in Mali as part of NDI's Mainstreaming Gender in Electoral and Political Processes program, a 30-month undertaking from July 2013 through September 2014. The program promotes Malian women's participation in public life by mainstreaming gender in electoral and political processes during Mali's transition period and enabling Malian women to participate more effectively as candidates and voters in the 2013-2014 elections.

PREFACE

Mali overcame significant security, political, and logistical challenges to successfully organize two rounds of a presidential election on July 28 and August 11, 2013, which served as the first step in Mali's transition back to democratic rule following the March 2012 coup d'état. A military junta deposed the country's democratically elected president, and widespread instability derailed scheduled presidential and legislative elections. Shortly after taking office, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, the newly elected President, set the dates for legislative elections, in which approximately 38 percent of the population participated.

Despite the fact that women comprised 53 percent of voters observed at polling places,¹ they continue to be underrepresented in the government, both in number of elected representatives and in government policy and legislation. Only 14 women were elected to parliament, representing 9.5 percent of members of parliament (MPs), fewer than the 15 female MPs who were elected in 2007. Recent public policies further constrain women's rights and political participation. Enacted in 2011, the Family Code stipulated that women must obey their husbands, men are the heads of household, and the legal age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys. Additionally, political party platforms rarely take a systematic or sophisticated approach to addressing women's policy concerns.

This study is based on 12 focus group discussions conducted from April 22-26, 2014 with 118 women participants across seven regions and the capital district in Mali. It was designed to help political party leaders, elected representatives, and government officials better understand women's attitudes and opinions and public policy priorities, and the barriers to access and opportunities that prevent women's inclusion in political processes. NDI's intention is that by understanding these attitudes and opinions, political leaders will be better informed and more inclined to incorporate women's concerns in political party policies. NDI plans to disseminate the study findings and recommendations to political party and government leaders in advance of local elections anticipated in 2015 to encourage parties to incorporate women's concerns in their political campaign positions and messages and policy positions if elected.

Qualitative Methodology: The methodology included in this study is qualitative. As such it is *not* a poll or survey. The purpose of quantitative methodologies, such as polls and surveys, is to

¹ According to findings from domestic observation group *Réseau d'Appui au Processus Electoral au Mali* (APEM), which deployed observers to all regions of Mali in the 2013 election. The findings are not statistically verifiable, and observers were largely concentrated in urban areas.

measure opinion. The purpose of qualitative methodologies, such as the focus group discussions used in this study, is to understand opinion, specifically the meanings, reasons and motivations that underlie commonly held participant opinions. This methodology also allows for the gathering of more subtle and nuanced opinions than is normally possible in a poll and also provides insight into how views may be impacted by group dynamics. This type of in-depth information helps government and party officials and policymakers better understand how participants are viewing key issues and so can provide important clues for how to address misperceptions or to build upon existing opinions. Although an effort was made to ensure the participants included a cross-section of ordinary Malian women, the citizens in this study were not recruited using a statistical random sample, such as is used in polls or surveys, and so the study is not generalizable to the population at large and cannot serve as a measurement of citizen attitude.

Focus Group Discussion Structure and Composition. Focus groups are semi-structured group discussions directed by a moderator, who follows a pre-set guideline. In this case, Malian women – educated professionals – were recruited and hired by NDI Mali on short-term assignment to conduct the research. All underwent training in how to lead the discussions in a neutral and non-leading manner. Groups were held with participants from seven of the eight regions and the capital district of Mali in order to encompass geographic, ethnic and religious diversity. In the Gao, Kayes, Koulikoro and Mopti regions, groups were held in the capital city, and in Mopti, a group was also held in Bandiagara, and in Kayes also in Kita. In the Sikasso region, a group was held in Koutiala, and in the Ségou region, a group was held in San. The groups in each location represented the dominant ethnicities in that region. One of the groups in Bamako comprised internally displaced women from the north (IDPs) in order to ensure that the voices of displaced people were included in the study. The groups in Gao (which included participants from Kidal and Timbuktu as well as Gao) were divided by ethnicity (Tamasheq and Sonhrai) because of the sensitivity of the political situation in the north². To ensure participants felt as free as possible to share their opinions, the discussions were organized by peer group. The groups were divided into two age categories – 18-35 and 36 and over – and to a lesser extent into different educational categories, where the primary goal was to ensure that each group had relatively similar education levels.

² The two groups in Gao consisted of participants from Timbuktu and Kidal as well as Gao. These participants were transported to Gao for the discussions because of the insecurity in those regions during the period of the fieldwork. All of the Tuareg women were from Kidal, while five of the Sonhrai women were from Gao, and five were from Timbuktu.

The moderators worked in pairs, with one leading the discussion and the other taking notes. The sessions were also tape-recorded and then transcribed. (Participants were guaranteed that their comments would not be attributed to them.) The discussions were conducted in French or a local language, as appropriate, and the transcripts were prepared in French. Most of the groups consisted of ten participants, and the discussions lasted from three to four hours.

Participants who met the appropriate ethnic, age and education criteria for each group were identified by NDI civil society organization (CSO) partners located in each region. The CSO partners were instructed to use a modified snowball recruiting method³ to reduce the chances of recruiting known activists or CSO colleagues.

Unless otherwise noted, the conclusions presented here represent views commonly and repeatedly cited by participants during the group discussions. Minority views exist and are communicated in this report only when they are significant or can highlight an illustrative alternate opinion. The focus group locations and participant demographic chart appearing at the end of this report should be consulted to understand the subsets of participants interviewed for this study.

A Snapshot of Public Opinion. Any public opinion research, including focus group discussions, is only a snapshot of opinion at the moment the research is undertaken. Public opinion is dynamic and evolves as people experience and react to major events, particularly in an evolving peace agreement environment. Therefore, the conclusions of this report only represent participant opinions when the research was undertaken (April 2014). After the fieldwork for this study was completed, there were changes in the peace and reconciliation situation (including an attack in Kidal and subsequent agreements signed by rebel groups). As a result, some of the participant attitudes and opinions reflected in this study may have changed.

Participant Perceptions. The perceptions of participants in the focus group discussions, or in any public opinion research, do not necessarily accurately reflect situations and events. People sometimes get facts wrong and often form their opinions based on inaccurate or semi-accurate readings of the world around them. Nevertheless, there is value in examining people's perceptions. Citizens make decisions based on what they believe. Without knowledge of these

³Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus the sample group appears to grow like a rolling snowball. In this case, as noted, the CSO partners did the recruiting and were instructed to recruit participants who were at least one degree removed from their organization.

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perceptions, policymakers and other political actors will not be able to address them. Therefore, the goal of this research is to report the perceptions and opinions of participants, regardless of their factual accuracy, to political and civil society leaders as well as the international community, so these audiences may better understand and respond to the concerns of women.

Outside Influence. Local authorities were informed of the research activities before they began, but every effort was made to ensure there is was no undue influence exerted on the participants in the groups. The focus group discussion guide was not shared with local authorities prior to the group. Additionally, the discussions were held in private meeting rooms, and participants, as noted earlier, were assured of confidentiality. In this study, there was no case in which the findings from one or more groups differed radically from findings in the groups overall, which suggests that any local influence that may have occurred did not impact the research.

This study is intended to help policymakers better understand the views of citizens as they make important decisions that will shape the future of the country. NDI is pleased to share the views of participants with political parties, government officials and other stakeholders as they work to create policies that faithfully take into account the opinions and aspirations of women citizens of Mali.

MAP OF MALI



This map is illustrative only and its inclusion does not imply endorsement of specific geographical boundaries.

Source: www.un.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This qualitative public opinion research study examines Malian women's views about their participation in social, civic and political life and the issues surrounding it. The study's conclusions are drawn from 12 focus group discussions conducted from April 22-26, 2014, across eight regions⁴ and the capital district in Mali. A total of 118 Malian women participated in the study. Each of the findings below is explored in more detail in the *Principal Findings* section of this report, where there also are quotations from participants that further illuminate their opinions on the key issues highlighted here.

I. General Outlook

- **Economic problems are the primary driver of discontent with conditions in Mali. Some participants also mention their concern about the political establishment's lack of attention to citizens' problems.⁵ Some are dismayed about the state of the peace and reconciliation process and the education system, while others point to signs of improvement in each case.** Economic woes top the list of participants' concerns, with complaints about the high cost of living (foodstuffs, housing, land) and the paucity of employment opportunities in general, and for women and youth, specifically. Additionally, some respondents call attention to problems with the political establishment (both local and national) as a reason for their pessimism, complaining that it ignores the concerns of the people, doesn't keep its promises and engages in corruption and favoritism.

For some participants there are other factors besides the economy and the political establishment that contribute to a bleak outlook. Some point out problems with service delivery. Lack of water supply (paired with a paltry rainfall) is particularly a problem in Bandiagara and San, while residents of Bamako complain about lack of electricity and periodic cuts in the electrical supply.

Some participants (particularly those in the north) take a bleak view of the peace and reconciliation process, citing the unsettled security situation up north, threatening signs of renewed war, and a citizenry riven by misunderstanding and disagreements. Others offer a more sanguine assessment, noting the cessation of most of the hostilities and the promising beginnings of the reconstruction and reconciliation process.

Additionally, some participants point to problems with the education system (the cost, strikes, non-attendance by students). Others, however, have noted improvements in the system (without offering much detail). As such, it appears views on education may be specific to a participant's location.

⁴ See footnote on page 3 concerning the composition of the groups in Gao.

⁵ These were spontaneously offered assessments. Later in the discussion, after the issue was raised by the moderators, the lack of attention from the political establishment emerged as a significant concern among many participants.

A minority of participants cites other positive developments in the country such as the president's efforts to end corruption.

II. Women's Role in Social, Civil and Political Life

- **Two principal challenges for women in Mali mentioned by participants are difficulty in finding sufficiently remunerative work because of a lack of education and other factors, and women's low level of representation in government.** Participants describe being caught up in a bind – they're expected to contribute to family finances as a result of the high level of unemployment and underemployment among men, but their ability to earn decent money is severely restricted. The roadblocks are lack of education, traditional beliefs that question women's capacity to handle skilled work even when they're educated, and difficulty gaining access to credit. Additionally, some note the low level of women's representation in local and national government as a challenge for women in Mali. Without a significant number of women in positions of political leadership, they say, the problems faced by women will not be remedied.
- **There is widespread support for women's engagement with civil society as participants say it can yield important benefits.** They say that participation in civil society will allow women to learn skills, exchange ideas, gain access to technical and financial help, advocate for their rights and make advancements on the political front.
- **Women have made some strides in terms of attaining equal rights, but much more work needs to be done particularly in the areas of education, employment and political life, participants contend.** They point out some areas where they believe women have increased opportunities and advantages from the past, such as the right to hold posts of responsibility in civil society and in government even though, as noted above, they feel underrepresented in the latter), to create and join associations, to have access to microcredit to start their own businesses (although, as mentioned above, they note it's difficult to qualify for it), and to have access to better healthcare. Some also note that as a result of awareness campaigns, some men are giving more freedom to their wives, and many mothers and daughters have more say in whom the daughters marry. But they specify a number of different arenas where men have an advantage, including education, employment, political life, land ownership and inheritance, and decision-making in the context of a marriage. The majority of participants want more women to be able to complete their education, have access to increased employment opportunities and financing, and play a bigger role in Mali's political system. They also want men to appreciate that women are as capable as they are and to fully accept that women belong in the workplace and in leadership posts.
- **Women have the potential and ability to be leaders and hold elected positions but are hindered by men's fears, social mores, their own lack of self-confidence and lack of financing, participants maintain.** Participants express

unanimous support for women to hold both local and national elected positions. They say that women are not only better poised than men to understand and advocate for women's concerns, but also they're more apt to care about the concerns of *all* citizens and work to alleviate them. But they feel that men's attitudes and prevailing social mores, in general, act as a brake on women's ambitions. For example, they believe that men dislike the concept of women as leaders and are loathe for women to be positioned above them in a hierarchy. They do not want to see women succeed so they throw barriers in their way and sabotage their efforts. Furthermore, they note that it's difficult for women to attend meetings in the evening as society judges this behavior poorly, men don't want women leaving the house to do this, and women have childcare and housework to attend to. They also say that women can be their own worst enemy because many subscribe to the prevailing prejudice against women and thus doubt the competence of female leaders. In addition, they lack self-confidence so they give up too easily. They also note that a lack of financial resources acts as an impediment to women's ability to engage in politics.

- **Participants contend that women should have much higher representation in government, both local and national, than they currently do, and most are in favor of putting a quota in place to assure a higher percentage of women.** As far as their notions of the "ideal percentage" of women in government for it to be representative and effective, the vast majority are looking for, at minimum, parity. Responses range from 20 percent to 80 percent, with most in the 40-60% range. Most participants are in favor of laws that make it easier for women to compete in elections and reach an "ideal" percentage of posts. They say that without such laws, women won't be able to make sufficient progress. However, a small minority has qualms about this notion of a quota. They believe that women have an equal chance of being elected as men and that the only criterion for election should be one's competence.

III. Political Parties

- **Participants have largely negative associations of political parties and believe they do not pay enough attention to female candidates or women's interests.** When participants are asked about their associations with political parties, the most frequent themes that surface are corruption, dishonesty, failure to keep promises or find solutions, self-interest, discord and divisiveness. They maintain that the only reason the parties offer any attention whatsoever to female candidates is because they need them to attract and mobilize the female vote. They believe that men will never put women at the top of the party list because they don't want them to be elected in place of men. In terms of the level of attention that the parties pay to women's needs and interests, some participants believe the parties never publicly address women's issues at all. Others say the parties pay lip service to women's priorities during campaigns in order to attract their vote but abandon women and ignore their concerns once their candidates are in office.

IV. Voting and Governance

- **Participants are largely aware of the procedures for voting. Additionally, the vast majority participate in elections, with most regarding voting as a duty of citizenship – an indication that they have not lost faith in the democratic process in spite of their discontent with political parties. Some citizens in the north, however, express more cynicism about the process.** The vast majority of participants were able to delineate the various steps of voting and claim that they do typically vote.⁶ Many say they vote to exercise their rights as citizens. A small minority (from the north) claims they base their vote on whether or not they will personally gain from a candidate's election or on the gifts they receive from the candidate during the campaign process.
- **Participants believe that communication with a political party representative or civil servant is intimidating and rarely results in a positive outcome.** Many say they have never attempted any sort of interaction with a public official, either because they are intimidated, assume they will be ignored, or believe they will be given promises that won't be fulfilled. Some have made attempts but describe them as fruitless. By contrast, some participants in Koulikoro and Banconi seem encouraged about their access to public officials.
- **Participants have mixed views about how well the central government takes into account their concerns. With respect to the National Assembly alone, most say it is too early to judge the current Assembly,⁷ but they believe that previous Assemblies were not sympathetic to women's issues. Participants are practically unanimous, though, in their negative assessments of the responsiveness of their communal authorities.** Most participants believe that the central government has not yet taken any concrete steps to work on issues they care about, and they note that there aren't many women in the government. Some participants are in a wait-and-see mode, while a minority is pleased with the government's work so far, citing anti-corruption initiatives, steps taken to alleviate youth unemployment, more communication from the government to the people, and some healthcare initiatives.

Most participants reserve judgment about the performance of the National Assembly as it is newly installed, but they express a lot of cynicism about previous National Assemblies, complaining that they did not pay attention to women's concerns and that once the deputies were elected, they never fulfilled their promises.

With respect to their communal governments, many participants point to unfulfilled promises and dreadful conditions in their community (e.g., gutters strewn with

⁶ There were a couple of women who had turned 18 after the last elections and thus had not yet had the opportunity to vote.

⁷ The National Assembly had been in power only a few months at the time of the fieldwork (since January 2014).

rubbish, flooded streets) which have not been remedied by the authorities. Many also accuse their local authorities of funding and awarding projects and distributing resources solely on the basis of nepotism or favoritism.

- **Participants advocate three different strategies for women to spur the government to action on issues of importance to them: holding direct meetings with officials if a specific project is concerned; conducting public outreach in order to mobilize and activate women to advocate for their needs; and using the power of the ballot box to vote out officials who don't meet their expectations.** Perhaps in light of the skepticism they had earlier expressed about garnering attention from public officials, they suggest that meeting a public official as a group will be more powerful than meeting as an individual. Additionally, some suggest targeting women leaders as they are likely to be more responsive to women's concerns. With respect to public outreach, in order to portray women's concerns and how best to address them, they advocate publishing articles, creating television sketches, creating country-wide awareness campaigns, holding workshops and conferences and organizing a march or other large event. Finally, they clearly state their intentions to vote out of power those elected officials who do not meet their expectations.

V. Peace and Reconciliation

- **Participants from the north, including the internally displaced women, have more information about the peace and reconciliation process and are more pessimistic than others about its progress. Yet no matter their level of optimism, all participants believe the government needs to intensify its efforts to come to a full and final resolution to the conflict.**⁸ All participants express a fervent desire for peace and a permanent solution to the conflict. They worry that the conflict may spread down south. Many advocate getting to the source of the dispute and continuing to sensitize both sides in favor of peace and reconciliation. Some attach caveats, specifying that they want the territorial integrity of Mali to be maintained and that the rebels need to understand that "the country belongs to all of us." A few place the emphasis on the need to strengthen the army, by giving the troops adequate training and salaries and recruiting more soldiers.
- **Participants believe that women, religious leaders and young people need to have a role in the peace and reconciliation process.** Participants are unanimous in their belief that women are wonderful mediators and are focused on peace, and when they are engaged in an issue, nothing will stop them from attaining their goal. They note that women can have tremendous influence on their families and their communities. In addition, they say women deserve to play a role because they were heavily victimized by the conflict. A few go so far as to say that without the participation of women, peace cannot be achieved. Participants suggest that women can organize meetings focused on dialogue and reconciliation and take part in the

⁸ These groups took place before the armed Tuareg groups signed an accord in Algiers affirming their commitment to dialogue with Bamako (on June 9, 2014).

negotiations. They also believe women can help forestall renewed conflict by alerting authorities if they see suspicious activity. Participants also believe it is important to include Christian and Muslim leaders in the peace and reconciliation process because they have moral authority and because religious differences were at the core of the crisis. Furthermore, they say that young people should be involved because they are the future of the country.

VI. Concerns of Displaced Women

- **In addition to their financial struggles and difficulties integrating into life in Bamako, displaced women face bureaucratic hurdles. They don't believe their situation can be truly rectified until full peace is at hand.** As their family's income-producing activities were interrupted by the conflict, the displaced women living in Bamako have difficulty affording food and adequate housing. They also have trouble integrating into Bamako life and have encountered bureaucratic obstructions in trying to deal with their problems. They believe that full reconstruction can only happen once there's a comprehensive peace agreement so they express a strong desire for the government to redouble its efforts to achieve a real and durable solution to the conflict.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The findings outlined below are based on 12 focus group discussions conducted from April 22-26, 2014. The discussions were conducted in 10 locations across eight regions⁹ and the capital district in Mali, and a total of 118 Malian women participated in the study. Group discussions were conducted with women of various ethnicities, age groups and education levels. Consult the location and participant demographic chart in Appendix A for further information on group composition. See Appendix B for the discussion guide used in the groups.

I. General Outlook

- 1. The majority of participants believe Mali is moving in the wrong direction, with economic woes emerging as the primary driver of discontent. Some also mention their concern about the political establishment's lack of attention to citizens' problems. Some participants are pessimistic about the state of the peace and reconciliation process and the education system, while others point to signs of improvement in each case.**

Economic woes top the list of participants' concerns, with complaints about the high cost of living (foodstuffs, housing, land) and the paucity of employment opportunities in general, and for women and youth, specifically. A few participants concerned about employment highlight nepotistic hiring practices, saying that only those with connections are able to find employment. Tamasheq women in the north bemoan the interruption of their work caused by the 2012 conflict and the resulting negative impact on their families' finances.

Anyone who earned 500f before, do not earn more than 300f today. Food and others that were cheaper before are no longer today. (Young woman, Ségou)

We the poor, we cannot have our own concession for lack of funds. If you decide to buy land, they will tell you a price that you cannot afford in 10 years of work. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

If we take the case of Koulikoro, the HUICOMA factory that is the only provider of employment, is stopped. All the women from Koulikoro are in the river trying to dredge up sand. Those who are not in the river are in the forest to cut wood. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

To move forward, we must abandon patronage and give places to those who deserve them. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Some respondents call attention to problems with the political establishment (both local and national) as a reason for their pessimism, complaining that it ignores the concerns of the people, doesn't keep its promises and engages in corruption and favoritism.

⁹ See footnote on page 3 concerning the composition of the groups in Gao.

The electoral promises not fulfilled by our deputies ... [is a problem]. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Political parties do not keep their promises. Once elected, they forget their promises and do not return to base. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

In general, Tamasheq women in the north exhibit the most discontent with present conditions in the country. Along with economic concerns, they also cite continuing security issues in Kidal and the social fallout from the crisis (including the high number of widows and orphans and juvenile delinquency as a result of the closure of schools).

We are tired of the war. Nothing works. We don't have any jobs.

We have to take care of the children, we have widows and orphans.

War has dispersed us, our husbands and our children.

For some participants there are other factors besides the economy and political establishment that contribute to a bleak outlook. Some point out problems with service delivery. Lack of water supply (paired with a paltry rainfall) is particularly a problem in Bandiagara and San, while residents of Bamako complain about lack of electricity and periodic cuts in the electrical supply.

We wake up at 3 or 4am to fetch water, the wells are dry and there is a lot of tap water cut, so Mali is not progressing in the right direction. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

There are untimely power outages. (Adult woman, Banconi)

With respect to the peace and reconciliation process, some (notably Tamasheq in the north) take a bleak view, citing the unsettled security situation particularly in Kidal but also in Gao, threatening signs of renewed war, and a citizenry riven by misunderstanding and disagreements. They are convinced that the country will not be able to move forward and attend to its problems until the conflict is completely settled. Others offer a more sanguine assessment, noting the cessation of most of the hostilities and the promising beginnings of the reconstruction and reconciliation process. The Sonhrai women in Gao are somewhat more positive than the Tamasheq women, citing increased security which allows them freer movement than during the occupation.

Mali is not doing well, there is no security, and Malian military does not have a voice in Kidal. (Tamasheq Adult woman, Kidal)

No security in Gao. Every week, they launched rockets. Let's not speak of Kidal; there is a vehicle of the MINUSMA that stepped on a landmine before yesterday. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

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Mali is moving in the right direction because the crisis known by our country through the conflict in the north is being resolved. The processes of reconciliation and reconstruction are underway. (Young woman, Kita)

I will say that Mali is moving in the right direction because the problem of the north has improved a lot, we rarely hear about the war. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

As for me I would say the situation is a little good because before we could not travel. Today, we thank God, we can go where we want go, so it's fine. (Young woman Sonhrai, Gao)

Some participants point to problems with the education system. Some specific issues that they cite are: the cost of sending children to school (which makes it unaffordable for those without means), girls who are not attending school, and interruptions to children's schooling. The interruptions have occurred in the north, where schools have not been operating, and in places like Mopti, where strikes have cancelled classes. Others, however, have noted improvements in the system (without offering much detail). As such, it appears views on education may be specific to a participant's location.

You go throughout the school year to see your child go to and from school saying that there is a strike, we suffer to support them, we want our children to study, so Mali is not progressing in the right direction. (Adult woman, Mopti)

In terms of education, there are girls who do not go to school, who are walking around with men in time to go to school. It's not good, you know. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

School education is going in the right direction. (Young woman, Kita)

A minority, either spontaneously or when prompted by a moderator, was willing to cite other positive developments in Mali's governance, such as the president's efforts to end corruption. IDPs in Bamako mention that the displaced people from the north are beginning to move back home.

During the president's visit to Mopti ... he intends to end the dual function, that is to say one person is no longer working in public and private institutions, and if it works well, the son of the poor will find employment. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Mali is moving in the right direction because the new president is fighting against corruption. There were controls and arrests following embezzlement and murder. He is the right man in the right place. (Adult woman, Mopti)

II. Women's Role in Social, Civic and Political Life

- 1. Participants most often mention one particular challenge when asked about those that confront Malian women. They say that women face many barriers in helping**

to contribute to family finances, although this has increasingly become one of their responsibilities. Lack of education and other factors limit their ability to find sufficiently remunerative work. Another challenge for women noted by participants is their low level of representation in government.

Economic difficulties also rise to the fore when participants are asked about particular challenges that women face in Mali. They note how onerous it is to meet family expenses and put food on the table. They describe being caught up in a bind – they’re expected to contribute to family finances as a result of the high level of unemployment and underemployment among men, but their ability to earn decent money is severely restricted. They’re forced into poorly remunerated petty trading activities.

One major roadblock is lack of education. Another is traditional beliefs that question women’s capacity to handle higher-level, skilled work – even women with higher education have trouble finding work because women are not taken seriously as candidates, they maintain. (Additionally, they say it’s difficult to be hired without having connections, although they say this is not a problem particular to women – it affects men, as well.) Yet another barrier to making an adequate income is difficulty gaining access to credit. They note that even when credit is ostensibly available to them (through programs like the institution of microfinance), many don’t qualify because they lack guarantors.

When you finish with studies we do not find a job, especially us poor. If you do not have a contact that can help you, you will not have a job. Even if you have a degree, there are a lot of people I know in Bandiagara who are in the same situation. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

The great challenge of Malian women is illiteracy. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

Illiterate women are many, myself I am illiterate, I have not been to school. I have a small business that does not work, and if you are not educated you cannot find work. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

Those who are educated do not have access to employment and those who are not educated have no IGAs. And even if they have one it’s a small business that does not bring much. (Adult woman, Kayes)

It’s always the problem of youth employment because after studies the diplomas are put away - we do not have a job. If we can find a solution to youth unemployment, it will please us. (Young woman, Kita)

While looking at MFIs [microfinance institutions] that have been created to facilitate women's access to credit, we see the opposite happening since women do not qualify as they do not have means to access it [financial and material guarantees]. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Additionally, some note the low level of women’s representation in local and national government as a challenge for women in Mali. Without a significant number of women in positions of political leadership, they say, the problems faced by women will not be remedied.

Women do not have enough room at the National Assembly and above at other decision-making bodies as well as at the community level. Out of 10 mayors there's only one woman. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Women are poorly represented in decision-making bodies, National Assembly, Government. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

The appointment of women in government is low. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

Whether they are there to defend the cause of women, it is the very life of the nation. If they are not there, people will forget us. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

2. While women are now required to assume more financial responsibility for the family, they must also continue to handle their traditional duties – which create a heavy burden for them.

Participants describe the considerable amount of work and responsibility that fall on the shoulders of Malian women. They say that women have truly become the mainstay of the family as they must contend with their traditional duties (taking care of the household including cooking, cleaning, looking after the children) as well as seek ways to make money to keep the household afloat and pay for their children's education (not an easy endeavor, as noted above). Most note that there is an unequal repartition of tasks in the household as few men are willing to help women with their traditional chores.

The woman is the pillar of the community. Women support family's expenses, because men are unemployed. They carry small activities to maintain their homes. (Adult woman, Banconi)

Before women took care of the kitchen and men fetched the price of condiment. Nowadays some women fetch prices of condiments and also take care of the kitchen while the man is sleeping. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Over 85% of the tasks fall to women. (Tamasheq Adult woman, Kidal)

Even in civil marriage, except in the context of community of property, men had tasks they no longer assume: housing the wife, meeting their needs, her health care, etc. This is no longer done. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

The role of women in the community has seen much change in recent years. Before, our mothers were satisfied with what our fathers brought back home. But nowadays, as long as the woman does not get up to look for money, there is no food. We are trying to feed our families because men have resigned from their duty. (Adult woman, Banconi)

3. There is widespread support for women's engagement with civil society as participants say it can yield important benefits.

Participants are very supportive of women's presence in civil society. They see nothing but benefits for women and the country as whole. They say that participation will allow women to prosper: learn skills, exchange ideas and gain access to technical and financial help. They also believe that participation in civil society will allow women to advocate for their rights and make advancements on the political front.

Yes, they need to help each other and grow and then when you are in groups, there is an exchange of ideas that can encourage you and give you the will to undertake to make something of your life. (Young woman, Koutiala)

I think it's great that women are actively involved CSOs, because if you participate, you learn to do something, like a job. Even if the contract of the NGO ends, what you have learnt rest forever. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

We can learn a lot because it's in groups that we found technical and financial support. They can also enable you to find a source of income by learning how to do something. (Adult woman, Kayes)

To claim our rights, women should actively participate in CSOs. (Young woman, Kita)

It will also move us forward politically. (Young woman, Koutiala)

4. Women have made strides in terms of attaining equal rights, but much more work needs to be done particularly in the areas of education, employment and political life, participants contend.

Most participants believe that men and women do not have equal rights in their community. Some points out that women have equal rights in theory, but not in practice.

We have the same rights in legal terms. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

They specify a number of different arenas where men have an advantage, including education, employment, political life, land ownership and inheritance, and decision-making in the context of a marriage. Boys have more of a chance than girls to continue their education, and this imbalance in educational attainment holds women back later in life.

Women aren't given the opportunity to engage in sufficiently remunerative work (as noted previously). There are a number of different factors which inhibit women from holding elected positions (discussed in the next section). Men can make decisions for their family and within their community without consulting their wives.

They do not have the same rights, because even in the recruitment men are taken into account more than women. Men have higher priority than the woman even if she can do the job. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

If the property inherited is a house, it is the man who keeps it and the woman does not enjoy it because she gets married somewhere else and leaves it to her brothers. (Adult woman, Mopti)

According to Islam, in the area of distribution of the estate, the woman gets half the inheritance rights. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Decision making within the household relies on the man. (Adult woman, Banconi)

Men and women do not have equal rights in our community. Men can make decisions in local development without consulting women, so in the end women will get nothing. (Young woman, Kita)

Nevertheless, participants do point out some areas where they believe women have increased opportunities and advantages from the past – first and foremost, the right to hold leadership posts, such as appointed and elected positions and heads of associations. (They do specify, as noted earlier, that they feel underrepresented in government.)

Women can create and join associations and work on issue of importance to them. They can receive microcredit to jumpstart their own businesses. But they point out that it's not easy to fulfill the conditions to receive the credit, and some women are unable to pay back the loans because they don't earn enough from their petty trading activities. Thanks to the former First Lady, Madame Touré Lobbo Traoré, they have access to better healthcare during their pregnancies, and caesarian sections are free. And although equal access to education is still an issue, more girls than before are attending school, and more women are attending university.

Before it was rare to see women leaders, but today we have women directors, women ministers and even military women. (Young woman, Koutiala)

We have a woman member of the parliament and elected women. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

For example, before there were no women ministers, but now there are. (Young woman, San)

They have the right ... of access to education and health care. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

There has been a change; there have been a lot of awareness initiatives on girls' education. So the percentage of women who goes to school has increased. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

Some also note that as a result of awareness campaigns, the Malian mentality toward women is evolving. For example, some men are giving more freedom to their wives, and many mothers and daughters have more say in whom the daughters marry.

Before, women did not have a say on the marriage of their daughter. Even if this one does not like the man, she will die in this marriage but you do not divorce ... But now we're getting married to the man you love, and our moms have their say. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Nevertheless, the majority of participants are not comfortable with the current status of women and want to have more opportunities. Specifically, they want more women to be able to complete their education, they want access to increased employment opportunities and financing, and they want to play a bigger role in Mali's political life. A few women also suggest improved opportunities for women with no education to learn a trade, such as soap making or textile dyeing.

I am not happy with the current situation, because I want men and women to have equal rights in all areas. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

We need women graduates to have jobs. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

We want equality between men and women in rights and duties. All a man can have a woman can have it too; we should not have to give them more opportunities than women. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

I want more rights to work and have degrees. (Young woman, San)

[I want] microfinance loans be given without interests because these days the trade is unprofitable. (Adult woman, Mopti)

In our community, we do not even have rights. We want greater involvement of women in politics. Allow us to assert our leadership and to run for elected positions (MPs, mayors). (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

Yet we want more women in decision-making positions. (Adult woman, Kayes)

We want a woman president in Mali. (Young woman, San)

For me the situation should move forward, especially for women who didn't go to school. They should be grouped together to create IGAs by creating sewing centers, training in soap fabrication, dyeing, so they have other activities outside of housework. (Young woman, Kita)

And although, as noted above, they have started to observe a shift in attitudes within society about women, they think much more work needs to be done. They want men to appreciate that women are as capable as they are and to fully accept that women belong in the workplace and in leadership posts.

5. Women have the potential and ability to be leaders and hold elected positions but are hindered by men's fears, social mores, their own lack of self-confidence, and lack of financing, participants maintain.

Participants were asked their thoughts about women and leadership – any qualities they possess over men and the constraints they face – and their attitudes towards women in elected positions.

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They say that women have the potential and ability to be leaders but are thwarted by a number of different issues. With respect to leadership qualities, they say that women are particularly skilled at managing conflict, finding consensus and mobilizing people. Some believe that women innately have more fighting spirit, will and courage than men.

Women have strength in families and communities to cope with a problem. They endorse social cohesion. (Young woman, Kayes)

Conflict management is one of the strengths of women. You have to see at the family level and even in the community, if there is a disagreement between two parties, the woman can easily mediate to help them getting along. (Young woman, Kita)

Men have little role to play in the stability of the country, it is women who can do it. (Young woman, San)

Women are fighters, there are very resilient women, but that we do not know. They are very brave too. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

Participants express unanimous support for women to hold both local and national elected positions. Women have the competence, they maintain – they just lack the support, both moral and financial, from society, and thus the opportunities. They say that women are not only better poised than men to understand and advocate for women’s concerns, but also they’re more apt to care about the concerns of *all* citizens and work to alleviate them. Having women in these positions, participants say, will serve as a source of motivation for other women. They cite a number of examples of effective female leaders, both in their communities and on the national front, who they say are doing impressive work.

This is the woman who is best placed to know better than men what problems faced other women. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Women are educated enough to play these roles, they only lack support to qualify for these positions. This support can be financial or someone who is well spoken and an influential push (Adult woman, Mopti)

The country will go far [if women have positions of leadership] because she knows at the same time, all the problems of men and women. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Everything that a man does, a woman can do it. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

Women are not involved, even if they are more capable than men, but they are just not involved. For example, when women talk, tensions are falling. They are better mediators. (Young woman, Koutiala)

They want women to have fulfilling lives. (Young woman, Koutiala)

The female coordinator of the NGO YACTOU Bandiagara named Fifi gives Missoula, millet, rice to children. She helps us even for personal problems. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Nationally, Hawa Keita had opened for women a learning sewing workshop, and also helped women graduates find jobs. (Adult woman, Mopti)

But they outline a significant number of constraints that women labor under in Malian society that make it difficult for them to assume leadership roles. They say that men's attitudes and prevailing social mores, in general, act as a brake on women's ambitions. Men dislike the concept of women as leaders and are loathe for women to be positioned above them in a hierarchy. They do not want to see them succeed so they throw barriers in their way and sabotage their efforts. Men don't like the idea of their wives being in close contact with other men (which would naturally occur in the course of work); this could and has led to divorce. It's difficult for women to attend meetings in the evening as society judges this behavior poorly, men don't want women leaving the house to do this, and the women have childcare and housework to attend to. Spending time on leadership activities will bring accusations of ignoring or abandoning one's friends and family. Women in leadership positions are also subject to sexual harassment and are accused of gaining their positions through liaisons with men. They also note that a dearth of financial resources acts as an impediment to women's ability to engage in politics. Women lack the resources themselves and have difficulty attracting financial backers, they say.

Men are our constraints, because when a woman becomes a leader and everyone only talks about her, men will begin to bar the way. Men misinterpret the nightly meetings of women even though men travel for business without any problems. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

They have the will, but they face men's selfishness (Tamasheq, adult woman, Kidal)

There are educated women, but once married they will stay at home because of her husband's imposed constraints. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

The problem is that women are culturally subjected, and men expect this subjection to be everywhere and therefore they feel superior. Even when you are the supervisor of a man, he always keeps that in mind ... It is difficult for men to think that women hold important position. (Young woman, Koutiala)

Some men are very selfish. They do everything to put obstacle in the way of their women. When they realize that their wives are able to hold certain managing positions, they create all sorts of tricks to prevent them from accessing it. (Adult woman, Banconi)

According to customs, if a woman stays late into the street because of her activities, the society judges her negatively. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Look after the education of her children, even if the child misses a little, or he does stuff, the husband comes, it just says it's your fault, the mom, did not take care well of your children. I think that we imposed a lot this on women in Mali. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

I also think that the barrier preventing women from getting involved in politics is the funding problem, even if a woman is ambitious, without money or somebody who can help her financially, she cannot achieve her goals. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

They also maintain that women can be their own worst enemy because many subscribe to the prevailing prejudice against women and thus doubt the competence of female leaders. In addition, they lack self-confidence so they give up too easily. They don't know their rights so they allow their advancement to be unjustly thwarted.

They are quickly discouraged. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

Lack of self-confidence (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

Women easily withdraw from the competition after failure to reach the leadership position. (Young woman, Kita)

They often face problems due to a lack of knowledge of their rights. If you know your rights, if someone blocks you, you can defend yourself and then you move on. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

6. Participants contend that women should have much higher representation in government, both local and national, than they currently do, and most are in favor of putting a quota in place to assure a higher percentage of women in elected office.

Participants were asked if they were aware of the percentages of women in the National Assembly and in locally elected positions (such as mayors or councilors). Only a handful of women are familiar with the correct percentages. Others either have no idea or overestimate.

When given the actual figures¹⁰, participants are unanimous that the percentages should be higher. From a fairness standpoint, they mention that there are more women than men in the country.¹¹ On a practical level, as noted earlier, they say that more female representation in Mali's political life is needed because only women truly understand women's problems and will work to alleviate them. They have not seen any evidence that men will take on women's concerns and don't trust them to do so in the future. Furthermore, in the larger context, they feel that women have a lot to contribute to the development of the country. Many believe that women are more engaged in the issues, fight harder and are more far-sighted than men.

The rate should increase because there are more women than men in Mali. (Adult woman, Mopti)

The rate need to increases so women can help us. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

We want an increase for our concerns to be taken into account. (Adult woman, Kayes)

¹⁰ The figure for the National Assembly is 9.5%; for mayors, 1%; and for local councilors, 9%.

¹¹ The sex ratio in Mali (according to the country's most recent Demographic and Health Survey in 2007) skews only slightly toward females, who make up 50.5% of the nation's population.

So we can participate in the development of the country. (Young woman, San)

I want the rate to be increased to ensure that women contribute once more to the development of the country. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

As far as their notions of the “ideal percentage” of women in government for it to be representative and effective, the vast majority are looking for, at minimum, parity. Responses range from 20 percent to 80 percent, with most in the 40-60% range.

I think that need a fair distribution, 50% women ministers out of 100%. Thus, we can normally defend our interests. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

30%, it's really minimal. Maybe 40%, why not 50%? I know it will not be possible now, but Paris [sic] was not built in one day. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

Most participants are in favor of laws that make it easier for women to compete in elections and reach an “ideal” percentage of representatives. They say that without such laws, women won’t be able to make sufficient progress. However, a small minority has qualms about this notion of a quota. They believe that women have an equal chance of being elected as men and that the only criterion for election should be one’s competence.

We must have a law to progress. (Adult woman, Kayes)

We must have a law to ensure that women participate. (Young woman, Koutiala)

I think that women have the same opportunities as men to stand for election. I do not see the need to pass a law. Women should have confidence in themselves to compete with men. If through the quota we elect women who do not have the skills to fulfill the tasks entrusted in them, it is a good thing for the country? (Young woman, Kita)

III. Political Parties

1. Participants have largely negative associations with political parties.

Although some participants have neutral associations with political parties (such as “elections,” “candidates,” “the president,” “deputies”) and a small minority has some positive associations (“moving the country forward,” “supporting democracy and the multiparty system,” “rights,” “liberty”) most link political parties with negative themes. The most frequent themes that surface are corruption, dishonesty, failure to keep promises or find solutions, self-interest, discord and divisiveness.

Me I think of the election of a good leader. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

The multiparty system (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

I think of those who turn away money. (Adult woman, Mopti)

I think of the corruption. (Young woman, San)

When we think of political parties, we think about the conflict. Once it starts, it is war. (Young woman Sonhrai, Gao)

Political parties bring nothing good. They sow discord between people. They are always there trying to identify people's concerns without providing solutions. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

When I hear the term "political party", I think of fraud. (Young woman, Kita)

If I hear political party, I think of fraud. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

People no longer believe in politicians because most make promises they do not keep. They sow discord between people. (Adult woman, Banconi)

Political parties have let us down. They came to us to ask us to vote for them on the basis of 'first Mali'. Barely elected, this became 'My family first. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

2. Political parties in Mali pay scant attention to female candidates or women's needs and interests, participants maintain.

Participants were asked their opinion about the level of attention and support that the political parties in Mali offer to female candidates. The prevailing consensus is "not enough." They maintain that the only reason the parties offer any attention whatsoever to female candidates is because they need them to attract and mobilize the female vote. They believe that men will never put women at the top of the party list because they don't want them to be elected in place of men.

Those who presented themselves as most knowledgeable about this issue claim that women candidates are rarely present when the most important party decisions are made, and a few mention instances of treachery that they're aware of that were directed against women candidates – for example, a woman's name was placed on the list but then removed before the vote without her knowledge. Some of the younger women have little concrete information about the parties' support of woman candidates but are nonetheless persuaded that the parties don't actively champion them.

In Kidal, men do not want women to be on the list of candidates. (Tamasheq Adult woman, Kidal)

In developing the lists, the party is putting the names of five or six men before putting the name of a woman. I think it's not fair. I want women to be on the list. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Men do not want women to run them because they say that women do not deserve power. (Young woman, San)

They do not pay attention to women and do not include them in the selection of the lists of candidates. They come to us when the campaigns are approaching. In addition, they choose only the

women presidents of associations to which they send money to mobilize people and vote for them. They know the capacity of women to mobilize. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

These people come with their games. They tell us the good words that they will put our names on the list, and late at night they remove your name. And if we talk about financial issues, they cajole you because of your popularity. Even if one has the money to support you as a candidate, they will not do so for fear of exceeding them. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Sometimes certain electoral lists are deposited at 4 a.m. in the morning, something that is not easy for a woman to stay so late. Well and it is at this moment that your name is being removed replace with others. (Adult woman, Mopti)

I myself do not know how they choose. All we know is that they choose only few [women]. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

The most optimistic view offered by a few participants is rather meager – they note that at least women aren't always at the back of the party list anymore.

Before, political parties put women candidates' names last on the list. Nowadays, they are in the middle of the list. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Participants were also asked their thoughts about the level of attention that the parties pay to women's needs and interests. Again, they offer a pessimistic assessment. Some believe the parties never publicly address women's issues at all. Others say the parties pay lip service to women's priorities during campaigns in order to attract their vote but abandon women and ignore their concerns once their candidates are in office.

I think they are not doing a good job because their words and deeds during the campaigns are different from what they do or say after the elections. So they do not care about our priorities. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Barely finished voting, they forget about you. Even when you have a problem, it is not easy for you to see the politicians you supported. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Publicly, they support the rights of women, but after the election, this is treason. (Young Sonhrai woman Gao)

At home what women have claimed [candidates], they said yes, but they did nothing after. (Young woman, San)

They give us a bit of money to influence you to support them. Then they will not consider you and we do not see them anymore. They will tell their guards to not open their doors to you, and they change their phone number. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Political parties think of women only during elections. After that, they forget because once in power they think only about themselves. (Young woman, Kita)

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If they do not do that [talk publicly about women], they will not be elected. When in campaigns, even if you ask them a million, they will deliver it, but after that, it's over. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

Before the elections, they go towards women, but once elected, they only defend their own interests. They do not favor laws that address the needs of women. (Adult woman, Mopti)

With respect to the 2013 presidential and legislative elections, participants maintain that the parties attracted female voters with gifts and promises in order to get elected, but abandoned women and their commitments to women once in power.

Some of them gave us t-shirts, jumbo cubes, salt, dates, and at night they came over and beg us to vote for them. They even promised one of my aunts to open a kindergarten, and they didn't do it. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

To my association, a party promised 60 chairs and a tarp. Until today, we haven't seen anything. He doesn't even respond to our phone calls. (Adult woman, Mopti)

They are doing a poor job. They do everything that women want during the electoral campaigns. After the campaigns, it's over and they forget their promises. They don't follow up the actions that they implement on the ground. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

They charm us during the electoral campaigns, but after they access the positions, they forget us. For instance, during the presidential campaign, women supported the current president to access the supreme office, but he didn't appoint them in the government. (Woman internally displaced, Bamako)

IV. Voting and Governance

- 1. Participants are largely aware of the procedures for voting. Additionally, the vast majority participate in elections, with most regarding voting as a duty of citizenship – an indication that they have not lost faith in the democratic process in spite of their discontent with political parties. Some citizens in the north, however, express more cynicism about the process.**

Participants were asked if they know the voting process and if they typically vote in elections. The vast majority was able to delineate the various steps of voting; the only group where the majority of women were unclear about the process was the group of older Tamasheq women in the north. Also, only half of the women in the group in Koutiala (with young women) could describe the voting procedures.

Additionally, the vast majority of women claim that they do typically vote.¹² Many say they vote to exercise their rights as citizens. As far as the reason for their vote, some mention

¹² A couple of women had turned 18 after the last elections and thus had not yet had the opportunity to vote.

they vote to pick leaders who will advance the interests of their community and the country as a whole. The crisis in 2012 was the catalyst for some, as they sought in 2013 to choose leaders who would effectively resolve it. A small minority claims they base their vote on whether or not they will personally gain from a candidate's election or on the gifts they receive from the candidate during the campaign process.

I vote to be a good citizen. (Adult woman, Kayes)

To exercise our citizenship. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

We vote to choose a candidate, someone confident who knows our problems, who knows our sufferings and who can find solutions immediately. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

His skills, if you believe in him, in the interest of the country, you can vote for him. (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

I am voting because I told myself that my vote will be used to stop the war and crises. (Young woman, Koutiala)

I vote for gifts. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

For the small number who says they did not vote during the elections in 2013, the barriers were mostly logistical: not possessing the NINA card, not having access to the card where they were currently living or being away from home (and thus their voting location) during the elections.¹³

2. Participants believe that communication with a political party representative or civil servant is intimidating and rarely results in a positive outcome.

Participants were asked if they had ever tried to communicate with a political party representative or a civil servant and if they had been successful in this endeavor (i.e., their concerns were acknowledged and ultimately addressed). The picture they paint is one of anticipated or actual neglect.

Many say they have never attempted any sort of interaction with a public official, either because they are intimidated, assume they will be ignored or believe they will be given promises that won't be fulfilled.

Some have made attempts but describe them as fruitless. They were given the run-around after having extracted promises of help and never got any resolution. Some of these women had communicated on behalf of an association and were not seeking help for a personal matter.

¹³ NINA (which stands for National Identification Number) refers to the new biometric voter cards that were used for the first time in the July 2013 presidential elections.

I do not even try to communicate with them. Once elected, they do not recognize anyone. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

I didn't go, because those who go, they'll make promises and they do not hold them. (Young woman, San)

I tried to see a politician. He said he will find employment for our children during his campaign for the municipality. I could see him, but every time he told me to come back until I'm discouraged. Ultimately, it did not take the calls, and so far he has done nothing. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Our association had a meeting with a political party so we can have women at the head of their list, that is to say, three women for five men, but they left us out. It was not easy, he did not give us much time to talk, and we saw him at first but at a certain point we could not see him anymore. (Adult woman, Kayes)

It was with a political leader that we had the training of young women. They listen to us at election time but then we don't see them anymore. (Young woman, Koutiala)

The most positive assessments come from participants in Koulikoro and Banconi who seem encouraged about their access to public officials.

It is not difficult to have access to our elected officials. And they pay attention to what we say: Particularly our MP. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

They do not help us all the time but when we have concerns and we report them, they help us if possible. (Adult woman, Banconi)

3. There are mixed views about the performance of the central government with respect to their concerns, with most noting that they haven't seen any solid initiatives.

Participants are divided about how good a job the central government in Bamako is doing in taking into account their interests. Most are of the opinion that the government has not yet taken any concrete steps to work on issues they care about. On women's issues, they say that there aren't many women in the government and that they haven't seen any specific initiatives directed at women. Some are in a wait-and-see mode as they say the government has had to focus on the crisis in the North until now.

When the president came to us, we told him about our primary problem which is the problem of water. Our wells are dry and not all valves provide water. He did not react. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

For the moment nothing is done, there are just words that are said in relation to youth employment, children education. (Adult woman, Mopti)

We have not seen any good act since the inauguration of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. (Young woman Sonhrai, Gao)

They do not even think about us. They do not even know we exist. (Young woman, San)

The current government does not take into account the concerns of women. We have not seen any concrete act. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

We do not see our Minister for the Promotion of Women, Family and Children; I think it's there for us women. (Adult woman, Kayes)

I do not see many women in the new government - that's already despair. (Adult woman, Kayes)

We first wait as the Prime Minister has not yet presented its program, the policy of his government. We wait to see if he will take into account women. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

There has been no change, and it tells us nothing about what is happening in the country. We do not understand anything about what is happening. (Adult woman, Banconi)

A minority believes the government has been doing a good job so far attending to their interests. Examples offered are anti-corruption efforts, steps taken to alleviate youth unemployment, more communication from the government to the people, and some healthcare initiatives.

Things start to go well; steps are taken to reduce corruption within the university. (Young woman, Kita)

Reproductive health, especially family planning and the fight against maternal mortality. There is even now a hotline for information on this subject. (Young woman, Koutiala)

4. Most participants reserve judgment about the performance of the National Assembly as it is newly-installed, but they have negative perceptions of its predecessors. They exhibit high awareness of their current deputy.

Assessments of the National Assembly are mostly neutral because it had only been in power for a few months¹⁴ at the time of the study and most participants say that it's too early to judge.

Those who are new, we say nothing about them first because we do not know them yet. (Young woman, San)

We will hear their parliamentary reports by circle and towns, after that we'll see. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

¹⁴ The new National Assembly was elected in December 2013.

A few participants in San point to some positive actions in their community that have been spearheaded by their deputy. According to one participant: “One deputy even opened a hair dying center in Santo.”

But they express a lot of cynicism about previous National Assemblies, complaining that they did not pay attention to women’s concerns, and that once the deputies were elected, they never fulfilled their promises.

As they pass through the door, they forget everything they told to women. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Since they have been appointed, they are relaxing. (Tamasheq Adult woman, Kidal)

I have not seen anything from them. Even when I went to see them to help me to support the care of my husband, they did nothing. I sat in the Assembly from morning until 2 p.m. I have not seen them. (Adult woman, Kayes)

A few express apprehension about the familial ties of the Speaker of the Assembly, Issiaka Sidibé to the president. They question whether he will be a strong voice in the Assembly because of this family relationship. As a speaker from Koulikoro (where he is a native son) notes: “... there are obviously some truths that he won’t dare saying [to the president]”

As long as the son of IBK would be there, the Assembly will never do a good job. There must be someone else. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

Participants were asked if they know who their deputy is. The majority are able to name their deputy. Awareness is lowest in the groups in Kayes and Koutiala and the group of young women in Bamako.

5. The communal authorities are not at all responsive to their concerns, according to many participants. They are frustrated by unfulfilled promises, poor living conditions and nepotism.

Many participants are particularly scathing when it comes to their assessment of the work of their communal authorities. They point to unfulfilled promises and dreadful conditions in their community (e.g., gutters strewn with rubbish, flooded streets) which have not been remedied by the authorities. Many also accuse their local authorities of funding and awarding projects and distributing resources solely on the basis of nepotism or favoritism. Some participants also discuss their authorities engaging in various corrupt land practices, such as accepting campaign money in exchange for a guarantee of plots of land (with the land never materializing) or promising the same parcel of land to different people.

Our local authorities are doing nothing good here. They promised to make renovations in Bandiagara. The problem is still there, the lots were given to their parents, but not to others, or they said that only the poor will have them. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Our concerns are not taken into account. The mayor has been there 10 years. During the rainy season, women swim in the river to go to the market. Once again some fall into the water with their condiment, and they did nothing to address the situation. (Adult woman, Mopti)

The mayor is elected only for those around him, his family, when he was elected for the whole town. (Young woman Sonhrai, Gao)

The municipal authorities are doing a bad work because there's a quota in the municipal budget allocated to women's associations that is not managed fairly. Some are favored because of their relationships with the authorities. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Even the current mayor promised us houses, but after he ignores us while passing us with his nice car. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Here there is a radio station that talks about repairing roads, water stagnation in neighborhoods, etc. Every Saturday ... it's open to the public. It seems that they even record the debate to bring it to the mayor, but so far nothing has changed. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Only a small minority of participants (a few in Koutiala, San and Kita) can name concrete positive actions taken by their local authorities.

It's starting to go well because they have recently built public toilets in schools. (Young woman, Koutiala)

I can say that the mayor has done a lot of things, not only for women but also for the city. (Young woman, San)

Participants are looking for personal contact with their communal authorities, attention to their concerns, and action taken on promises given.

We recommend them to be available, to welcome us and allow us to have a beneficial exchange. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

We will call them so that they can take into account the promises they made to us during the campaigns. (Adult woman, Kayes)

6. To spur the government to action on issues of importance to women, participants advocate that women hold direct meetings with public officials, spearhead public awareness efforts and vote out of power those who don't meet their expectations.

Participants were asked to imagine they were the head of a woman's association and, in this role, to design strategies to persuade elected leaders to pay attention to women's issues. Their ideas generally fall into three categories: holding direct meetings with officials if a specific project is concerned; conducting public outreach to mobilize and activate women to advocate for their needs; and using the power of the ballot box to vote out officials who don't meet their expectations.

Direct meetings

Many participants recommend surveying the association's members about the topics of most importance to them, brainstorming a plan of action based on the results, and subsequently holding meetings with government leaders to ask for their help with financing or finding donors. They advocate working through a chain of command – for example, talking first to the prefects or mayors to reach the deputies, or talking to the deputies to reach the ministers.

Perhaps in light of the cynicism they had earlier expressed about garnering attention from public officials, they suggest that meeting as a group will be more powerful than meeting as an individual. Additionally, some suggest targeting women leaders as they are likely to be more responsive to women's concerns.

We must create a project that you will achieve, its objectives and then its advantages too. You have to try to explain them better, even better to convince them, you know! (Young woman university graduate, Bamako)

We must first bring women together to identify their priorities and create a project that we will take to the Minister for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family that would be forwarded to the President of the Republic and wait and see. (Adult woman, Kayes)

Meeting with them to discuss our problems and solve them. (Young woman, Koutiala)

I believe that women should first consult each other and find areas of agreement and propose them to the leaders. (Young woman, Koutiala)

I'll make sure to bring women together in one strong and united group. Then we would go to the authorities to discuss our concerns. (Adult woman, Banconi)

For me one of the strategies is that the association leaders invite the woman MP from Mopti to express the concerns of women. She is better placed to bring these complaints at the National Assembly, plus she knows how to handle them. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Public Outreach

Some participants recommend using the media: publishing articles or creating television sketches that portray women's concerns and how to address them. Others advocate creating country-wide awareness campaigns to mobilize and activate women or holding workshops and conferences to place women's concerns front and center. Some suggest organizing a march or other large event and publicizing it widely.

We women can organize awareness campaigns across the country, to make women understand that we are the majority; if our concerns are not addressed we refuse to cooperate. (Adult woman, Mopti)

To organize a day of safety, call the mayor or deputy, or any other government official and ORTM to show them how my organization works, the difficulties we have to make women come out. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

I was going to hold a peaceful march for the government to hear us. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Power of the Vote

Finally, they state clearly that they intend to vote out those elected officials who have not met their expectations (and make the leaders aware of their intentions). As one woman in Mopti says: “we will let the mayor know that if he doesn’t take into account our concerns, we will not vote for him for a second mandate”

V. Peace and Reconciliation

1. Participants from the north have more information about the peace and reconciliation process and are more pessimistic than others about its progress.

With respect to peace and reconciliation, not surprisingly, those who were most affected by the crisis in the north (participants from Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu and IDPs in Bamako) are more knowledgeable about the current state of affairs than others. And, as noted earlier, compared to the others, participants from the north have a more pessimistic view of the process. Participants in San and Banconi are the least informed.

The National Assembly voted for 15 people in charge of the reconciliation and maybe in two days they will be put in place, I do not know, but the Minister of reconciliation we are negotiating for the appointment of its representative in all regions, as manager. The Committee on reconciliation in the regions, too ... we will create a commissioner in the 15 regions. (Adult woman internal displaced, Bamako)

I don't know anything about this (Young woman, San)

I am not aware of anything on this issue of reconciliation and peace. (Adult woman, Banconi)

While many in the rest of the country discuss an end to the war, the beginning of dialogue, IDPs and refugees moving back home, and the return of the administration in the north, participants from Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu claim there has been no progress on dialogue or reconciliation.¹⁵

Country leaders are beginning the dialogue the return of peace in Mali. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Soldiers from other countries are here to help us fight. Also there are negotiations between the government and the rebel groups. (Adult woman, Mopti)

I know that the peace and reconciliation processes are ongoing. Talks are underway for the rebels to lay down their arms so that we can cohabite together. (Young woman, Kita)

¹⁵ These groups took place before the armed Tuareg groups signed an accord in Algiers affirming their commitment to dialogue with Bamako (on June 9, 2014).

We can say that things are better now. In any case, the situation is not as hard as before. (Young woman, Koutiala)

For now, nothing is being done. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

Everything is at a standstill. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

We are told that ... Northern Mali is free, but this is not true because Kidal is still under occupation. Not even long ago MNLA celebrated its third anniversary of the declaration of liberation of Azawad. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

We have not seen progress for the reconciliation. The government is seeking to liberate the North, the MNLA also claimed Azawad - nothing is clear about reconciliation. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

2. There is high familiarity with the participation in the reconciliation process of the United Nations, religious groups and the minister of reconciliation, but low top-of-mind awareness of the newly-created Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission.

In terms of their knowledge of public and civil society institutions that are working on reconciliation, participants as a whole are most familiar with the role of the United Nations, various Muslim and Christian groups, and some women's organizations in the country. There is also broad awareness that there is a newly-created post in the president's administration of a minister of reconciliation.¹⁶ However, only three participants spontaneously mentioned the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission created at the end of March 2014 (and may have been conflating it with the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission created by the former transitional government).

The grouping of Muslim leaders gathered the faithful for blessings the return of peace. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

The Christian community gives also the blessings in churches for peace. (Adult woman, Mopti)

The National Union of Muslim Women is also involved in it. Women easily manage conflict without arms. (Adult woman, Kayes)

The ministry of Reconciliation was created by the government. This ministry mediates between us and the rebels in order to forgive the rebels. (Adult woman, Mopti)

The Ministry of National Reconciliation and Reconstruction of Northern Regions was recently created, and leads a lot of activity for the victims of the crisis. They go to them to put them at ease as they not only faced material damage but also psychological ones. (Adult woman, Kayes)

¹⁶ In April 2014, very shortly before the fieldwork for this study took place, the new Prime Minister Moussa Mara replaced the Minister of Reconciliation and Development of the North with a Minister of National Reconciliation. It's not clear if all the participants who spoke about this post were aware of this change.

3. Participants are eagerly hoping for a full and final resolution to the conflict and believe the government needs to intensify its efforts.

Although many acknowledge the progress on reconciliation made so far, primarily through the efforts of religious leaders and organizations, none of the participants believes that the peace and reconciliation efforts to date are sufficient. They say there is no consensus around the final remaining issues between the rebels and the government.

All participants express a fervent desire for peace and a permanent solution to the conflict. They worry that the conflict may spread down south. Many advocate getting to the source of the dispute and continuing to sensitize both sides in favor of peace and reconciliation. Some attach caveats, specifying that they want the territorial integrity of Mali to be maintained and that the rebels need to understand that “the country belongs to all of us.”

Things do not move, even IBK made trips to the country to find the solution. The rebels refuse to disarm. Our troops are still stationed. They did not manage to enter the city of Gao. Things should not remain as such; we need a change. Some negotiate and others continue to cause wrong. (Young woman, Kita)

It does not evolve, and it's too insufficient. (Tamasheq adult woman, Kidal)

It is not sufficient to increase awareness. (Young woman Sonhrai, Gao)

It's not enough. Now there must be a definite peace. Anything the government can do for a lasting peace, they only have to do it. We want a lasting peace. We must not have any relapses. People are tired. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

We need the state to look at the source of the problem, go and meet those who have taken up arms to know the real reason for their rebellion. Know what they want and agree on something. (Adult woman, Kayes)

We must call those who took up arms to the negotiating table. To end the conflict, we must listen to everyone. (Young woman, Kita)

A few place the emphasis on the need to strengthen the army, by giving the troops adequate training and salaries and recruiting more soldiers.

The efforts are insufficient. We need to increase the recruitment of soldiers, give them proper training and timely pay our military. (Adult woman, Mopti)

4. Women must be included in the peace and reconciliation process, participants maintain, as they can play a number of important roles. Some would like to play an active role themselves. They also believe that religious leaders and young people need to play a part.

As far as which groups should have a role in the peace and reconciliation process, participants most often mention three:

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Women
- Religious leaders
- Youth.

Either spontaneously or when prompted by a moderator, participants note that women need to be implicated in the peace and reconciliation process. They believe that women are wonderful mediators and are focused on peace, and when they are engaged in an issue, nothing will stop them from attaining their goal. They note that women can have tremendous influence on their families and their communities. In addition, they say women deserve to play a role because they were heavily victimized by the conflict – their husbands, sons and brothers were sent to fight, they were raped, they were displaced – and will be forced to send their men off again if the war recommences. A few go so far as to say that without the participation of women, peace cannot be achieved.

Women are the best mediators. (Adult woman, Koulikoro)

Women's groups [must be involved]. Because when a woman is involved, nothing can hold her back. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

Groups of women should be included because a woman takes seriously everything that she does and they are listened to. They must be trained and after, they will raise awareness in their families, in their communities, in Kayes, in Kidal. Their arguments are that in case of war, it is their children, their brothers, their husbands - in a word, the whole village - who fall on the field of war. (Adult woman, Mopti)

Of course, because women suffer all the ills of this crisis, it must be women who are at the beginning of reconciliation and at the center of debates and conferences. If women are not there, how do you want bring peace? You cannot, because it is the children of these women who are in the middle of this crisis, in the army. So we have to bring them back on the table. We must raise awareness. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

We need more women involved because they have been the most affected by the crisis: displacements, losses of jobs, husbands, etc. (Young woman, Koutiala)

Women must play a role in it because the rebels have caused harm to women. We must seek to know their opinions. If it does not imply women there will be no solutions. (Young woman, Kita)

Women are the backbone of reconciliation. If we talk about the priorities of the country, it is women and children. (Adult woman, Kayes)

As long as women are not included in the peace process, it would be difficult. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

In terms of the specific role that women can play, participants suggest that women can organize meetings focused on dialogue and reconciliation as well as take part in the negotiations. One participant from Mopti complains about the lack of female representation on the reconciliation commission: “In the committee put in place for the reconciliation,

there is only one woman, Oumou Touré from the Coordination of the Women Associations and NGOs in Mali (*Coordination des Associations et ONG féminines du Mali – CAFO*), we need to enlarge the number of women in this structure”

Women should organize meetings to promote dialogue and reconciliation. (Young woman, Bandiagara)

We can participate in the negotiations to end the conflict. (Young woman, Kita)

They also propose that peace and reconciliation commissions be organized at all levels of local government and that women play a role in these associations.

Additionally, participants mention that women can function as early warning systems to forestall renewed hostilities. One participant from Mopti notes how a woman was willing to implicate members of her own extended family in a selfless effort to help end the conflict: In the midst of the crisis, it’s a woman from Niafingué who was the first one to say that many followers of one of the mosque of Taikiri are rebels coming from Niafingué, Diré and that she knows them personally. Some are even her cousins, but she delivered this information to save the homeland”.

We have roles to play, if we see a risk of conflict or disagreement, we must denounce them because the woman is more vigilant in this regard. (Adult woman, Kayes)

When thinking about what part they themselves can play in the reconciliation process, many simply say they will continue to pray for peace.

Some see themselves taking a more active role: fostering an environment of pardon in the country and bringing both sides in the conflict together; giving humanitarian aid in the form of money and food to IDPs and refugees; and alerting authorities if they see suspicious activity in order to prevent renewed conflict.

We must sow the culture of forgiveness in their minds for national reconciliation. (Adult woman, Kayes)

To organize awareness campaigns in our association. (Young Sonhrai woman, Gao)

Negotiators, because we are the mothers of Bambara, Peulh, Sonbrai children. We are mothers on both sides, so it is our job to negotiate between our children now. (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

To do humanitarian work by donating money, food. (Young woman, Koutiala)

Participants also believe it is important to include Christian and Muslim leaders in the process because they have moral authority and because religious differences were at the core of the crisis.

Furthermore, participants say that young people must be included because they are the future of the country.

The country's future is with the young people because it is their battle we are waging – that's why they should be involved in it. (Adult woman, Kayes)

VI. Concerns of Displaced Women

1. In addition to their financial struggles and difficulties integrating into life in Bamako, displaced women face bureaucratic hurdles.

The displaced women living in Bamako express frustration with the lack of progress in addressing the problems that they've encountered. First, they face financial hardship as the income-producing activities of their family were interrupted by the conflict. In turn, they have difficulty affording food and adequate housing. Furthermore, they maintain that they have had trouble integrating into Bamako life.

We are all waiting, but we don't see anything yet (Adult woman internally displaced, Bamako)

They describe some of the problems and indignities they've faced in dealing with the government. They note that some of the aid that was meant to flow to them actually ended up in the hands of residents of Bamako. One participant outlines how she attempted to address this issue but was caught up in an endless morass of bureaucracy, and nothing was solved: "We lay out the problem; we even went to see the Prime Minister to address it. He took us an appointment with the Minister of Humanitarian Action. We met the minister a month later. We were told to go to the national leadership of Humanitarian Affairs. He told us to get our list of displaced who remained. Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, they were brought, he promised that on March 8th he will make the donation. What's going on? A month later he said we should go see the National Director of Social Action. We had a meeting with them, so we need to resume the census by town again! They will check, we were told that there is no problem. We have our lists with us. Nearly two months later, we are still waiting."

Another participant from Timbuktu recounts how she tried to assess the state of her damaged property, as requested by the government, but was confronted by a corrupt bailiff: "There is only one bailiff, who stayed there, and he asked 300,000 CFA to work, to send the file at the Chamber of Commerce and no one have. 300.000 or 200.000 CFA, how can we raise this?"

They note that full reconstruction can only happen once there's peace so they express a strong desire for the government to redouble its efforts to achieve a real and durable solution to the conflict. One participant asks that the government work directly with the rebels and discontinue using intermediaries: "The government is there to invest in the search for peace, true peace. Do not look in Algeria; do not look in Burkina Faso. You really have to go to these people. They are our brothers, they are not strangers ... You have to go talk to the armed groups to find the truth and make a true and lasting peace. "

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, women in Mali describe the myriad challenges they face. Some of these challenges are not specific to women (such as the high cost of living or lack of job opportunities), but in their various roles as wives, mothers and daughters, they experience them in a particular way and often more intensely than men.

In addition, they face other struggles that *are* unique to them. They acknowledge that their opportunities have increased in recent years, but they identify many different areas where they continue to feel at a disadvantage in society. They believe that women have the ability to play a larger role in Mali's social and political life but are held back by social mores, men's fears, and inadequate attention from the political establishment, insufficient financing, and their own lack of self-confidence. The three principal areas where they would like women to have increased opportunities are in education, employment and political life. They also believe that women have an important role to play in the peace and reconciliation process.

They feel intimidated about expressing their concerns to public officials or feel simply ignored once they make an attempt. They maintain that political parties pay attention to women candidates and issues important to women only before elections, purely in a strategic bid to garner the female vote – but then once in power, abandon their promises.

They have yet to see evidence that the government in Bamako will make significant advances on issues that are of interest to women. They are disappointed by their local officials whom they view as acting purely out of self-interest. They believe that without more women in positions of political power, their situation won't dramatically improve. Absent other methods of exerting influence, they are clear about using the power of the ballot box to vote out those leaders who don't fulfill their expectations.

In deference to the study findings, in-country stakeholders (elected officials and government leaders, political parties and civil society organizations) may wish to consider the following recommendations in order to respond to women's concerns and expectations and help realize their desires and aspirations.

Elected Officials and Government Leaders

- Develop and support a comprehensive program for encouraging feedback from women constituents, including multiplying face-to-face visits, establishing regular meetings or forums and creating and communicating about channels through which women can provide their views.
- Create a broad plan of action to address the issues that concern women most (increased access to education, employment and political office). Launching even small-scale initiatives at first can make a difference and demonstrate that women's concerns are being acknowledged.
- Increase efforts to combat illiteracy among women.
- Consider subsidies to help finance costs associated with education, such as registration fees, books and transportation. Subsidizing costs may increase the willingness of parents to allow their girls to finish their education.

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop and fund programs aimed at creating job opportunities (including vocational training) specifically for women.
- Investigate methods for making microcredit more accessible to women and more practical for them (i.e., less likely to saddle them with crippling debt).
- Increase efforts to keep citizens informed about the status of peace and reconciliation efforts.
- Include more women and women's associations in the peace and reconciliation planning and negotiations.
- Work to lessen bureaucratic hurdles for displaced women and their families to receive the support they need.
- Conduct civic education about the voting process among populations where knowledge is lacking.
- Submit and vote a quota bill for more a greater representation of women in elected and appointed positions.

Political Parties

- Initiate programs to communicate with women voters and collect their opinions.
- Develop a manifesto and create a broad plan of action to address the issues that concern women most (increased access to education, employment, and political office).
- Establish a plan for identifying promising women candidates and offering them ample moral and financial support.
- Consider placing more women at the top of party lists.
- Invite local and national elected officials during their mandates to restate their activities to women and girls in the towns, circles, regions.
- Invite elected officials to keep their promises
- Encourage political parties to implement quota for more representativeness of women in the decision making bodies.

Civil Society Organizations

- Undertake activities to increase the identification and discussion of issues important to women.
- Encourage government accountability by reporting on promises made on issues important to women and to what degree they have been met.
- Develop workshops to teach women leadership skills and build their self-confidence.
- Conduct civic education efforts aimed at men (and particularly the next generation – boys and young men) to sensitize them to women's concerns, demonstrate women's competence as leaders and showcase the important role women should play in Mali's social and political life.
- Continue to conduct literacy campaigns and renew efforts to demonstrate the importance of keeping girls in school.
- Start a national dialogue around the issue of increasing women's participation in politics, including the possible creation of quotas.
- Press for more involvement of women and women's associations in peace and reconciliation efforts.

- Work with displaced women to have their concerns taken seriously by the government and help them navigate their way through the bureaucracy they face.
- Encourage young women to engage in civil society organizations to benefit from the capacity building.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS AND PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

DATE	GROUP SIZE	REGION	LOCATION	ETHNICITY	RELIGION	AGE GROUP	EDUCATION
04/26/2014	10	Gao ¹⁷	Gao	Sonhrai	Muslim	21-35	None (3) Primary (4) Secondary (3)
4/24/2014	10	Gao	Gao	Tamasheq	Muslim	35-53	None-Early Primary
4/22/2014	10	Kayes	Kayes	Soninke (9) Peulh (1)	Muslim	29-50	None (2) Primary (8)
4/24/2014	10	Kayes	Kita	Bomena (2) Peulh (3) Malinke (2) Dogon (3)	Christian	18-29	Primary (3) Secondary (7)
4/24/2014	10	Mopti	Bandiagara	Dogon (9) Minyanka (1)	Muslim	19-32	None (1) Primary (6) Some Secondary (3)
04/22/2014	10	Mopti	Mopti (stadium Barema-Bocoum)	Dogon (1) Bella (1) Sonrhai (4) Bobo (1) Somono (1) Peulh (1) Bamanan (1)	Muslim	37-57	None (4) Primary (6)

¹⁷ The two groups in Gao consisted of participants from Timbuktu and Kidal as well as Gao. These participants were transported to Gao for the discussions because of the insecurity in those regions during the period of the fieldwork. All of the Tuareg women were from Kidal, while five of the Sonhrai women were from Gao, and five were from Timbuktu.

4/25/2014	10	Bamako	Banconi	Sonhrai (1) Bambara (5) Malinke (2) Soninke (1) Unknown (1) ¹⁸	Muslim	30-58	None
4/26/2014	10	Bamako	Bamako – Women internally displaced	Sonhrai (6) Tamasheq (3) Arab (1)	Muslim	32-56	Secondary ¹⁹
4/24/2014	8	Bamako	Bamako - Maison des Femmes de Rive Droite	Dogon (2) Peulh (1) Bambara (2) Malinke (1) Sarakole (2)	Muslim	23-32	University (2) Master (6)
4/22/2014	10	Koulikoro	Koulikoro	Malinke (2) Bambara (3) Somono (2) Sarakole (1) Griote Soninke (1) Bomena (1)	Muslim	31-48	Primary
4/22/2014	10	Sikasso	Koutiala	Minianka (7) Bowa (3)	Christian	15-25	Secondary (7) Professional (3)
4/24/2014	10	Ségou	San	More Soninke Bambara Bozo Sonhrai Bowa (3) Peulh Senoufo	Muslim (9) Christian (1)	18-29	Primary (3) Secondary (7)

¹⁸ One participant listed “blacksmith (*forgeronne*)” as her ethnicity.

¹⁹ All participants had reached at least the 9th grade (5) while two had some high school education, two are school teachers, and one has a master’s degree.

APPENDIX B: MODERATOR'S DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

MALI

APRIL 2014

I. INTRODUCTION

[GIVE CUSTOMARY TRADITIONAL GREETING]

Hello, my name is _____ and I am here with my colleague _____. We are working on behalf of the National Democratic Institute, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that is trying to learn more about what women in Mali think about the important issues in this area. We are doing a number of these group discussions around the country. Once the discussions are finished, we will write a report and deliver it to government leaders and other groups interested in Mali's development, such as NGOs and donor countries, so that they can understand what issues are important right now for women in Mali. I am the facilitator for today's discussion.

- My job today is to learn from you.
- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask.
- I would like everyone to participate equally – everyone's opinion is important. It's okay that you may have different points of view. Everybody will get a chance to express their opinion.
- Please speak freely and without fear. This discussion is confidential.
- I am a woman like you so please feel free to speak openly and honestly about your opinions.
- I have this recorder to help me when I write the report. Your name will not be used in the report.
- The person here is taking notes to help with the report, but again, no names will be used.
- Please ask before speaking
- Please speak loudly and one at a time so the recorder can pick up your voice.

Thank you for agreeing to spend the time talking with me. Are there any questions before we begin?

[TAKE ANY QUESTIONS NOT RELATED TO THE CONTENT OF THE GROUP DISCUSSION, BUT DEFER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTENT UNTIL AFTER THE GROUP.]

[ASK PARTICIPANTS TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES, TELL THE MODERATOR ABOUT THEIR DAILY ROUTINES, JOBS AND HOMETOWNS/VILLAGES.]

Now let us begin.

II. GENERAL DIRECTION

1. How is the situation in general in Mali today? Overall, is Mali going in the right direction OR the wrong direction? **[IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET ANSWERS FROM ALL BEFORE PROCEEDING—GET A SHOW OF HANDS²⁰, HOW MANY THINK RIGHT DIRECTION, HOW MANY THINK WRONG; DO THIS BEFORE DISCUSSION ON REASONS FOR RIGHT/WRONG DIRECTION.]**
2. What things are going right?
3. What things are going wrong?
4. What are the specific challenges faced by women in Mali?

III. WOMEN'S ROLE IN THEIR COMMUNITY

1. What role do women play in your community?
2. According to you, how are the tasks distributed between men and women? What do you think of this distribution?
3. Do you think women have equal rights with men in all aspects of your community?
 - a. In which areas do they have equal rights?
 - b. In which areas don't they have equal rights?
 - c. **[PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED:** ability to lead decision-making in the household; division of household labor between men and women; control of money; access to education; access to healthcare]
4. Are you comfortable with this situation or would you like for women to have more rights? Which ones?
5. Thinking about Mali in general, do you think women have more possibilities or opportunities now than over the past 10 years? If so, what kind of new opportunities do they have?
6. Do you want other opportunities, but that currently don't exist for women?

²⁰ Try to get a secret vote before discussion. Perhaps have everybody close their eyes for the hand raising or have participants mark their answer down on a piece of paper (using an agreed-upon symbol for “right direction” and one for “wrong direction”) and then collect the pieces of paper. Verbally state the results so that the recorder can pick up the answer.

IV. WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

1. Are there any women leaders in your community or in the country that you think are doing a good job?
 - a. **[IF YES: TRY TO GET SPECIFIC NAMES]. Why do you think they are good leaders? [ASK SPECIFIC NAMES IF IT'S AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL]**
2. What strengths, if any, do women leaders have compared to men leaders? **[PROBE, IF NOT MENTIONED: conflict resolution, caring, compassionate, less partisan, less hierarchical, consensus-driven, collaborative, etc.]**
3. What specific constraints are imposed upon women in the Malian society that men don't have to confront themselves?
4. What weaknesses, if any, do women leaders have compared to men leaders?
5. Now let's talk about civil society. What do you think about women becoming involved in civil society? Do you think this is a good idea or a bad idea? Why? **[IF NECESSARY, EXPLAIN: When I say "civil society," I mean non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others.]**
6. Now let's talk about women leaders elected at the local and national level. Do you think this is a good idea or a bad idea? If yes, explain, if not explain
7. Do you think that women have the necessary competences to lead at the community level? Why?
8. Do you think women can serve as legislators and as executive officials effectively?
 - a. For example, can women be effective village heads, mayors, governors, ministers, or presidents?
 - b. Can they be effective as members of Parliament in the National Assembly?
 - c. Are they more effective as one or the other? Why do you say that?
9. Are there some things that prevent women from becoming more involved in politics, or getting involved in public life? **[PROBE, IF NOT MENTIONED: cultural norms (not a woman's place, should be at home, taking care of children); lack sufficient financial resources or networks; lack of self-confidence; lack of desire; attitudes of male leaders/politicians; perception that politics is a dirty game]**

V. PERCEPTION OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

1. What are the different stages to vote? **[ESTIMATE HOW MANY WOMEN IN THE GROUP KNOWS THE STAGES.]**
2. Usually, do you vote during the elections?
 - a. **[IF YES]:** Why?
 - b. **[IF NO]:** Why not?
3. **[ASK TO THE ONES WHO VOTE]:** Usually, on what basis do you vote? **[PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED: gifts, candidate's personality, electoral promises, the program, husband or family's decision]**

VII. ATTITUDES TOWARD POLITICAL PARTIES

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “political party”?
2. In your view, how much attentions have political parties paid to recruiting women as candidates and supporting their campaigns? Is this level of attention sufficient?
3. Do the parties do a good job or not so good job of addressing issues of importance to women? Why? [**PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED:** *Do the parties talk about women’s issues publicly? Do the parties consistently support laws that meet the needs and concerns of women?*]
4. Thinking about the recent presidential and legislative elections, did the parties do a good job or not so good job of making efforts to attract women voters – did they seem to care if women supported them?
5. Have you ever tried to engage or communicate with a government official or political party?
 - i. *If yes:*
 1. On what issue(s)?
 2. How did you do it?
 3. Was it easy?
 4. Were they responsive?
 - ii. *If no:*
 1. Why not?
 2. What would make you willing to engage with a government official or political party?

VI. QUOTAS FOR WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

1. What percentage of elected representatives in the National Assembly and in locally elected positions do you think are women? [**ASK EVERYONE TO SAY THEIR ESTIMATES;** then tell them the percentage of women in the National Assembly is 9.6% and that 1% of mayors and 9% of local councilors are women.]
 - a. Do you think these percentages should be higher, lower, or about the same as now? Why?
2. Do you have an idea for the “best” percentage for ensuring government is effective and representative of the population?
3. Do you think there should be laws that make it easier for women to compete in elections and reach the ideal percentage, even if it means more men will lose their positions? Why or why not?

VIII. GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE

1. Now I'd like to talk about the government. Is the central government doing a good OR not so good job so far in addressing problems that are important to you? Do you feel represents you and your interests? [**FOLLOW-UP: Why/Why not?**]
2. Now let's discuss the elected deputies in the National Assembly. Although it has been in power just a short time, is the National Assembly doing a good OR not so good job so far in addressing problems that are important to you? [**FOLLOW-UP: Why/Why not?**]
3. Do you know the deputy of your region? [**ESTIMATE HOW MANY WOMEN KNOW THE NAMES OF THEIR DEPUTIES.**]
4. Let's pretend that you were the head of a women's association. What would you say to leaders in the central government to encourage them to pay attention to issues that are important to women and put in place solutions for these problems?
 - a. What strategies would you recommend for them to respond to women's concerns with effective measures?
5. Now let's think about the local government here. Are the commune leaders doing a good OR not so good job in addressing problems that are important to you? [**FOLLOW-UP: Why/Why not?**]
6. Again, let's pretend that you were the head of a women's association. What would you say to the commune leaders here to encourage them to pay attention to issues that are important to women and put in place solutions for these problems?
 - a. What strategies would you recommend for them to respond to women's concerns with effective measures?

VIII. PEACE, RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION PROCESSES

1. What do you know about the peace and reconciliation process that is happening now in Mali, at the national level?
2. Do you know any public institutions that are involved in this process or who work on the theme of reconciliation? If yes, which ones? What are their roles and actions?
3. Do you know CSOs involved in this process or who work on the theme of reconciliation? If yes, which ones? What are their roles and actions?
4. What do you know currently of the peace and reconciliation processes that occur in your community?
5. What do you think of the work being done (at the national and local level)? Que pensez-vous sur du travail déjà fait (au niveau national et à l'échelle communautaire)?
6. Who are the most important groups to include in the process?

7. **[PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED:]** Should women play a role in this process? If so, what kind of role?
8. Do you see a role for yourself, personally, in contributing to the peace and reconciliation process? If so, what kind of role would you like to play?

[ONLY FOR THE GROUP OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN]:

9. What are the specific difficulties that displaced women and girls face?
10. What are your expectations concerning the current reconstruction programs in the Mali?
11. Do you know any association from the North that work on this issue? If yes, which ones?
12. How do you think that your needs and interest can be taken into account by these reconstruction programs?

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

APPENDIX C: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea L. Levy is an independent consultant to several organizations, including the National Democratic Institute. She has worked in the research field for 22 years. She was formerly the research program manager for NDI in Sudan and has subsequently managed research studies for NDI in Somalia, Burundi, Angola, Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire. Her international research experience includes projects implemented for the governments of Poland, Bolivia, Colombia, Wales, Indonesia and the Bahamas. Previous to working with NDI, she was a senior research consultant at several communications consulting firms in New York, including SS+K and Miner & Co. Studio, where she managed and conducted opinion research for Fortune 500 companies from a variety of industries. She holds a master's degree in international relations from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

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