SOHS 2018 CASE STUDY:

MALI

ALNAP is a global network of humanitarian organisations, including UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve the response to humanitarian crises.

Groupe URD is an independent institute which specialises in the analysis of practices and the development of policy for the humanitarian and post-crisis sectors.

About this case study

This case study is one in a series of five research pieces which fed into the analysis for *The State of the Humanitarian System 2018*. This research was conducted and written in April 2018.

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The views contained in this report do not necessarily reflect those of ALNAP Members.

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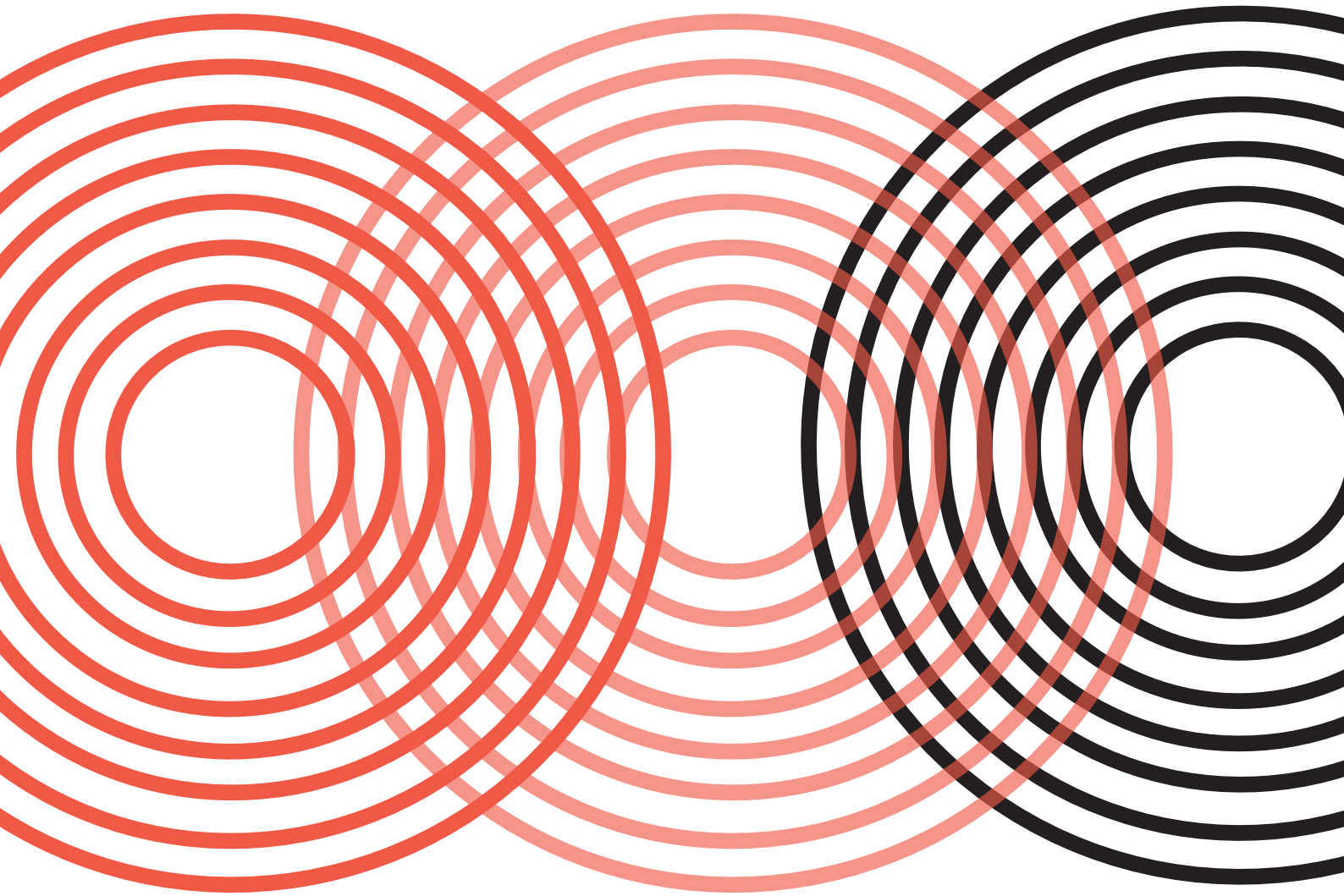

Acronyms

ASACO	community health associations
AVSF	Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (Agronomists and Vets without Borders)
CESCOM	community health centres
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CRT	Timbuktu Regional Council (*Conseil Régional de Timbouctou*)
DFID	Department for International Development
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission
FONGIM	the backbone of NGO coordination in Mali
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL	international humanitarian law
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MCP	Malian Civil Protection
MINUSMA	UN Stabilization Mission in Mali
MOC	Operational Coordination Mechanism
MSF	*Médecins Sans Frontières*
OCHA	UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
PEDSC	*Programme Economique de développement social et culturel* (Economic programme for social and cultural development)
SOHS	*The State of the Humanitarian System report*
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanisms
TFP	Technical and financial partners
WFP	World Food Programme

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Executive summary

Evolving crises and the humanitarian–development nexus

Since the last State of the Humanitarian System report in 2015, humanitarian aid in Mali has gone through a series of changes. The situation in the country has been affected by increased insecurity due to the fracturing of non-state armed groups, the rise of new jihadist militant groups and the emergence of a totally new conflict in the centre of the country.

Increasingly, during the period 2015–17, the conflicts in north and central Mali have been exacerbated by the politics behind ethnic divisions and competition over pasture and water resources. Difficulties related to the peace process have meant that the crisis has evolved from being a situation where improvement was expected, allowing a shift from humanitarian to development aid, to in fact become more of a protracted crisis. In these shifting contexts, it is difficult to apply international humanitarian law (IHL).

New tools have emerged within the aid community, including special funding mechanisms that aim to track the crisis over time while also building the resilience of the population and national institutions whenever this is possible. For example, despite the controversy related to its 'security and migration agenda', the EU's Humanitarian Trust Fund has supported many vital activities that are essential for the survival of the civilian population in the difficult areas of the north.

Efficiency, effectiveness and coverage

The humanitarian sector in Mali has been able to deliver many essential services to affected communities despite a wide range of constraints. Its coverage and capacity to deliver assistance has remained stable since 2012 when armed groups took over large parts of the north of the country. In many areas of the north, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the national staff of international NGOs continue to deliver assistance to people in need, though often in a sporadic way.

The increased costs of security measures, including the use of air transport and the difficulty of properly monitoring operations, have contributed to increasing the role of Malian NGOs, which is positive in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Use of third-party monitoring has mitigated the constraints affecting monitoring.

With the development of mobile banking and the increased coverage of mobile telephones and the banking system, more humanitarian agencies are using cash-based financing in their operations in addition to vouchers. But this is still limited due to the weaknesses of banking infrastructure and the risks involved in transporting money in difficult areas.
However, due to the changing alliances between the different armed groups of the north and deteriorating security in central Mali, some humanitarian actors are slowly reducing their presence, and thus the coverage of needs. In areas where the aid system is active, the security costs involved are reducing the efficiency of aid.

As aid actors have become more acquainted with the situation in different areas, they have designed increasingly refined programmes, which are more effective but are not necessarily easy to scale up. The challenge now is to establish how to work in the long term using a methodological mix from different schools of thought, strong situational intelligence and flexible administrative procedures that allow genuine operational agility.

A welcome development is the growing role of the Malian Civil Protection (MCP) force in the response to natural disasters and high intensity attacks on civilian infrastructures, especially in urban contexts, and in drawing up contingency plans. At the same time, NGOs and donors have developed several Rapid Response Mechanisms to deal with sudden conflict-related population displacements and fast-onset disasters. These mechanisms need to improve their own coordination, as well as their coordination with the MCP, which has limited access in the northern regions.

Principled humanitarian aid in a context with a UN Stabilization Mission

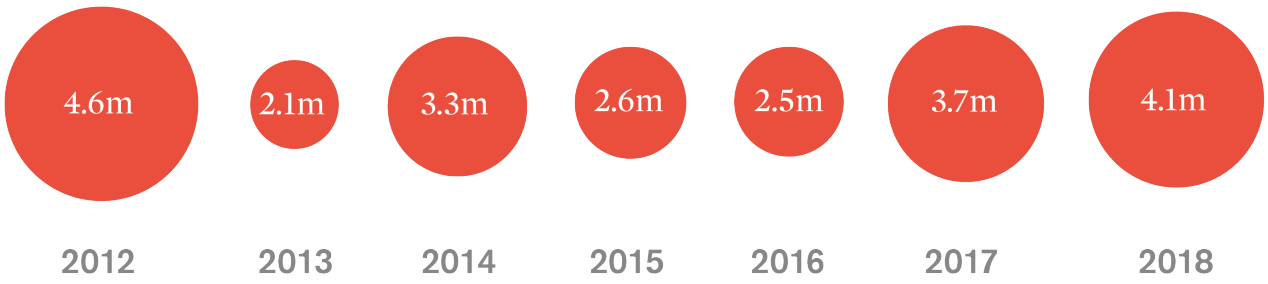
The Mali case study underlines the limited progress made in terms of the relations between the humanitarian sector and the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The community projects financed by MINUSMA ('Quick Impact Projects') remain a concern for humanitarian agencies. While all stakeholders underlined the importance of making progress on political, security, governance and development issues, views differ significantly about how to coordinate these different aspects of crisis management. Thus many humanitarian actors see the risk of humanitarian aid being used for other purposes is seen as rather high. Many interviewees felt that because MINUSMA convoys and bases are frequently targeted, it is even more critical to maintain sufficient distance between the humanitarian sector and the UN mission.

In search of coherence: the politicisation of aid in the humanitarian-development-security-migration nexus

The humanitarian sector in Mali is under pressure due to a set of relatively new challenges. Emerging debates about linking aid and security, and about linking aid and migration are creating a great deal of unease within the humanitarian community, even though the 'humanitarian–development nexus', formerly known as Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), has already been discussed in different forums in Bamako. The creation of the G5 Sahel multi-country military force in 2017, based in Sévaré, central Mali, has increased the tension between humanitarian organisations and armed forces of all kinds with several different chains of command and uneven knowledge of IHL.

The challenge now is to establish how to work in the long term, providing high-quality humanitarian aid based on a mixture of strong situational intelligence and flexible administrative procedures that allow genuine operational agility, and downwards and upwards accountability.

Figure 1 / Size of population in need in Mali, 2012–2018



Source: OCHA (2019)

Introduction

As a result of the series of crises that have affected Mali since 2010, the population in need was estimated in 2018 to be around 4.1 million, a rise from 3.7 million in 2017, with 49,000 internally displaced people and 47,000 returnees from the refugee camps in neighbouring countries. These numbers have evolved in parallel to the security crisis and the climate-related events affecting food security (OCHA, 2016; 2017).

The humanitarian response is implemented by more than 130 aid organisations, including the key United Nations agencies, the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, a wide range of national and international NGOs and key donors.

The present report brings together the results of two field visits to Mali and builds on the Mali case study for the 2015 State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report (SOHS, 2015) by covering the subsequent 2015–17 period. It is based on a series of interviews in Bamako, Gao and Timbuktu with staff from Malian institutions (central and decentralised levels), UN agencies, international, national and local NGOs, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Malian Red Cross, as well as beneficiaries. Around 30% of the interviewees were women. While some interviews took the form of face-to-face meetings with individuals, several took the form of focus groups (with UN agencies, local NGOs and beneficiaries).

Out of the total of more than 50 interviews, 30 were recorded, 28 of which were transcribed and coded using the MAXQDA software. The report also makes the best possible use of existing reports on humanitarian aid in Mali (see Bibliography).

1. Context overview

1.1 The origins of the crisis

The current crisis in Mali is linked to historical factors, the enduring unequal development between the south and the north and east, and the fact that the issues raised by the conflict in the 1990s have not been sufficiently addressed (the need for infrastructure, local development and access to basic services). The situation has been made worse by a crisis in governance, despite the efforts that have been made to deal with weaknesses of state institutions both at the central and regional levels. Since 2006, the state's disengagement from the north has allowed major drug and arms trafficking networks to emerge, and radical Islam has gradually spread into the country over its northern border with Algeria. Regular government scandals, an unfinished decentralisation process, the ongoing sense of marginalisation among communities in the north, weak civil society polarised by the 2010–2013 conflict (when jihadi groups, allied with independence movements, occupied the north), environmental damage, made worse by increasingly visible changes to the climate, the subsequent major impact on agricultural and pastoral practices, and economic shocks, all make for an extremely fragile context. When Libya collapsed in 2011, a large number of Tuaregs from the Libyan army returned to Mali with arms and resumed the conflict. They established an alliance with radical *Katibas*[1] and together occupied the north and the east (Groupe URD, 2013). After Operation Serval, state officials who had left between 2010 and 2012 slowly began to return, but this process is still far from complete. Though they have returned to the main towns in the north (Timbuktu, Gao, Nyafounké, Goudham, Gourma Rharous), at the time of this study, many positions in the lower levels of territorial administrations (regions or cercles, and communes) were still vacant or only occupied in a very limited way (ICG, 2018).

1.2 A difficult peace-building process

The period covered by this report comprises several milestones with a heavy emphasis on humanitarian aid. The Algiers Agreement, signed at the beginning of 2015 between the state and the two main coalitions of insurgents, has proven difficult to apply:

- The disarmament of armed groups has not yet taken place and the establishment of cantonment sites for the demobilisation of former rebels (where they can stay until the process of reintegration either into the military system or into civilian life is in place), has fallen behind schedule; some progress has recently been made in Kidal as the MOC camp (Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination (Operational Coordination

Mechanism) – the system in place to oversee the disarmament-demobilisation and reintegration (DRR) process) has been vacated to allow the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to set it up as a cantonment site (UNSC, 2017b).

- The establishment of transitional authorities has taken a long time in the northern regions, particularly in Kidal and Timbuktu, which were virtually taken hostage by the movements. Finally, new regional committees have been set up and have begun to take responsibility for the future of their regions since April 2017 (Government of Mali, 2017).

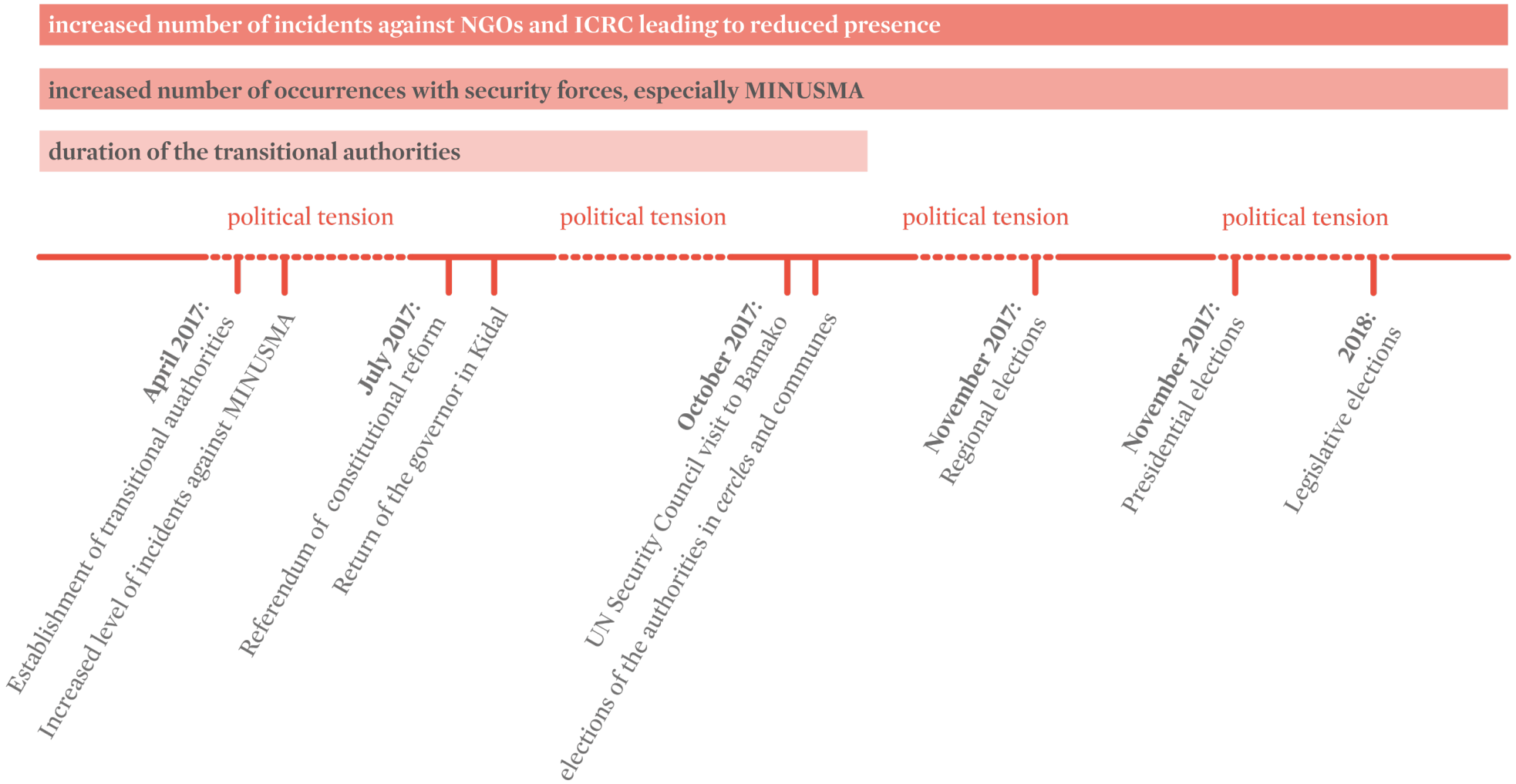
These delays have created dissatisfaction, which has bolstered new Islamic fundamentalist movements in the north and centre of the country. As a result, insecurity has spread and the number of attacks has increased, further weakening the peace agreement and making humanitarian action dangerous.
The centre of the country has become extremely tense, with an increased ethnic divide between the Fulani and the Bambara, exploited by Islamic fundamentalists. The Malian army has reacted violently and too often based on ethnic affinities. There have been a large number of arbitrary arrests, disappearances and assassinations (Tobie, 2017). It is always extremely difficult to investigate and keep a record of these cases (ICG, 2016).

Some international organisations, including both humanitarian and peace-building actors, have focused primarily on inter-community dialogue, in order to reduce inter-community violence (CDH, 2017). This is often linked to competition over natural resources and is subject to political manipulation. It has notably led to the growing influence of jihadist groups among certain ethnic groupings.

Radicalisation and politicisation of inter-community confrontations

Ethnic groups like the Fulani, particularly in the centre of the country, feel that they have been swindled and discriminated against by the security services and the state. They are therefore more receptive to certain messages. Jihadist groups take root within communities first via a certain number of community members. Sometimes they are able to convince the others simply by discussing the jihadi message, but often the fact that they carry arms forces the community to become radicalised, to establish links with radical groups, to accept them and to adopt their strategy. This increases the level of tension, and the frequency and violence of inter-community clashes. This is then used by political actors in their course to power.

Figure 2 / Key political risks April 2017 to 2018



Source: Groupe URD

1.3 Political factors

To understand the difficulties encountered by humanitarian actors working in Mali during the period under review, it is important to consider political factors. On the one hand, there were the inherent difficulties of applying the peace agreement in the north.
On the other hand, there was a high level of uncertainty due to the very busy electoral calendar in 2017–2018. This complex political environment led to a rise in the number of attacks against non-UN actors, after a period when there had been relatively few (2015–2016). Humanitarian actors had to adjust and adapt to this environment and were forced to disengage from certain areas. This environment created significant political risk during the period covered by the report (CDH/MINUSMA, 2017).
Election years often bring complications, and several donors therefore made significant efforts to prepare the Ministry of the Interior's Special Forces to deal with possible large-scale unrest as effectively as possible (Michailof, 2017). Furthermore, the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018 were marked by a lot of uncertainty within Malian institutions (Sy, 2017).

It is also likely that there will be legal and constitutional instability in the months following the elections with regard to the functioning of the transitional authorities. Aid implementation is likely to be affected by tensions between modern administrative systems and traditional, communal systems, and by incompatibilities between existing texts on decentralisation and those related to the functioning of the transitional authorities that were installed as part of the 2015 Alger Peace Agreement (IMF, 2015; DANIDA, 2017).

2. Analysis and findings

2.1 A wide range of humanitarian activities: life-saving to livelihoods protection

Humanitarian aid in Mali dates back to the terrible drought of 1973–1974. After the 1991 insurgency that led to the first Peace Agreement in the early 1990s, development aid became dominant. The 2010–2011 drought and the occupation of a large part of the northern regions by jihadist groups by mid-2012 then led to a new surge in humanitarian aid. It is interesting to note that during the response to the 2010–2011 drought, the humanitarian sector struggled to work at scale or to apply humanitarian principles. This was because most of the agencies that were present in Mali at that time only had a 'development presence' and had a lot of difficulty shifting to a humanitarian approach.[2] Despite the increase in the number of humanitarian teams and the new humanitarian agencies that developed their activities in the north, it took a lot of time to ensure that the appropriate humanitarian dynamic was in place, to establish a Humanitarian Country Team and to activate the Cluster System.

> "We are involved in aspects where we are unable to carry out long-term actions because that depends on being completely in control of security aspects, which is not the case. Also, the state is responsible for support and assistance at the community level. If that is not there, for the moment it is good to advance on the emergency, gradually in the short term, before properly engaging in long-term programmes because, firstly, the people are often not there. Secondly, even if they are, the elected representatives are not fully in control of the situation. Thirdly, the development needs to be the property of the beneficiary communities. This is a major problem. This is why, in the current crisis, it is good to give the priority to short-term, emergency relief, rather than long-term development, because we don't have the means to implement these projects which create problems."
>
> **Local authority representative**

The situation has changed dramatically since 2012, and the 2015 SOHS report described a major increase in humanitarian activities. Many of these activities are still ongoing, though there has been a great deal of changes in programming and implementation methods. These different humanitarian activities have had a positive impact in many respects, including in areas where there is little or no state presence or decentralised technical services. There are also some areas of concern and risks of negative impacts, in particular when aid can induce a certain level of dependency or cronyism. In order to overcome these, in addition to developing exit strategies for their programmes, several agencies have found it essential to adopt a 'do no harm' approach and to conduct conflict-sensitive analysis.

Overview of the humanitarian aid sector in Mali (OCHA, 2018)

Health: There are positive impacts in the health sector as the Community Health Centres (CESCOM) and the Community Health Associations (ASACO) have both received a significant amount of assistance to put in place free healthcare. However, the question remains about how this will work when the aid stops. The health sector is dependent on funding from NGOs and returning to a cost recovery system will necessarily have an impact on the quality of the health service.

Food security: A large number of programmes in the agricultural and animal husbandry sectors are reasonably effective, with organisations like Agronomists and Vets Without Borders (AVSF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), that know how to work effectively with the nomadic tribes. On the other hand, organisations like the UN, that are dependent on humanitarian organisations to implement programmes, appear to have difficulty seeing the people as operational partners. Several key informants underlined the fact that this can lead to aberrations, such as when the World Food Programme (WFP) gives its partner in Kidal lists of beneficiaries established in 2014 to carry out distributions. Given Kidal's recent history, the urbanisation and demographic changes that are taking place in the city, and the predominance of nomadism in the area, these lists do not make much sense.

Education: Significant effort has been made to allow children to return to school. Incentives have been introduced to attract them back and to prevent them from disappearing from the education system. The assistance has taken different forms, such as providing educational materials, or supporting school canteens. Some donors also see education as a way of preventing young people from joining jihadist groups, a security-based approach that makes some humanitarian actors very uncomfortable. In a few areas, there has been discussion about how to articulate modern education and Quranic schools, in order to establish education systems that are suited to nomadic areas.

Protection: Humanitarians want to provide protection, but the protection issues that exist are complex and diverse. Some are linked to attacks by the armed opposition, others to the behaviour of the Malian Armed Forces and the settling of scores, which have been very frequent since 2012. On their own, most NGOs are only able to engage in advocacy because these questions are the responsibility of the state; for non-specialised agencies, there is a certain risk in addressing these issues. Specialised NGOs were alerted about a certain number of issues, such as the scale of sexual violence, a subject that is often taboo in Mali. In most other organisations, staff had to be trained to take this 'gender' issue into account. Now, more and more information can be collected, and cases can be referenced and transferred to specialised organisations. These protection issues are often related to displacement following political and inter-community conflicts. Significant effort has been made to reference and document cases of abuses and violence carried out by the Malian army. Despite the efforts of NGOs who reference these cases and engage in advocacy work, and of a few Malian legal experts, impunity

remains the norm. There are very few sanctions, and thus little deterrence. The structural weaknesses of the protection sector are directly linked to the operational difficulties of the Protection Cluster. Donors have tried to reinforce 'protection' coordination and ensure that integrated cross-cutting approaches are put in place (Protection Cluster, 2017).

Although the ICRC, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and a handful of Malian human rights NGOs are very active, there is a severe lack of institutions capable of dealing with protection cases. This is due to the lack of specialists, the lack of dedicated resources, and the weak presence of state services in the centre and north of the country. The challenge is no longer to identify the cases but to be able to refer them to appropriate service providers, with the relevant human and financial resources, capable of covering areas where there are the greatest needs. As one key informant interviewee explained, this creates a dilemma: 'it is good to improve the capacity to identify cases, but if we are then unable to treat them, there is a risk of doing more harm than good'.

2.2 Impact, effectiveness, coverage and efficiency

In a large part of the north, most of the assistance goes to the most accessible areas, both for physical and security reasons, while the rest of the area is neglected. This is the case to the north of the river Niger where there are huge areas that are practically empty, with a few settlements at water points. It is very difficult and expensive to gain access to these scattered populations. What is more, for security reasons, westerners only very rarely go to these areas, except for the military which has significant logistical means, including helicopters. However, in areas where humanitarians work, the impact of their activities is generally considered to be positive, though insufficient, as shown by the analysis of several food security, livelihoods and health programmes in the northern and central regions.

> "You have to see the conditions on the ground to understand how difficult it is to provide assistance: there is less than 50 km of tarmac road in our extremely large province. The majority of people are concentrated along the river, particularly around Timbuktu and in the irrigated zone, and in the pastoral areas in the south with the Gourma, and in the north with the Haoussa. There, there are thousands of kilometres of sand, and cars go at 20 km/h and consume 25 litres of diesel/100km. Providing all those who need it with assistance is difficult, because it is dangerous to leave the cities due to the jihadists and there is not good coverage in the areas away from the river. And even along the river, there are often attacks, and NGOs do not generally send western expatriates."
>
> **Malian manager**

The challenge of healthcare for all

In the early 1980s, in view of the difficulties of financing health systems and creating sustainable access to healthcare for all, the issue of cost recovery began to be debated. This led to the Bamako Initiative (UNICEF, 1987), which introduced a degree of cost recovery into the health systems of various countries, both in Africa and further abroad. Cost recovery systems can either involve the payment of a fee to gain entry into a health system, or payment for each medical act and medicine. There may or may not be exemptions for the very poor. As the country behind the Bamako Initiative, Mali has always been very proud of the fact that its health system has a high level of coverage (though this is lower in the north, due to low population density and difficult terrain) and is relatively sustainable, thanks to its financing mechanism (Falisse, 2012). After 2012, the humanitarian sector chose to provide free healthcare, with the objective of full coverage. With the country's humanitarian budget now gradually being reduced, the government wants to go back to a cost recovery system, but humanitarian actors are not happy about such a prospect as this may exclude the most vulnerable sections of the population. What is more, humanitarian actors are concerned that if cost recovery is re-established too quickly, significant logistical problems in terms of medical and nutritional supplies (such as imported products like Plumpy'nut), the absence of quality control and the existence of corrupt practices would probably lead to a drop in the quality of care, and possibly to the closure of numerous community health centres, thus drastically reducing access to primary and secondary healthcare for the rural population. There is therefore a dilemma between protecting access to essential services for all and the need to build the sustainability of these services.

Similar developments could affect other technical sectors, such as food security, cash transfers (the setting up of social protection strategies and social safety nets), and the establishment of water supply systems.

Despite underfunding, humanitarian aid has had a positive, though fragile impact: humanitarian actors underlined the fact that, though there are still concerns, there has not been a large malnutrition crisis. In addition, basic social services have been maintained in almost all areas, although often in a 'degraded mode'. ECHO (the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission) classified the Malian crisis as a 'forgotten crisis' in 2016, and the prospects of an increase in humanitarian funding are limited due to competition from other crises, such as Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa and Syria. There is a form of fatigue on the part of the international community with regard to Mali, even though it appears to be aware of the seriousness of the situation; two donors – the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) – have recently posted human resources dedicated to humanitarian aid in the Sahel in general and in Mali in particular.

> “...in terms of negative impacts, it is the phenomenon of dependency that is created amongst the communities. We don't involve the communities, we arrive with our ready-made toolkits, what the communities need, and in the end we spend very little time working with them. It works well in an acute situation, but very quickly, after six months of the acute phase, there is a real need to do some proper programming.”
>
> **Focus group with local and international NGOs**

Due to the difficulty of the environment, the security problems in certain areas and the reduced humanitarian funds available, humanitarian aid in Mali is currently in transition with little clarity about how the situation will evolve (ICG, 2018b).

2.3 Security, access and coverage

The presence of radical groups in northern Mali does not necessarily prevent humanitarian organisations from gaining access, but has made it significantly more difficult for non-African expatriates to access the field. For the moment, they do not appear to want to prevent NGO staff from working in these areas as long as their projects do not aim to tackle head-on sensitive issues, such as antenatal health or women's education. In the north, agencies with strong roots in a given area (international agencies with well-connected local staff or local NGOs with a good record) have been able to deploy and be very active, even in difficult areas such as Kidal. NGOs have had to develop strategies to be accepted in the north since 2010. The same thing is needed in the central regions where humanitarian NGOs have only had a limited presence in the last few years. However, due to the presence of armed opposition groups and international and African military forces, staff security has become a major issue for aid organisations, though the degree to which they are affected varies (MSF, 2016). During 2017, a significant surge in security incidents led Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the ICRC to disengage from Kidal (MSF, 2017).

> “However, some actors, including the humanitarian coordinator who is part of the MINUSMA leadership, are trying to combine security and humanitarian approaches; which she considers to be legitimate as it is an integrated UN mission. There is a difficult, and relatively chaotic debate, and we know from experience that humanitarians lose this kind of power struggle, particularly if humanitarian actors begin to contribute to this kind of approach, which was the case in Afghanistan, for example. So there is an issue at stake with this subject, to the extent that giving up on strict adherence to humanitarian principles, could only, in my opinion and based on experience, lead to a loss of credibility on the part of humanitarian actors in the field. Obviously in relation to signatory groups,

but these are not the most dangerous for humanitarian actors; also radical groups, ethnically based self-defence groups, and foreign actors who are beginning to move in. We know that there are radical groups from Burkina Faso, and from Niger who are present in Mali. ”

International organisation representative

The context has significantly deteriorated in the centre of the country since the second half of 2016 (ICG, 2016), making humanitarian action more dangerous (FIDH, 2018). This has led to new constraints for humanitarian organisations. NGOs have adopted different strategies in order to be able to adapt to these new threats and continue to provide assistance to vulnerable people in the field. For example, the fact that there have been no flights to Kidal since last year has not prevented NGOs from continuing to work there; eight international NGOs currently work there on a daily basis with national staff and national partners. Today, one of the main factors that limits the presence of both international and local organisations is crime. The number of burglaries and vehicle thefts has soared, representing more than 80% of attacks against NGOs. The measures taken by the government to reduce insecurity, such as the ban on motorbikes in the centre of the country, have created problems in contexts where a lot of NGO agents travel by motorbike (health programmes, etc.). It is obviously not possible to provide every NGO agent with a car. Military operations can also create temporary ‘no-go’ areas for aid organisations.
It is therefore important to specify the risks and the actors involved in this violence:

- As political organisations, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and the Platform of armed groups (the Platform) do not target humanitarians any more than jihadists do; it is not in the interests of either to be accused of reducing aid. However, terrorist attacks have targeted MINUSMA and everything associated with it including UN agencies, the Barkhane Force and the Malian army, and other Malian state bodies.
- Road blockers, car thieves and especially livestock thieves, no doubt supported by corrupt and underpaid security forces, are the main risk both for humanitarians and the population. These are the actions of out-of-control members of the armed movements who are economically destitute (the cantonment and reinsertion process has been very slow) and young men who are socially deprived due to the lack of economic development in the country.

> “The quality of aid and the coverage of needs vary depending on the sector and the geographic area. Access to areas like Kidal, Menaka, Gossi, Ghourma Rharous and Taoudenni is much more difficult than to areas close to Gao and Timbuktu. In the centre of the country, certain cercles near Mopti are becoming more difficult in terms of security than Kidal or Menaka, where the situation is very variable.”
>
> **Malian official**

Important measures that have been negotiated between aid organisations and donors include international NGOs' use of facilities such as ECHO Flight which, though expensive, allows them to take part in systems for medical evacuation; and the increasingly systematic use of hired rather than bought vehicles in the field. (Imported cars or cars rented from entities that are not well connected do not benefit from local social protection and become easy-to-rob targets.)

2.4 The challenge of adhering to principles

Adhering to humanitarian principles, a key factor for the acceptance by parties involved in the conflict, raises many challenges in the north and centre. The first of these is the weakness of the state, which struggles to reassert itself in parts of conflict-affected areas (Kidal, Taoudenni and Menaka), while radical groups regularly target state representatives. Today, even though humanitarian organisations are aware that they are guests in the country and that they need to be accountable to the state, if they are seen to be too close to the state, there is a risk that this will be perceived as a loss of their neutrality and independence, putting NGO staff in jeopardy. Nevertheless, they still have to establish relations with technical ministries such as the Health and Education Ministries in Bamako.
Another challenge is the result of instability caused by the establishment of temporary authorities in connection with the peace agreement. Though progress has been made, this led to a wave of insecurity in Gao in the spring of 2017, with significant social unrest and demonstrations in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.

> “Respect for the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, from that point of view, is very well understood, but there is a big difference between understanding and implementation. Everyone agrees that it is important to take these aspects into account in humanitarian action. Very often, when there is a lack of confidence there can be doubts that lead to problems of understanding. These can be harmful because certain humanitarian agents have been kidnapped because it was thought that they were there to provide the armed forces with information. These are things that it is very simple to avoid.”
>
> **Local authority representative**

Inter-community conflicts have led to a form of politicisation of humanitarian aid. As aid actors have to coordinate with national and local institutions, some key informants feel that the aid sector is taking sides. In the context of Kidal, for example, a large proportion of humanitarian aid is concentrated in the city of Kidal, because most of the 75,000 people in the province live in the city. The communities involved in these conflicts still have a very traditional, nomadic outlook and, as a result, any assistance to the urban population of Kidal raises suspicions about a hidden agenda. There are a large number of small projects in the different cercles of the Kidal region, with very difficult field conditions, significant logistical constraints and very high costs per beneficiary. Some of these projects are implemented by or under the supervision of armed forces, whether this concerns Barkhane (Chebli, 2017) or MINUSMA. This inevitably entails a blurring of lines between humanitarian and military actors with repercussions in terms of humanitarians' perceived neutrality (Bourreau, 2017).

2.5 Connectedness in a context with a multi-dimensional UN mission

The question of civil–military relations is very important in this context. MINUSMA embodies a mixture of politics, development and military action in areas where humanitarian action also takes place. As such, it creates a significant amount of insecurity for aid practitioners. Its convoys and UN vehicles are regularly the target of attacks. MINUSMA's financing of community projects (Quick Impact Projects)[3] since 2013 has sparked a great deal of debate and they are still going on. Though mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate the coordination between military and civilian action, humanitarian actors remain defensive about MINUSMA, which has political, peace-building, security and development responsibilities, not all compatible with respecting humanitarian principles.

> "The ICRC has done a lot of advocacy work in favour of humanitarian principles. Many local NGOs claim to respect them, because the principles of IHL are often similar to those of our culture, or even of our religion. Local NGOs do not understand why international NGOs believe that local NGO cannot be neutral or impartial and respect these humanitarian principles. There is even a perception that some international NGO tend not to trust the local actors in the name of these principles: we don't have the plague!"
>
> **Malian NGO representative**

This tension is aggravated with the well-known difficulties inherent to the fact that the Humanitarian Coordinator also wears other hats: he is also Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and UN Resident Coordinator among other roles. In this context, the risk of using humanitarian action for strategic and political gains is real and has already been observed in several instances for instance in Youwarou (Mopti region), where MINUSMA helicopters were mobilised to bring food aid.

2.6 Coordination

Coordination in Mali is organised around several families of actors:

- humanitarian
- within the Malian administration
- donors and technical and financial partners
- within the context of integrated mission deployment.

We will now look at each of these in detail.

2.6.1 Humanitarian coordination

There are several coordination mechanisms in Bamako. At the higher level, the Humanitarian Country Team brings together UN agencies, international NGOs and the Red Cross Movement around the Humanitarian Coordinator. Recently a representative of the Malian NGO has been included in the HCT. At the technical level, the Cluster System is the main coordination tool, but there are some problems in terms of quality. Certain clusters are more effective than others. The Food Security Cluster is one of the best; it provides more in-depth analysis as part of the national mechanism for food security assessment (known as the cadre harmonisé process), provides up-to-date estimates of food production and facilitates strategic planning adapted to the context and needs. The Protection Cluster strategy, which was from 2012, has just been updated (Protection Cluster, 2017).

> “The coordination mechanism in place is based on two branches: the Humanitarian Country Team, shared by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), and the Cluster System. There are a lot of necessary interactions with the donor/government-led ‘technical sectors’ of the Technical and Financial Partners (TFP). This is further stimulated by the fact that the HC is also Resident Coordinator (RC) and very engaged in development planning with the UNDAF process.”
>
> **UN official**

In key domains such as health and nutrition, humanitarian coordination with national institutions is relatively good in Bamako, and sometimes in the field. Coordination of food security programmes essentially takes place at the central level. As for health, coordination takes place with the central authorities at the ministerial level, but the provision of healthcare is decentralised, with a certain amount of autonomy at the sub-regional level: districts, communes, etc. Thus the centre of gravity for coordination is at the field level.

One of the latest developments is the presence of a national NGO in the Humanitarian Country Team, which is seen by all as a great achievement and very much in line with the 'localisation agenda'. NGOs have their own coordination mechanism with the Groupe Thématique Humanitaire, a branch of the FONGIM, which is the backbone of NGO coordination in Mali, bringing together 35 large humanitarian organisations. Humanitarian coordination in the field is also uneven. As the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is not present everywhere, other UN agencies share this responsibility. It has also been proposed that in certain areas where the UN is not present, an NGO could be in charge of coordination, but it appears to be difficult for OCHA to delegate this responsibility as it is its core mandate.

> "The centralised NGO coordination mechanism for humanitarian organisations, the FONGIM, brings together international organisations. Though a similar mechanism exists for national organisations, the latter are not involved a great deal in the different coordination forums. This is particularly true at the central level in Bamako; they take part a little more at the regional and local levels.
> Due to the difficulty of gaining access to direct institutional funding, these local actors are frequently sub-contracted by UN agencies or international NGOs, even though a large proportion of international NGOs implement programmes directly themselves and do not systematically sub-contract implementation to local NGOs.
>
> Beyond the question of the competencies of local NGOs, the real subject is their independence and neutrality in a hierarchical culture that is structured on the basis of different ethnic groups, and where it is rare to find a local NGO that goes beyond a form of attachment to an ethnic group, whether this is simply on the basis of their geographical presence.
>
> These are the questions that international NGOs have to ask themselves when they collaborate with a local NGO in order to ensure that it helps to create stronger local roots and develop stronger local acceptance, rather than, on the contrary, leading to some of the targeted beneficiaries being rejected."
>
> **Director of an INGO**

2.6.2 Malian administration coordination

This coordination has three levels: central ministry services; decentralised state services, with governors and local state services (regional managers who answer to the central ministries); and finally, everything related to decentralisation processes concerning regional councils, cercles and communes. Planning and coordination mechanisms in the field at the regional level report to the Regional Development Agency (Agence de Développement Régionale (ADR)) and the Regional Steering Committee for Coordination and Follow-up of Development Activities (Comité Régional d'Orientation de Coordination et du Suivi des Actions de Développement (CROCSAS)). At local levels they report to communal and local committees (Comités Communaux (CCOCSAD) et Locaux (CLOCSAD)), that do their best with very limited resources (Government of Mali, 2015). In theory, they are supposed to be involved in defining needs, planning processes and coordinating aid on their territories. However, in practice, they tend to be ignored by humanitarian actors who have arrived in Mali since the crisis, who do not understand these locally led systems and therefore do not have any local knowledge about interacting with institutions at different levels.

> "The NGOs and the donors decide what they want and sometimes inform us. They never include us in project design and come to get us to sign the project agreements that they need for their funding applications. They come to see us when there are problems and they need our help. Even development NGOs who have been working with us for a long time have become less cooperative."
>
> **Timbuktu Regional Council representative**

For the Health and Nutrition Clusters, coordination with national organisations is relatively good in Bamako, and sometimes in the field. The central health authorities at ministerial level are in charge of global coordination, with the help of the World Health Organization (WHO) under the Health Cluster. Although the Health Cluster tended to operate alone during the early part of the crisis, the Ministry of Health rapidly took a central role in coordination. But the provision of healthcare is decentralised, with limited autonomy at sub-regional level for districts, communes etc. At the highest levels of the decentralised pyramid, regional health authorities and communal committees are in charge of overall coherence and running the higher levels of the referral pyramid. At the lowest level, each community health centre is supposed to be financially managed by a community health association (Association de Santé Communautaire (ASACO)) in charge of implementing the cost recovery policy. OCHA, UN agencies and NGOs have to adjust to this multi-layer system and there is no way that they could impose anything different. Regional coordination hubs were created with an OCHA presence in most of the areas concerned by humanitarian aid.

> “A lot of effort has been made to produce strategic documents, notably as part of the State–Region Plan, and at the level of each local authority with the Economic Programme for Socio Cultural Development (PDESC). It seems that these documents are not used a great deal by donors and NGOs when they plan aid programmes. Humanitarians and donors who fund programmes in the Timbuktu region without discussing them with the Regional Council and without knowing whether they are in-keeping with its priorities, need to understand how important it is to improve coordination with the regional authorities.”
>
> **Timbuktu Regional Council staff**

Coordination is meant to happen in partnership with the communes, the regions and the central level, but the related legal, administrative and technical parameters are still very vague. Unpredictable management, endemic corruption and an extremely variable level of interaction between the different layers of the state, from one community to the next and from one region to the next, prevent a consistent approach from being implemented everywhere.

Relations between the regional directorates (structures referring to the line ministries) and the decentralised regional councils, staffed since 2017 by the transitional authorities, will become even more important as the decentralization process continues and transfer of responsibilities accelerates. The question of resource transfer became a key component of the discussion during the period under review.

With limited budgets and little information, local actors struggle to play their role in coordinating humanitarian aid. The complexity of the humanitarian coordination system and the transaction costs involved (long, frequent and ineffective meetings, complex Excel files to fill in with long lists of indicators) make it difficult for fragile local institutions to take part. Since 2013, the Timbuktu Regional Council has tried to play a positive role in political negotiations and in order to re-establish basic services. However, various difficulties have hampered these efforts. In fact, many humanitarian organisations define their objectives and set up their programmes without informing the Council, which means that it only has a limited vision of what is really happening on the ground.

> “The consultation framework that has been set up in Timbuktu involves NGOs, the UN system, including MINUSMA and the ICRC. A monthly meeting is organised with the Timbuktu Regional Council (known as] CRT [and the different agencies. The sectors concerned are essentially Food Aid, WASH, Health and Education. This system has allowed the CRT to influence geographic coverage and try to prevent all the aid from simply going to the most accessible areas (Goudham, Timbuktu) and leaving out areas like Rharous and Nyafounké. This established a better balance across the territory.”
>
> **Local authority representative**

In the north, French and Bambara are the shared languages in technical and administrative circles, but Bambara is sometimes seen as the language of Bamako. French is thus the preferred language between the authorities and the aid agencies, although Arabic-speaking aid workers are well accepted. In addition to Bambara, national staff have to be at least fluent in one of the languages of the area (Songhai, Tamashek, Arabic in the north and Fulabe in the central area). The situation is more complicated for MINUSMA staff, especially some of its military components, since many do not speak French.

2.6.3 Donor and TFP coordination

Since the beginning of the crisis in northern Mali, many multilateral and bilateral donors have become involved in the northern regions. Well-established humanitarian donors like DG ECHO (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations), DFID and OFDA have been coordinating their response as they normally do.

Things have become more complicated since bilateral and multilateral development donors (World Bank, Switzerland, Germany, France, the US, etc.) have become involved with funding for the Malian government, NGOs, UN agencies and MINUSMA (World Bank, 2017). The complexity of the resulting series of financial streams has made coordination not only more complicated, but also more necessary (UNDAF, 2015). This has raised numerous concerns:

- Even though the technical and financial partners meet regularly, coordination between donors appears to be relatively weak and ineffective, leading to incoherent coverage, duplication and even competition.
- There is genuine concern that a lot of money arrives in an uncoordinated way in areas where the absorption capacity is relatively limited (especially in the northern and central regions).
- The articulation is still largely uneven among funding mechanisms, national institutions (such as the Commission for the Reconstruction of Conflict-Affected Areas) or national line ministries, decentralised institutions (such as the transitional authorities created after the Algiers Peace Agreement) and UN agencies and NGOs.

> “Coordination can take different forms within the donor community. Humanitarian donors, who normally coordinate with each other quite well, have been faced with the importance of coordinating internally with their development colleagues. As they have different cultures, different procedures, different mechanisms for assessing and vetting proposals, different requirements in terms of collaboration with national institutions, and of course, different timeframes and reporting systems, the dialogue has not always been easy. The coordination between development donors that existed before the crisis as part of the TFP coordination took several forms and excluded humanitarian donors for a long time. Things have improved, but there is still a long way to go.”
>
> **Donor representative**

2.6.4 Coordination by and with MINUSMA

MINUSMA is organised in the same way as most of the other integrated missions, with its Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG), who coordinates the mission as a whole, its Deputy in charge of political and civilian affairs, its Deputy for development and humanitarian aid, and its Force Commander. In terms of humanitarian issues, the same well-known contradictions exist across the political, security and humanitarian agendas (Groupe URD, 2014c).

The current Deputy Special Representative, who is also the Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and Designated Officer for security of the UN staff, is overloaded by his numerous responsibilities and faced with having to juggle different agendas. As has often been said, it is ‘mission impossible’, both in terms of time available for each of the tasks and in terms of agendas: the humanitarian, development and political agendas have strategic interfaces, but are distinct and sometimes contradictory.

The crisis of confidence between MINUSMA on the one hand, and NGOs and UN agencies on the other, makes coordination difficult. The fact that MINUSMA is an enormous machine where information does not necessarily circulate very well and where staff turnover is high means that communication is far from fluid and coordination and advocacy efforts of humanitarians only have a marginal effect.

3. Challenges

3.1 Risk management and early response mechanisms

A contingency plan covering risks of drought, flooding, epidemics, locust attacks and population displacement essentially linked to conflict, was finalised in mid-2017 for the national level and then a regional version was developed. MINUSMA has also drawn up a contingency plan, which is now ready. Regional institutions, such as Regional Councils, usually play an important role in disaster response, but since 2010, when the jihadists took control of the north, the majority of technical managers from these departments, and notably those linked to the ministries, have left for Bamako. Regarding early response mechanisms, certain NGOs now have the means to respond rapidly when there is a flood, for example. There are two main Rapid Response Mechanisms (RRM), one funded by ECHO (Reliefweb, 2017) and the other by USAID.

> “There is a big humanitarian community which is pretty vast and so information makes its way up slowly, and as a result, information is lost between the field and the coordination structures in Bamako. And in fact, certain things that would allow us to anticipate, unfortunately do not get to us in time, and we only realise after an incident that, in fact there were warning signs, signs of a certain number of things that we weren’t able to see or pick up.”
>
> **INGO representative**

The first currently involves six partners that are essentially focused on displacement linked to conflicts and natural disasters, and thus covering the following sectors: Food aid, Wash, Basic non-food items, Shelter and Emergency healthcare. The second is implemented by the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and therefore involves a network of local NGOs and a relatively different approach in terms of method and tools. It involves other small networks of organisations like Caritas, and the possibility of funding from the START Fund. However, according to some key informants, there are also some problems in terms of coordination between response mechanisms: different activation mechanisms, different capacities leading to different quality in terms of timeliness and content of the response, and risk of competition from the Malian Civil Protection (MCP). Coordinating and integrating these different mechanisms into humanitarian coordination mechanisms is problematic, even though some progress has been made. Indeed, one of the objectives of the programme funded by ECHO is to reinforce operational coordination at the regional and sub-regional levels in the field, including local actors and local NGOs.

It is important to take into account the growing capacities of the MCP, which manages all the preparedness and emergency responses by the Malian government. In terms of preparedness, its mandate is to implement the national Contingency Plan, including and going beyond simply rescue. This includes all prevention and preparedness activities. It also has the lead in the preparation of national multi-risk and sectoral plans.

> “The head of the Malian Civil Protection (MCP) produces a daily newsletter (BRQ) which arrives at the President’s office at 8am every day. It also contributes strongly to humanitarian action, conducting search-and-rescue-evacuation and medical activities. Its capacities have been strengthened thanks to different types of training in order to be able to work with UNDAC, to be involved in Post Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNA), etc., to be able to fulfil its role in identifying needs and coordinating. NGOs are beginning to understand that, in many situations, they need to coordinate with the MCP, especially in the context of RRMs [Rapid Response Mechanisms]. It has not been easy, but the NGOs in charge of the RRM are starting to contact us spontaneously. The establishment of an Inter-ministerial Crisis Committee is a critical point (the creation decree is at the level of the Prime Minister) with the creation of an Operations Centre and crisis management, which is critical for aid coordination. When responding to major floods in Bamako or in the other parts of the country, humanitarian intervention is very difficult because of the characteristics of these contexts and the specific means needed to respond to them: boats, helicopters, pumps for urban areas, etc. ”
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> **MCP officer**

The MCP’s work is obviously more complicated in areas of conflict where there is little or no state presence. Local authorities’ support is critical as is that of NGOs. The Malian Red Cross has made great progress in its capacity to respond to events such as bombings in populated areas, with a much-improved medical response capability.

An ‘emergency-attack’ plan has been drawn up in consultation with the ICRC, MSF and some large, high-capacity medical NGOs. There is now an inventory of equipment, stocks and capacities. This helped the MCP to prepare for recent international political summits (G5 Sahel, etc.) and to be at the forefront of the response to Bamako’s Radisson Hotel attacks (on 20 November 2015) and other tragic events where humanitarians were killed (18 June 2017 in a resort near the capital). However, in the northern and central parts of the country, it remains very difficult to operate, even though the Civil Protection department has small offices in Gao and Timbuktu.

> “A contingency plan which covers the issues of drought, flooding, epidemics and population displacement has just been finalised for the national level and is now going to be developed for the regional level.”
>
> **Donor representative**

3.2 The ‘new way of working’

Linking relief, rehabilitation, development (LRRD), giving some life to the humanitarian-development nexus or implementing the “new way of working” as it was referred to in the World Humanitarian Summit debates, are the evolving concepts linked to trying to ensure that aid dependency is avoided, resilience is strengthened, post-crisis processes facilitated and peace consolidated using aid resources in a most effective and efficient manner. It is far from easy and Mali is no exception.

The complexity of the aid planning mechanisms, with the Humanitarian Response Plan, the United Nations Development Aid Framework (UNDAF) process,[4] and the different mechanisms in place in the Malian system, creates confusion about what humanitarian aid is, and therefore what is subject to humanitarian principles, and what is development. In this debate, there is conflict between the Paris Principles about the effectiveness of aid, the other principles promoted by the OECD for fragile states and the principles promoted by the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (GHDI).[5]

In the north and centre of the country, most needs arise from weak development, climate-related problems and local conflicts. These are typically endemic but are worsening as the crisis has become more entrenched. Currently three types of needs co-exist: those that are purely humanitarian, those related to rebuilding resilience, and those that are related to rebuilding the state (OCHA, 2018). The majority of organisations, including donors, move back and forward between these different objectives. In the north, there are national development NGOs that have been present for a number of years and are familiar with the context and the issues at stake there, but that have all the constraints of a national organisation: limited capacity to respond ‘to scale’ in an emergency, lack of familiarity with the methodological tools of humanitarian action and security management, lack of tools to meet donor accountability demands, etc. Alongside them are large international organisations that arrive with significant funds and resources to run and implement programmes, that very quickly provide assistance in the short term and inject resources, but that are unable to grasp certain nuances in the field and struggle to consider the long term.

> “As we are all competing for various different funds, we accept these funds, knowing that these are UN funds, an integrated mission with a military component and we accept it, without any difficulty, because we need funding. Not everyone is equal in relation to this neutrality. Not everyone has the same room for manoeuvre as NGOs like MSF who are completely independent and neutral. Unfortunately, we do need money.”
>
> **Focus group**

It is worth noting that the distinction between humanitarian and development aid does not mean much to national and local NGOs, or the population. The same problems of poverty, health and access to water existed before the crisis in 2010. It was just as difficult to get a Community Health Centre to function six years ago as it is today. In addition, what counts for local organisations is the long-term impact and not just the short-term effect which stops when the NGO leaves.

The proportion of typical short-term funding for humanitarian action is currently being reduced in favour of sources that are more development- or resilience-oriented. While DFID is moving towards multi-year humanitarian funding, it is also deploying other kinds of resilience funding windows, such as BRACED. OFDA is also moving towards multi-year funding as a way of addressing chronic and/or protracted crises. The EU recently developed a new Trust Fund that works with other methods and timeframes that might be more adapted to supporting resilience-strengthening for populations in the long term, in areas when the situation is unpredictable and fast-changing. One of the characteristics of these quasi-development funding opportunities is that they try to combine a push towards increased links with state institutions with an understanding of the required operational modalities to work in these dangerous zones. This could be resented by NGOs eager to protect their image of neutrality at all costs.

One of the difficulties of these complicated post-crisis periods, when peace processes can be reversed, is the prioritisation of funding.

On the one hand, continued humanitarian needs linked to the crisis require considerable humanitarian budgets, which often need to be seen from a long-term perspective. On the other, reconstruction and rebuilding the state in crisis areas requires rapid investment, which then needs to be taken up by the state budget, generally with budgetary assistance. The implementation of funds provided by different donors, such as the European Commission (European Union, 2015) to rebuild state infrastructure and local services, has been slow despite the fact that these were supposed to be emergency measures to create rapid peace dividends. The implementing agency involved wanted to have the full assessment of needs

finalised before starting to act, while it would have been more appropriate to carry out the assessment and the response in parallel for the areas that had already been surveyed. Assistance aimed at local institutions is not being given the importance it deserves even though its role is not only central to the peace agreement, but also to improving people's living conditions.

Lastly, it was important to quickly relaunch programmes that helped the population to become more resilient, using hybrid funding tools that allowed both medium-term planning and implementation, and above all agility, so that the programmes could adapt to turbulence. This is what is being tested with the European Emergency Trust Fund, which aims to rapidly improve access to basic services. More than 15 different initiatives or plans are now in place in the Sahel, and several have emerged in Mali during the period under study: AGIR, UN Plan for Sahel, CDEO Sahel Plan, G5 Sahel, and the Alliance Sahel. In addition to this, each bilateral or multilateral donor or agency has its Sahel or Mali plan, resulting in a lot of confusion.

According to some interviewees, the sector needs to address several key points.

- Monitoring coverage to avoid duplications caused either because there has not been a situation assessment or because there is political advantage to be gained in terms of visibility in a given region. The current system where humanitarian and development funds and actors are increasingly integrated largely displaces OCHA.
- Promoting compatibility and complementarity between actors, ensuring that institutions' absorption capacity is not saturated.
- Raising awareness within the system of the risks linked to differences of approach and methodology between humanitarian and development aid – humanitarian aid saves lives, but has little longer-term effect and can induce dependency; development aid can encroach upon vital humanitarian principles, but has a longer-term vision.
- Paying more attention to how agencies get involved in coordination in general, to know who is working where, on what theme and the size of programmes, etc., but also how they could contribute to the greater good by being better at sharing information.
- Ensuring the 'do no harm' principle is applied beyond tokenism in order to reduce the harmful effects of emergency relief (such as the creation of aid dependency, or worse still, the integration of humanitarian aid into the population's and local and national organisations' survival strategies).
- Considering the sector's position vis-à-vis local power relations to ensure that positive governance dynamics are reinforced (rebuilding social ties, restoring confidence in the justice system and in inclusive governance) without compromising on humanitarian principles.

3.3 The challenges of the humanitarian-development-security-migration nexus

The Sahel crisis in general and the Mali crisis in particular, with national and international jihadi movements and cross-border turbulence, have led to unprecedented security and migration challenges. The response to date has principally been of a military nature. The tendency is to reinforce the armed forces, the military police and border forces, and often to forget the civilian issues at stake, and what the population wants – that is, law and order. This can only be established by the law and its application, and, in the end, guarantees security.

In some areas, food security crises and population displacement are caused by illegal check points set up for extortion and livestock thieves who act in a context of impunity and corruption (Grunewald, 2014), rather than the jihadists: indeed, these illegal road blocks dramatically impact the local economy and significantly hinders access to food and money. Some of the factors that have made the crisis in the north worse have come from this lack of law and order, and this is the fundamental source of the crisis in the centre of the country. In order to restore security, the challenge is therefore less to build more roads and schools, or to put more armed men in the field, but rather to restore confidence in the justice system and the rule of law.

> “We should not delude ourselves about this. There is a lot of corruption in the system in Mali. There are a lot of manipulations and certainly misappropriation of aid.”
>
> **Focus group**

Those in the security sector (Barkhane, MINUSMA, and now G5 Sahel Force) and in diplomatic circles appear to have understood that Mali’s problems cannot be resolved solely by military means and that there is a need for development. As a result, their programmes now include economic development, access to basic services and governance, as well as, sometimes, humanitarian action. However, the majority of programmes are security-focused and the justice system receives very little attention. This use of humanitarian action in parallel to military action, as part of a broader securitisation agenda, is problematic. Migration has also become a very important cross-cutting issue. It has taken on great political significance for the international community, notably for domestic policy reasons. As a result, funding has been revised and the ‘aid narrative’ has been profoundly modified. It is clear that the fundamental issues behind the migration question will not be addressed by either short-term humanitarian programmes, or by reinforcing security. Rather, a strategy needs to be based on inclusive economic development, the reinforcement of democratic

authorities and, most of all, the end of crises and conflicts. In Mali, those who are aiming to migrate, and their families and communities, are only just beginning to realise that Europe is not an Eldorado. There are many different reasons for migrating, including not wanting to lose face with a family who has contributed financially to your migration, but also fear of retaliation for those who have committed acts of violence either as part of the military operations or as part of human right violations against simple civilians). Humanitarian aid can only have an extremely marginal role in reducing migratory flows, and, at best, can help to avoid suffering and exploitation. Indeed, protection is a real issue on the migratory routes that cross Mali and the Sahel in general towards Libya, where there are even cases of sexual slavery. Humanitarian organisations are trying to provide local protection to the victims of human trafficking, in so far as this is possible in terms of security and the absorption capacity of the dedicated and competent referencing services. This would require more financial resources to be able to work in a difficult, and potentially dangerous working environment, because there are obviously considerable economic interests behind this trafficking.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Adapting and being agile under pressure

The crisis dynamics in the north and centre of Mali differ significantly, but both situations are rooted in the local population's desire for fair and appropriate development. Managing the short- and long-term humanitarian effects of these crises and responding to the population's needs and wishes requires responses that go further than classic humanitarian aid, with its specific methods and funding timeframes. Many new initiatives have emerged, such as the new DFID and OFDA multi-year humanitarian funding frameworks. Humanitarian agencies have shown a great deal of imagination in adapting to situations where they have to both consolidate their image of principled humanitarian actors, because it is critical for their security, and adopt a development-like approach, because that is what is required to respond to a protracted crisis largely rooted in chronic development failure. Two examples are innovative approaches to working on human health in parallel to animal health in the north, or different forms of cash transfer, which was completely unknown in Mali until recently. This entails discussing with non-state armed groups and collaborating and coordinating with national institutions at central and decentralised levels.

The challenges of linking humanitarian action and development are crucially important and go beyond the usual debates about the aid continuum – and the fact that Mali is not yet in a post-crisis context – and the aid contiguum – which entails working with different approaches in juxtaposed areas. The challenge now is to establish how to work in the long term using a methodological mix from different schools of thought, strong situational intelligence and flexible administrative procedures that allow genuine operational agility.

Endnotes

1. Katiba is the name used in French for a combatant unit or camp during various conflicts in North Africa or in the Sahel.
2. IASC Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the drought in Sahel, Dakar 2012.
3. These projects are financed for a maximum cost of $50,000 and a maximum six-month duration, in the fields of: services and small public infrastructures rehabilitation; training and awareness-raising activities; and employment and revenue creation.
4. UNDAF is a strategic, medium-term results framework that describes the collective vision and response of the UN system to national development priorities and results on the basis of normative programming principles. It describes how UN Country Teams will contribute to the achievement of development results based on a common country analysis and UN comparative advantage.
5. OECD Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness put national ownership at the centre of the strategy while the GHDI puts respect of humanitarian principles, in particular independence and impartiality, at its core, giving more space to independent actors and not depending on the state to ensure that aid reaches beneficiaries in conflict. OECD Fragile State principles try to combine the two groups in a way that supports the state while ensuring that basic needs of the populations can be properly covered.

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