

## Context and Protection Analysis of Central and Northern Mali

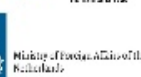
**Circles of Douentza, Mopti Region and  
Gourma Rharous, Timbuktu Region**

July 2020

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# Acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CMA	The Coordination of Azawad Movements
CMP	Population Movement Commission
FAMA	The Malian Armed Forces
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
JNIM	Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin
KII	Key Informant Interview
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MNLA	Tuareg Azawad National Liberation Movement
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'ouest
OCHA	Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SCI	Save the Children International
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Institute
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General

# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a context and protection analysis undertaken in hard-to-access areas of Northern and Central Mali, specifically in the **Circle of Gourma Rharous**, Region of Timbuktu and **Circle of Douentza**, Region of Mopti, by Islamic Relief Mali (IR) and Save the Children Mali (SCI), funded by the START Network. It is based upon information collected directly from host communities, internally displaced people and returnees in the area, supplemented by key informant interviews and published reports.

The circles of Gourma-Rharous and Douentza are marked by a persistent weakness of state security, governance and legitimacy. Despite the signing of the Algiers Peace Accord in 2015, armed groups continue to mobilise around community interests, politico-military goals or self-defense. All armed groups active in central and northern Mali are directly or indirectly involved in illicit activities (weapons, drugs, motorcycle and fuel smuggling, cattle rustling, artisanal gold mining and poaching) and local conflicts.<sup>1</sup> They exploit the vulnerabilities of local economies, rivalries between farmers, pastoralists and ethnic groups, and governance deficiencies.

The following points are key conflict, livelihoods and protection issues and needs among the communities studied in Gourma-Rharous circle and Douentza circle. They are presented to inform future conflict- and gender-sensitive programming by all actors in this highly complex context.

## Conflict, security and governance issues

- **Land and water disputes are the key drivers of inter-communal conflict. Relations between the host community, displaced persons and returnees are generally peaceful** and characterised by solidarity – displacement is not a key line of division between groups. Ethnic discrimination arose in this study as a background feature of conflict in this area of Mali, primarily because ethnic divisions fall along the same lines as livelihood divisions (e.g. farmers vs pastoralists).
  - **Weak state security presence results in a failure to protect civilians from violence and increases insecurity.** The communities most at risk of violence by people outside the home are those living in areas with no state security presence where there is a non-state armed group or ethnic militia from a different ethnic group to their own. However, people who live in villages with a strong ethnic militia (such as the Dozos) feel well protected by the militia if they belong to the same ethnic group.
  - **Non-state armed groups are the primary perpetrators of violence** and communities overwhelmingly point to them as the key driver of insecurity. Communities are extremely fearful of these groups and many have experienced violence from them. Men are most scared of abduction and torture while women fear of sexual violence.
- **Access to justice and dispute resolution is primarily through customary authorities (village chiefs, Imams, Quranic scholars and Qadis courts)** as they are more accessible, locally legitimate and perceived to provide a more fair and just resolution than the formal justice system, but ethnic militia are also engaged by communities in areas where they are present.

## Livelihoods, basic services and humanitarian aid issues

- **Displaced communities are especially vulnerable** since they have lost their land and livelihoods and feel discriminated against with regards to unequal access to basic services, particularly water points. They also have to walk the furthest to collect water which puts women and girls at greater risk of violence. Displaced households are largely comprised of women and children. Women in these households are largely illiterate and displaced children within both circles tend not to attend school due to security fears, making them vulnerable to early marriage, child labour and exploitation.
- **Livelihoods are under threat resulting in food insecurity and malnutrition.** 88% of households have reduced their food consumption in the last six months with few receiving food aid or cash/vouchers. Agricultural and pastoral livelihoods are highly vulnerable to poor rainfall and most families are unable to grow enough food or fodder for their household or livestock. Insecurity in many areas has led to an increase in livestock theft, restricted access to agricultural land and restricted access to markets for the purchase of supplies or economic inputs, or the sale of produce.
- **Barriers to health care.** Households in the villages of Timba and Orodou in Douentza circle have no access to a community health centre. Households in Gossi in Gourma-Rharous also reported high levels of deaths as a result of sickness. Poverty prevents many households from availing themselves of health services if they are not free of charge, and 25% of families lack identity documents, which may also hinder access to health services.
- **Access to electricity is poor and access to basic WASH services is critical in both circles.** Many households do not have latrines in Tango - Tango (Tedié) and Guèré - Doundé villages in Douentza circle, Bambara Maoude and Gossi villages in Gourma-Rharous circle, therefore open defecation and attendant disease are likely to be issues of concern here.

<sup>1</sup> ISS, December 2019, Op Cit. p.2

### Specific issues among women and girls

- **Women and girls are vulnerable to gender-based violence both within the home and from non-state armed groups.** Fear of violence or harassment of girls on the way to/from school is a concern among a third of families, which sometimes prevents girls from attending school, especially displaced Tamasheq girls living in Douentza commune. Fear of violence is also a concern during water collection as displaced women and girls in Douentza town must often walk for more than one hour to collect water. Displaced Tamasheq women and girls feel very unsafe, having experienced gender-based violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups. GBV services and community awareness raising are needed to deal with the effects of GBV on women and transform attitudes to violence against women.
- **52% of girls marry before the age of 18.** Girls are encouraged to marry early to avoid unwanted pregnancies and unburden the family of an additional mouth to feed. Prevention of early marriage interventions are needed to protect girls.
- 38% of households with access to a health centre do not have access to specific **female health services and gynecological and family planning assistance**, which are urgently needed.

### Specific issues among teenagers

- **Teenagers** from all ethnic groups, displaced, host community and returnee backgrounds in Douentza, Gossi and Benguel in Gourma Rharous stated that they **feel in danger** because of insecurity and the presence of bandits.
- **Teenagers state that one of their most important needs is access to education and school materials.** However, insecurity creates a barrier to children's attendance (particularly among girls) and results in disrupted schooling.
- **Teenagers do not have enough to eat because of household poverty and poor agricultural output.** As a result, 52% of households use children under the age of fourteen to work and contribute to the family's means of subsistence.
- **Teenagers perceive good relations between their peers** in the host community, IDP or returnee communities and express feelings of solidarity and compassion to other groups. These positive relations can be further built upon.

### Recommendations for humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors

- Humanitarian and development interventions which have an effect on agriculture, pastoralism, land or water access **need to be highly sensitive to the local context** and perceived biases in state land use policies to avoid exacerbating inter-communal tensions. They must also be extremely sensitive to socio-economic divisions in communities, which very often fall along ethnic lines. **Insensitive interventions could increase inter-ethnic tensions and raise the risk of further conflict.** Interventions could usefully integrate peacebuilding components that address resource competition and inter-community relations to enhance their sustainability in the longer-term.

- Increased access to potable water in close proximity is needed for all households in both circles. Interventions should take into account the safety and security of women and girls, particularly those from IDP households and should also seek to build community relations, ensuring equitable access for all.
- Land demarcation and the provision and management of water infrastructure for livestock, agriculture and drinking water are critical issues that need addressing in all areas, requiring extensive consultation with all ethnic groups to avoid exacerbating tensions.
- Inter-community disputes could be addressed by conflict prevention, mediation or peacebuilding initiatives, engaging with women (particularly on water) and tribal chiefs (particularly on land). This may help to prevent conflict escalation and cycles of attack and revenge.
- Longer-term resilience interventions should consider enhancing subsistence production whilst also supporting households to diversify sources of production and income to enhance their resilience to shocks. Agricultural inputs (especially fertilisers), the provision of economic inputs for other sectors, rainfall conservation, improved irrigation technologies and production of animal fodder among pastoralists, taking into account the local impact of climate change, could all be considered. However, a primary concern is to re-establish access to markets in insecure areas.
- Awareness raising on gender-based violence and child protection in the communities is needed to reduce violence within and outside households and work towards gender justice.
- **Security concerns among displaced Tamasheq women and girls are a high priority for them.** Interventions which focus on improving security for them and relationships with the host community are likely to also benefit Tamasheq girls' access to education, reduce the risk of early marriage, reduce tensions around water sources and reduce the risk of violence against and exploitation of Tamasheq women.
- **41% of households surveyed had at least one family member with a disability** and 12% had two or more people with a disability in their household. The specific needs of people with a disability and families caring for a member with a disability should be taken into consideration in any provision of assistance.
- Education in Emergencies programming can be considered within these circles. During school closures community education projects to supplement gaps in education should be explored.
- Child-friendly spaces that engage children from host community, IDP and returnee families to support the psychosocial well-being of children are recommended.
- Programming that connects children from IDP, host community and returnee households can support the maintenance of positive community relations, reducing fear or prejudice amongst children of other groups.
- Barriers to humanitarian access in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles may be addressed by humanitarian mediation which could open opportunities to deliver assistance to communities in need of humanitarian aid.

# 1. Introduction

Mali's central and northern regions have attracted considerable attention in recent years from governmental and international actors engaged in the country's development and stability. Since 2012 in the north and 2015 in the centre, these regions have become insecurity hotspots where threats from armed groups, military operations, intercommunal violence and conflicts between pastoralists and farmers converge. With state authority, governance and monopoly of force in these regions severely diminished, chronic insecurity reigns and undermines prospects for peace and socio-economic development. This insecurity as well as natural disasters, water resource shortages and land tenure issues have contributed to a complex humanitarian crisis in Mali in which 4.3 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance<sup>2</sup>.

This report presents the findings of a context and protection analysis undertaken in hard-to-access areas of Northern and Central Mali, specifically in the Circle of Gourma Rharous, Region of Timbuktu and Circle of Douentza, Region of Mopti, by Islamic Relief Mali (IR) and Save the Children Mali (SCI), funded by the START Network. Humanitarian needs in both Circles are high; both Circles host the highest number of returnees within their Regions. In Mopti, Douentza is the most affected by school closures with a total of 146 schools closed, affecting some 44,000 pupils<sup>3</sup>, in Gourma Rharous, only 30% of the population have access to potable water<sup>4</sup>.

Displacement Situation as of May 2020 according to OCHA <sup>5</sup>		
	Douentza Circle	Gourma-Rharous Circle
Number of Inhabitants	348,000	152,000
Currently displaced	6,700	6,100
Returnees	25,900	100,000

Against this backdrop, this analysis is intended to:

- Inform IR and SCI humanitarian programming within the targeted Circles, particularly in ensuring context sensitive and gender sensitive approaches.
- Contribute to informed programming of other actors in the humanitarian sphere in Northern and Central Mali through public release of the report.

The strength of this analysis is that it is primarily informed by the voices of communities living in the two circles, presenting their needs, vulnerabilities and perceptions of how their lives have been impacted by conflict.



<sup>2</sup> OCHA, Plan de Reponse Humanitaire: Mali, March 2020

<sup>3</sup> OCHA Profil Humanitaire de la Region de Mopti, May 2020 at [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2020\\_ocha\\_mli\\_profil\\_humanitaire\\_mopti\\_20052020.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2020_ocha_mli_profil_humanitaire_mopti_20052020.pdf) accessed 10 July 2020.

<sup>4</sup> OCHA Profil Humanitaire de la Region de Timbuktu, May 2020 at [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2020\\_ocha\\_mli\\_profil\\_humanitaire\\_tombouctou\\_30032020\\_vf.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2020_ocha_mli_profil_humanitaire_tombouctou_30032020_vf.pdf) accessed 10 July 2020

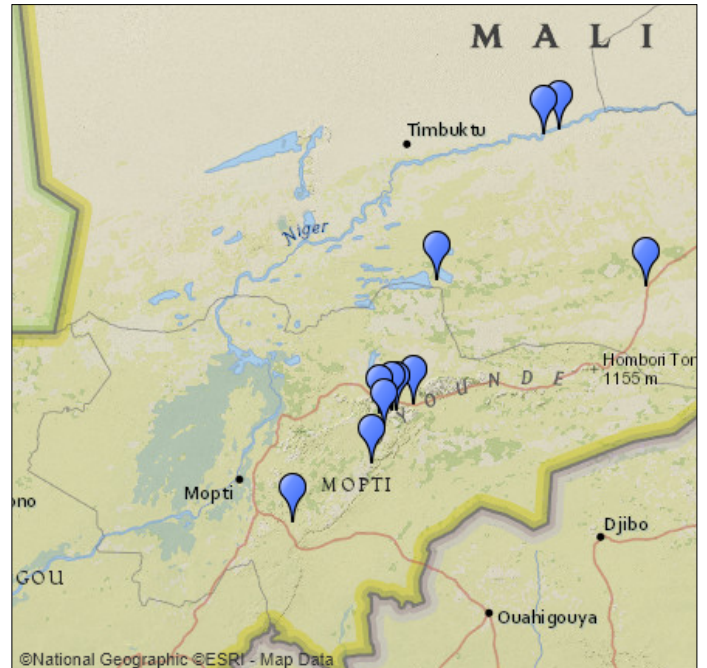
<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.2

## Data collection methods

Data for this analysis was collected through a literature review, household survey, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). Twelve villages (six in Gourma-Rharous, six in Douentza) were selected based on the following criteria; villages where there are host populations only, villages where there are host populations and IDP groups, and villages where there are host, returnee and IDP groups but also vulnerable ethnic groups such as the Bella who have little access to and control of resources. In total, 122 households were surveyed covering all ethnic and displacement groups in the two circles.

- In **Douentza**, 80 households were targeted: 60 of which were from the host community (54 from the majority Dogon ethnic group); Ten Tamasheq households who have been displaced since June 2019 having fled their village of origin in Seno-Drimbe. Five returnee families from the commune of Douentza belonging to a variety of ethnic groups: Bella, Dogon, Malinke and Tamasheq, all returning between 2012 and 2015 from Mauritania and neighbouring regions in Mali.
- In **Gourma-Rharous**, 42 households were surveyed: 22 were from the host community and 15 were from IDP households, the majority of whom are from the Peul ethnic group and some of whom are Songhai. They were mostly displaced since December 2019, coming from Douentza and other parts of Mopti region. Five returnee families from the Peul and Tamasheq ethnic groups were also interviewed, having returned in 2019 after taking refuge in Algeria or Burkina Faso.

Data collection was undertaken by a team of local enumerators in each region formed of three people including at least one woman. Separate focus group discussions for men, women and children were arranged among host communities, displaced communities and returnees in order to collect nuanced data that reflected differences in perception based on experiences of displacement, age and gender. Key informants were chosen from local organisations, international think tanks, local government and partner organisations working in both circles of focus.



Map 1: Map of villages included in this analysis

Circle	Commune	Villages
Gourma Rharous	Rharous	Nana
		Benguel
	Bambara Maoude	Bambara Maoude
		Bobangueye
	Gossi	Gossi
		Kadago
Douentza	Douentza	Douentza
	Koumbele Koundja	Temba
		Orodou
		Adia
	Tedie	Guene Dounde
		Tongotongo



## 2. Context and Protection Analysis

### a. Background to the conflict in central and northern Mali

Mali has been struggling to build peace and achieve security after an armed rebellion broke out in northern Mali in January 2012. The crisis started as a Tuareg rebellion against the Malian government, the fourth in a series of rebellions starting in 1963. The 2012 rebellion developed into a serious armed conflict as a number of non-state armed groups joined in and took over several cities and territory in northern Mali<sup>6</sup>. As Islamist and separatist Tuareg groups advanced, tensions and conflict increased. Fighters looted the businesses of Arab smugglers and raided cattle from Fulani shepherds<sup>7</sup>. These actions prompted Arab merchants to form and Fulani herders to join MUJAO in 2012 as a means of defending themselves against the growing power of the Tuareg Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNL) and its Islamist allies Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar Dine<sup>8</sup>. Fulani stigmatization, in turn, has precipitated the targeting of Fulani communities by neighboring community militias such as the Dozo in central Mali. These militias have mounted attacks killing hundreds of Fulani civilians that have spurred further recruitment into militant Islamist groups, propelling a deadly cycle of revenge and reprisals. Fulani leaders are faced with the dual challenge of defusing the group-wide stigmatization while stemming further recruitment into militant groups<sup>9</sup>.

A peace agreement was reached after international mediation, led by Algeria and with the participation of neighbouring countries, the African Union and the United Nations. By June 2015, all parties had signed the agreement, marking the beginning of a comprehensive implementation process, however, several challenges remain to building a peaceful society in Mali.

Central Mali has been increasingly affected by the conflict that originated in northern Mali in 2012. In Mopti region, mobilization against the state arose before non-state armed groups gained presence.<sup>10</sup> Central Mali is an area of socioeconomic diversity where pastoralist communities, farming communities, fishermen, traders—and a variety of ethnic groups—cohabit. Conflicts of governance were formerly settled by the regular renegotiation of power relations between customary leaders, but a rise in violence and increased presence of armed groups no longer

allows these kinds of transactions and rebalancing to take place easily. The perceived absence of trusted arbitrators (such as state or customary authorities) who would normally be able to de-escalate disputes before they become violent, has led to a cycle of violence.<sup>11</sup> This is compounded by the spread and multiplication of armed groups who are in part enabled by the proliferation of illicit trafficking of weapons over porous borders in the wider region.<sup>12</sup> Since 2012, Mopti region has undergone periods of occupation by several armed groups, each one negotiating or imposing its presence by exploiting alliances or other opportunities to embed itself. This confused reorganisation of the local security environment has caused a rise in the levels of insecurity and criminality, including robbery of traders, cattle rustling, targeted attacks on community leaders and intercommunal conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

Northern and Central Mali have seen an increase in conflict since 2015 linked to non-state armed groups, the intensification of local conflicts and the persistence of transnational organised crime. In this highly insecure setting, some Malian communities have chosen to ally themselves with newly created groups such as the Movement for Unity and Jihad in Western Africa (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'ouest, MUJAO) to defend their interests and provide a counterweight to other armed groups considered to be competitors.<sup>14</sup>

The central and northern parts of Mali are home to both nomadic and sedentary populations who have long been in conflict over land use. In the north, the nomadic group is made up of Tuareg, Arab and Fula shepherds. Sedentary populations are mostly Songhai and Tamasheq - usually called Bella. In the centre, the most settled populations are Dogon (farmers, farmer-herders and artisans), Fula (livestock farmers and farmer-herders), Bambara (farmers, farmer-herders and artisans), Markas (farmers, farmer-herders and artisans), Bozo-Somono (fishermen and farmer-herders), Songhai (farmer-herders and small businesses) and Bwa (mainly farmers)<sup>15</sup>. These regions have been affected by a decrease in grazing areas due to land being used for crops, as well as the depletion of water and foraging resources. The informal economy is very important in these regions involving an interweaving of licit and illicit goods.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) at <https://sipri.org/research/conflict-peace-and-security/africa/mali> accessed 10 July 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Modibo Ghaly Cissé, "Understanding Fulani Perspectives on the Sahel Crisis", April 22, 2020 at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/understanding-fulani-perspectives-sahel-crisis/>

<sup>8</sup> Modibo Ghaly Cissé, "Understanding Fulani Perspectives on the Sahel Crisis", April 22, 2020 at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/understanding-fulani-perspectives-sahel-crisis/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>11</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) at <https://sipri.org/research/conflict-peace-and-security/africa/mali> accessed 10 July 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. "The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali", SIPRI, Stockholm, October 2019, p.7

<sup>14</sup> Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. "The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali", SIPRI, Stockholm, October 2019, p.7

<sup>15</sup> Assanvo, W; Dakano, B; Theroux-Benoni, L-A; Maiga, I, "Violent extremism, organized crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma", Institute for Security Studies (ISS), West Africa Report no. 26, December 2019, p.7

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.8



## b. Current dynamics of conflict in central and northern Mali

### Conflict Actors

Many armed groups operate in Mali with agendas and ambitions that are sometimes vague and unclear. The Algiers Peace Accord signed in June 2015 permitted the establishment of two major coalitions of armed groups: The Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) consisting of pro-independence groups, and the Platform of Movements of 14 June of Algiers, incorporating the pro-government armed groups. In 2017 these were joined by the Coordination of Entente Movements consisting of dissident armed groups from the CMA and the Platform. Non-state armed groups have also been involved from the start of the crisis, with some controlling large swathes of Malian territory. Finally, in a context marked by the persistent weakness of state governance, other groups that are less structured or less involved in the Peace Accord continue to mobilise combatants around community interests, politico-military goals or the need for self-defense<sup>17</sup> The changing alliances between the various armed actors and the confused nature of their claims make it extremely difficult to read the situation and to trace the conflict's different dividing lines across the regions of central and northern Mali.<sup>18</sup>

In some areas in central Mali, the intensity of violence escalated with the arrival of non-state armed groups, notably MUJAO and then Katiba Macina, but also with military campaigns by the Malian army, in particular Operation Seno in 2015. Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM, Group to Support Islam and Muslims), has drawn particular attention. Since it was created in March 2017 as a coalition of groups affiliated to al-Qaeda (Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM, Katiba Macina and al-Mourabitoun), it has led spectacular and devastating attacks on the international and national security forces<sup>19</sup>. National and international actors mobilized in an attempt to weaken or eradicate the group, which was considered a threat to the peace process in Mali and to regional—and even global—stability. However, the JNIM soon became established as a major actor

marking a radical change in the nature of thenon-state armed groups present in Mali. Whereas its predecessors, such as AQIM, were mainly considered to have originated outside the country, JNIM appears to be firmly rooted in a specifically Malian narrative, making it much more difficult to eradicate using security measures alone.<sup>20</sup> The ability of JNIM to establish a support network among the local population is essential to its enduring presence despite its targeting by national, regional and international forces.<sup>21</sup>

Conflict reached a peak with the creation of community-based vigilante and militia groups who formed to make up for the inability of the Malian armed forces (FAMA) to protect the communities. These groups were not necessarily formed in a total security vacuum: they are supported or tolerated by the authorities.<sup>22</sup> These 'self-defense groups' are organized on a community basis, including the Dozos (mainly composed of Bambaras), the Dogon militia - Dana-Amassagou group ('the hunters who trust in God') and the Sékou Bolly group (of Fulani). The first two groups represent traditional hunting societies, however, unlike traditional hunting groups these self-defense groups have military-grade weapons.<sup>23</sup>

All the armed groups active in central and northern Mali are directly or indirectly involved in illicit activities (weapons, drugs, motorcycle and fuel smuggling, cattle rustling, artisanal gold mining and poaching) and local conflicts<sup>24</sup>. They exploit the nature and vulnerabilities of local economies, rivalries between socio-professional groups and governance deficiencies. The positioning of these groups in relation to local conflicts varies depending on the context and their strategic objectives. Non-state armed groups can either be party to conflict or serve as mediators and their presence can also lead to a temporary cessation of conflicts<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. "The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali: The necessary adaptations of the strategies for re-establishing peace". SIPRI, October 2019, p.1

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> SIPRI, October 2019, Op Cit., p.10

<sup>23</sup> ISS, December 2019, Op Cit. p.2

<sup>24</sup> ISS, December 2019, Op Cit. p.2

**Table 1: State and non-state armed groups present in the studied villages (May-June 2020)**

Village	Non-state armed group						State/International security forces
	Dozos	Dana-Amassagou	MUJAO	MNLA	Un-named armed groups	Un-named self-defense groups	
<b>Douentza Circle</b>							
Douentza	X	X	X	X	X	X	FAMA, National Guard, Gendarmerie, MINUSMA
Adia	X					X	
Guere-Dounde	X						
Orodou						X	
Tango-Tango (Tedie)	X	X					
Timba	X	X					
<b>Gourma Rharous Circle</b>							
Bambara-Maoude							FAMA
Benguel				X			
Bobangueye							FAMA
Gossi							FAMA, National Guard, Gendarmerie
Kadago							National Guard
Nana				X	X		

## Conflict Dynamics

The most important dynamic of the conflict in the two circles analysed in this study is related to land and natural resources. According to a report by the International Crisis Group in 2020, while climate change has caused severe environmental degradation and lack of resources in Mali which has fueled conflict, the spread of conflict in the region is linked less to dwindling resources than to a transformation of modes of production, resulting in poorly regulated competition over access to increasingly coveted resources – particularly land.<sup>26</sup> Resource scarcity is neither the only nor the determining factor behind rising insecurity; in some cases, resources are plentiful, but traditional or central authorities lack the ability or the legitimacy to mediate conflicts over access to them.<sup>27</sup>

Years of drought in the 1970s and 1980s decimated the herds of central Mali, impoverishing Fulani herdsmen who depended on transhumance for survival. During that time, farmers experienced several bad harvests, but they continued to produce and soon generated a new surplus that many invested in livestock. These sedentary farmers then employed as herdsmen a large number of Fulani who had been ruined by the droughts. This period is the origin of a crisis of marginalisation for pastoral communities, which partly explains the appeal of the rhetoric of non-state armed groups to many Fulani nomads.<sup>28</sup> The vast majority of the population in the area of this study are Muslim, but a shared belief in Islam provides both a point of connection and division between different ethnic groups, depending on how it is practiced or politicised.

The International Crisis Group report argues that more farmers are exploiting land previously reserved for livestock and are taking over areas near water sources and pastoral wells to grow vegetables. This expansion of agricultural land makes it more difficult for livestock to enter pastures and reach water sources, leading to violent clashes between farmers and pastoralists.<sup>29</sup> Pastoral mobility, which connects the flooded plains of the interior Niger delta and the plains of Seeno, is at the heart of the functioning of the delta system, but as the main way of life of Fulani breeders in the region, pastoralism has been weakened by certain policies and projects. These prioritise food security, development and agricultural production in the sandy plains of the Dogon plateau (particularly large hydro-agricultural developments and agricultural drilling in the flooded plains of the delta). The territorial hold of the Peuls over the sandy plains has gradually meant that large agricultural villages with Fulani hamlets are now dependent on the Peuls for access to water. Because of the virtual absence of pastoralism in public policies, livestock breeding communities have been left to “do without the State”.<sup>30</sup> This was confirmed by a World Bank expert interviewed for this study who stated that a recent unpublished World Bank study found that it was the large donor-supported agricultural development policies of the 80s and 90s that saw the neglect of pastoralism and thus the effects being seen today<sup>31</sup>.

## c. Impact of conflict on civilian communities in Douentza and Gourma Rharous circles

### Displacement

Widespread insecurity and conflict in the circles of Douentza and Gourma-Rharous has caused a large number of people to be displaced. Displaced communities that were surveyed as part of this study have been displaced since November or December 2019 and February 2020, mostly originating from other localities in Douentza circle.

### Commonalities within both Circles

In both Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles the majority of displaced people are Tamasheq or Peul. The ethnic Tamasheq (from Douentza commune and Gossi in Gourma Rharous circle) all believe themselves to be in danger with two thirds of the Tamasheq families interviewed for this study stating that members of the household had experienced direct violence such as physical violence, abduction and torture, pointing towards the Peul community as perpetrators of this violence. All families have had livestock stolen and all state that the presence of armed Peul and Dozo self-defence groups in their villages creates a sense of insecurity and persecution which has greatly affected their livelihoods. 63% of the displaced families surveyed have been directly involved in a dispute or conflict over water resources or land.

Even though those displaced refer to the municipality to resolve disputes, they all felt that they were not resolved justly. The displaced Tamasheq trust state security institutions for their protection, and these institutions are present either permanently or on patrol in their areas of displacement.

The displaced Tamasheq families all perceive that they do not have the same access to basic services as the host community. While all of these families have experienced an increase in food insecurity and a decline in their food consumption, only 3 out of 12 families received food aid in the last month, despite it being the lean season. None of them have electricity in their household and all say that their source of firewood is insufficient for their needs.

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), “The Central Sahel: the New scene of climate wars”, Briefing no.145/Africa, 24 April 2020 at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/b154-le-sahel-central-theatre-des-nouvelles-querres-climatiques>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Comité Technique Foncier et Développement, “Mise en œuvre des réformes gouvernance en temps de crise et développement : Les enjeux du foncier agricole et rural au Mali », Notes de Synthèse, no.30, Mars 2020 at <http://www.foncier-developpement.fr/publication/note-de-synthese-n30-mise-en-oeuvre-des-reformes-gouvernance-en-temps-de-crise-et-developpement-les-enjeux-du-foncier-agricole-et-rural-au-mali/> accessed 9 June 2020

<sup>31</sup> Key informant interview with Emilie Bourdan, Senior Fragility Advisor, World Bank Mali, 7 May 2020



### Douentza Circle

The displaced community in Douentza circle (all within the commune of Douentza) are Tamasheq, who state they are persecuted by the Peul. They are mainly female-led households where women have been subjected to violence. They feel greatly insecure and that they do not have access to the same basic services as the host community. Host Community perceptions towards IDPs are mixed, with groups of men and women expressing solidarity as well as weariness. Their first source of income is agriculture with the second source being animal rearing, but half of these families do not own the land they cultivate or the livestock they care for, further aggravating their vulnerability. All have had a decline in their food consumption in the last six months.

Women from this group are involved in local disputes with other displaced women or host community women especially around water resources and access to drinking water. These families take an average of 45 minutes to get to a clean drinking water source, with some families having to walk for up to 90 minutes. Six out of ten families feel that their girls are not safe on their way to school. This community trusts the army and National Guard for their protection and refers to the Mayor's office to resolve their disputes.

### Gourma-Rharous Circle

The displaced populations in the circle of Gourma Rharous are also composed mainly of women and children and the level of illiteracy is extremely high. Those displaced in Gourma Rharous Circle feel a strong sense of ethnic discrimination. Lack of access to water for agriculture and livestock rearing is a significant problem, especially when there is a lack of natural resource management of ponds and water sources, and conflict over water resources is very frequent. Although all displaced families have access to a community health center in Gossi, Gourma Rharous has no women specific health services.

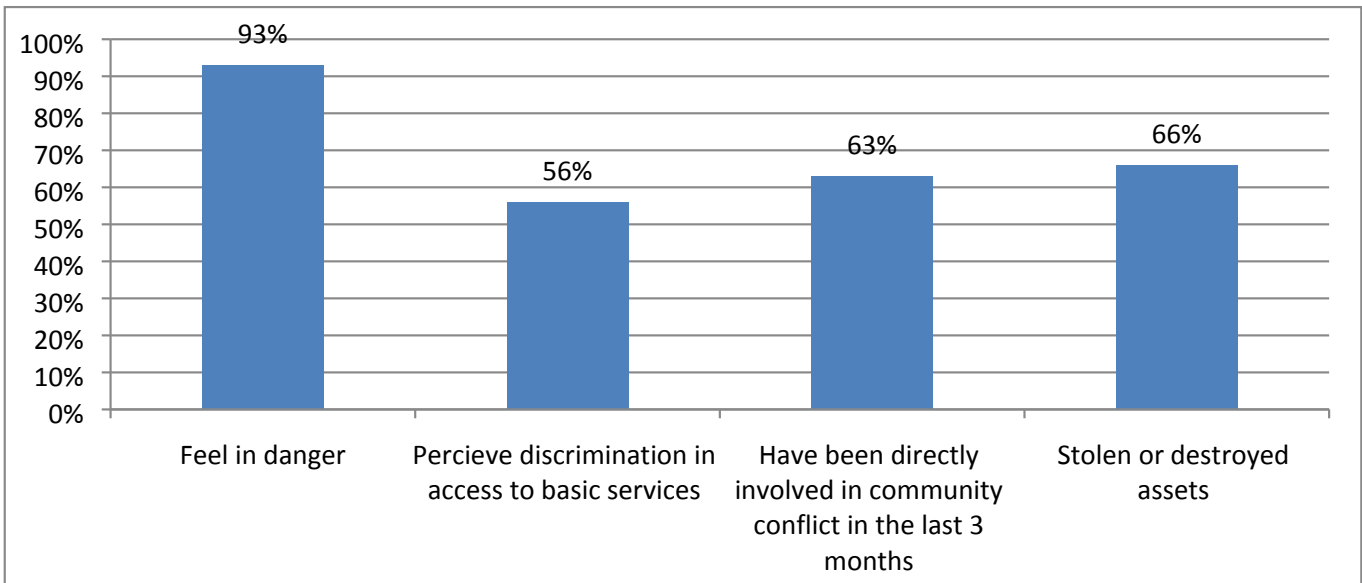
Displaced people in the village of Bambara Maoude in Gourma Rharous circle are principally Peul. There are no armed groups in this village because of the presence of the National Army, which also prevents inter-community conflict and community members usually refer to the Chief of the Village to resolve disputes. There is a school, however children do not attend it. It takes an average of 25 minutes to reach a source of drinking water and the displaced community feels discrimination with regards to access, stating that they are often forced to wait for longer for their turn at the well or water area. Peul men and women in FGDs reported that the conflict has *"broken social relations with other communities in Mali"*. In analyzing results of FGDs, perceptions of IDPs by Host community members were stated to be positive, host community men stated that *"We are proud to be with our brothers, they are at home but very vulnerable and in need of assistance"*.

Although their principal source of revenue is agriculture and livestock rearing, they lack agricultural inputs (especially fertiliser) and food for the livestock. A lack of fertilizer reduces crop yields which exacerbates food insecurity.

In Gossi, displaced Tamasheq communities take on average 45 minutes to walk to the nearest drinking water point, and since women and girls are the ones collecting this water, the presence of armed groups and restrictions on movement makes them extremely vulnerable to sexual violence and abduction. Displaced Tamasheq families in Gossi do not have access to latrines and while their children (including the girls) attend a primary school, 50% of these families feel their girls are not safe on their way to school.

### Graph 3: Impact of conflict on IDP households

Percentage of displaced household respondents who...



#### Returnees in Douentza circle

Returnees in Douentza circle are considerably more literate and most women can read and write. They are large families who feel less in danger than the displaced communities. The armed group most present in the area are the Dozo militia who offer some protection to these communities from other armed groups. The returnees in Douentza circle have not had their belongings stolen or destroyed which is likely to add to their perception of relative security, however they do not own land nor livestock and their principle source of revenue is small commerce or daily wage work. Two out of the five returnee families surveyed in Douentza circle rear livestock as a secondary source of income, however they are not the owners of that livestock. As returnees, they have not recovered their land so do not undertake any agricultural activity. Since they live in Douentza commune, three out of the five families surveyed have access to many hours of electricity and a drinking water source in their homes. They also have access to a clinic and schools and as a result they are satisfied with the basic services provided by the municipality.

All the returnee families surveyed in Douentza have participated directly in conflict within the community, the majority over land issues and inter-community conflict between ethnic groups. Although state security actors such as the national army, national guard and police are present, non-state armed groups are also present and restrict the movements of this population. The returnee households trust state security institutions and have not experienced any violence on the part of those actors. All of the returnees refer to local religious and customary leaders to resolve conflicts and they all expressed that they felt these conflicts were resolved in a just and fair manner.

Host community FGDs of men and women highlighted positive sentiments towards members of returnee communities. Women stated that they feel *“conditions so that they can support their families in dignity should be created for these groups”*. FGD men also highlighted that they do not feel any discrimination on the part of the host community.

#### Returnees in Gourma-Rharous circle

The returnee populations in Gourma Rharous are ethnic Peul and Tamasheq. There is a significant difference in the literacy levels of the Peul community versus the Tamasheq with the Peul much more illiterate. Returnee households from Algeria, Burkina Faso and Mauritania between 2012 and 2019. All mentioned insecurity and conflict as the reason for their first displacement.

Tamasheq returnees have experienced more violence and feel much more in danger than the Peul returnees. The MNLA is present in Benguel where the Tamasheq returnees live and where then national army is not present. MNLA restricts the free movement of Tamasheq returnees and Tamasheq girls do not attend school even though there is one close to the village. There is no other state presence and the community is very unsatisfied with the non-existent basic services. Insecurity is reported to be a significant problem for the livelihoods of returning Tamasheq women: *“The security situation has had an impact on life because we no longer do our small businesses...we cannot do weddings, baptisms as we want”*.

In Bambara Maoude, where the Peul returnees live, the national army (FAMA) is present and there are no non-state armed groups. However, there is no access to latrines and drinking water is a 25 minutes walk away. Most returnees are not aware whether they have access to the formal justice system; instead they refer to the village chief for dispute resolution.



### Violence and Movement Restrictions

A March 2020 report of the UN Secretary General on the situation in Mali, noted a deteriorating human rights situation, marked by terrorist attacks in northern and central Mali targeting national security services, peacekeepers, international forces and, increasingly, civilians.<sup>32</sup> Malian security forces themselves were stated as being involved in human rights violations.<sup>33</sup> The report stated that civilians also fell victim to attacks by self-defense groups, including as a result of their perceived support for Islamist groups.<sup>34</sup> According to ACLED, in the first three months of 2020, there were nearly 300 civilian fatalities across the country, increasing by an estimated 90% compared to the previous quarter.<sup>35</sup> 85% of families surveyed in this study said that they felt they were in danger while 65% believe that the security situation has either stagnated or worsened. In a focus group discussion with women in Orodou village in Douentza circle, a woman said *“Yes we feel in danger since there are inter-community conflicts everywhere and the bandits also roam freely in the bush with their weapons”*. Armed bandits unaffiliated to an armed group pose a significant threat to civilians outside areas of state control.

While community militia are responsible for more than half of all civilian deaths, the government’s heavy-handed tactics have resulted in an increasing civilian toll, especially among the Fulani pastoralist communities of central Mali.<sup>36</sup> State security forces are only present in the main towns in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles, with some patrolling presence in nearby villages. Households in Bambara Maounde and Bobanguye in Gourma-Rharous and Douentza commune in Douentza circle report feeling protected by the presence of state security forces and did not express feeling in danger, but households in villages further away from town, such as Timba and Orodou in Douentza circle and Nana and Gossi in Gourma-Rharous circle, feel unprotected by state security actors.

Lack of security is a significant concern as it severely limits the movement of people and has a considerable impact on their access to services and mobility to carry out economic activities such as accessing markets and exchanging goods. Focus group participants expressed concerns that insecurity is destabilising shops and markets, resulting in price increases and affecting the availability of goods. It is also limiting employment opportunities and increasing the theft of goods and livestock. Some 51% of households in this study said their movements were restricted, mostly by non-state armed groups and the presence of bandits.

At least one family member in 25% of the households surveyed in this study had experienced some sort of violence, ranging from abduction to physical or sexual violence or torture. Men are perceived to be more at risk of abduction by armed groups while women are perceived to be more at risk of sexual violence. All the ethnic groups surveyed reported being subjected to some level of violence, however, in this study the majority of those who had experienced significant violence were from the Tamasheq and Songhai ethnic groups. They stated that the violence was committed by Peul, Dozo or unnamed armed groups.

As a result of ongoing insecurity, self-defence groups have proliferated in the absence or inability of state security actors to protect the civilian population. Nearly 40% of all households confirmed that they trust non-state armed groups for their protection, ranging from Dana-Amassagou (for the Dogon families in Douentza) to the Dozos and other unnamed self-defence groups. An ethnic Dogon woman from Tongo-Tongo village in Douentza circle explained that the protection offered by the Dozo militia allows them to sleep peacefully in their homes and provide for the needs of their families in peace. The majority of men and women interviewed across all demographic groups (HC, IDP and Returnees) however, said that the presence of such groups was overwhelmingly detrimental, impacting livelihoods and trade, prolonging insecurity and enforcing laws specific to the armed groups that are felt to be “negative”.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Mali”, S/2020/223, New York, 20 March 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

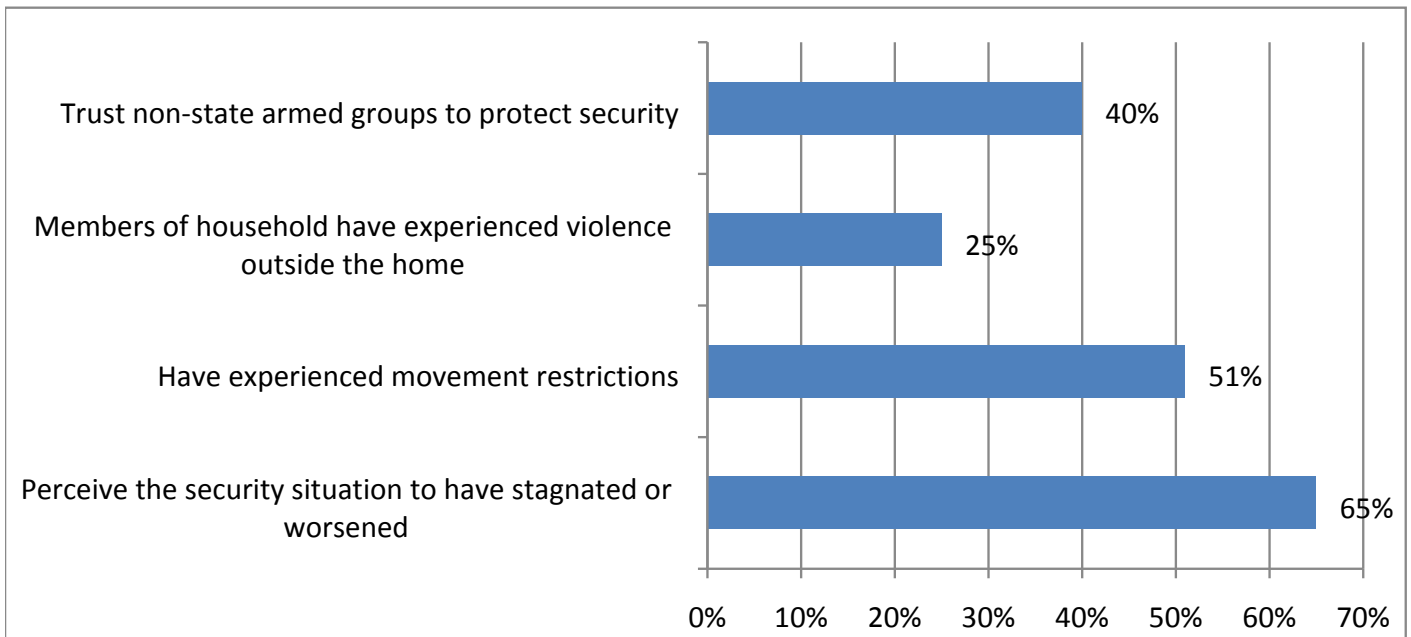
<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> ACLED, “Navigating a violent insurgency in Mali”, CDT Spotlight, 5-11 April 2020 at <https://acleddata.com/2020/04/16/cdt-spotlight-navigating-a-violent-insurgency-in-mali> accessed 15 June 2020

<sup>36</sup> ACLED, “Navigating a violent insurgency in Mali”, CDT Spotlight, 5-11 April 2020 at <https://acleddata.com/2020/04/16/cdt-spotlight-navigating-a-violent-insurgency-in-mali> accessed 15 June 2020

## Graph 4: Security Situation

Percentage of household survey respondents who...



### Trust in Governance and the State

Insecurity in the Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles has largely prevented the Malian state from maintaining a firm presence and providing security and basic services. This has resulted in a downward spiral of insecurity, increased poverty and a lack of civilian protection. During the 2020 parliamentary elections in Mali the government deployed a large number of troops and national guard to villages which resulted in a decrease of violence during the election period.<sup>37</sup> However, while the presence of state armed forces can reduce insecurity and provide a level of civilian protection, it can also have a negative effect if protection is only temporary. Temporary patrolling by armed forces in certain villages can result in violent repercussions for villagers, as they are seen to have “sided” with the state by having the army present.<sup>38</sup>

Only 52% of surveyed households confirmed either a temporary (patrolling) or continued presence of state security actors in their villages. The remaining 48% of surveyed households stated that state security forces were not present at all. Despite this lack of presence, 71% of respondents said they trust state security actors to ensure their security and 98% of all the households mentioned that they have not been subject to violence by the army, national guard or gendarmerie. Lack of trust in state security actors was expressed by 35 families who live in villages with a significant presence of non-state armed groups and self-defense militia, where state security actors are completely absent.

In the March 2020 report of the Secretary General on the situation in Mali, the percentage of civil administrators present at their duty stations in northern Mali remained limited but stable, at 23%, with 60% of governors, 42% of prefects and 16% of sub-prefects deployed. In Mopti region, central Mali, as at 31 January 2020, the number of civil administrators present at their duty stations had decreased to 27%, from 30% in November 2019.<sup>39</sup> The lack of public administration in these areas is also evident in this study with 25% of the surveyed households not formally registering births or deaths and 25% of families not having official identity papers.

<sup>37</sup> Virgine Baudais, Senior Researcher at SIPRI, interview on 15 May 2020

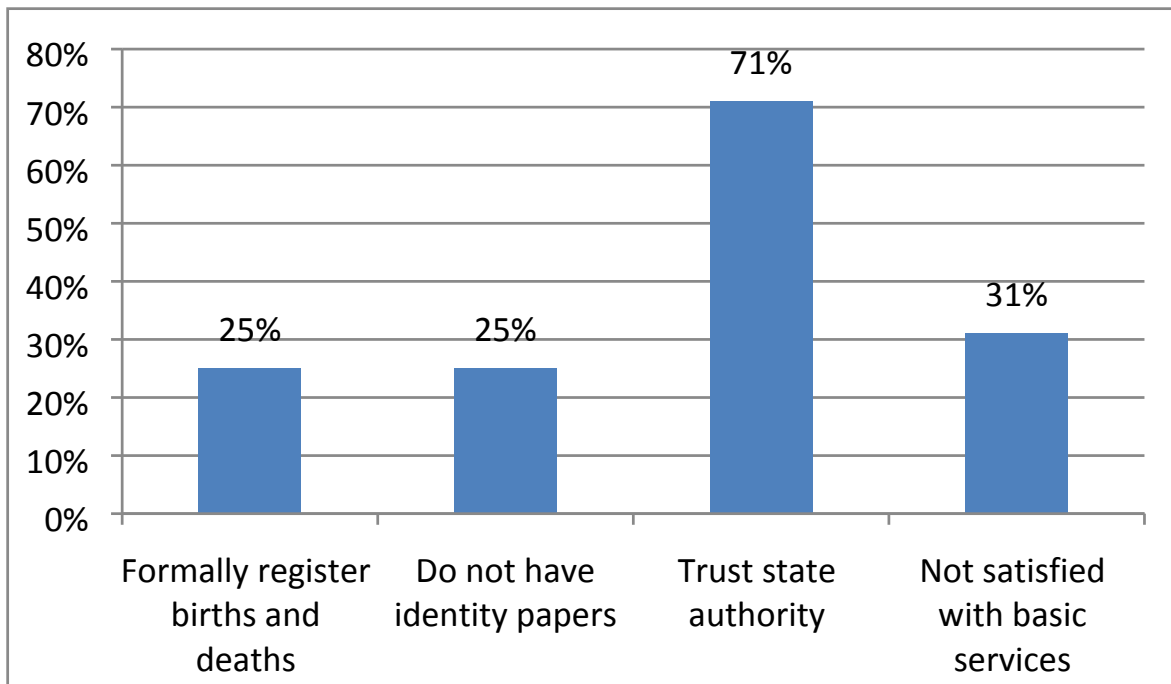
<sup>38</sup> Mohamed Ahmed el Ansari, Analyst at EUCAP Mali, interview on 11 June 2020

<sup>39</sup> UN Security Council, March 2020, Op Cit.



## Graph 7: Governance and trust in state authority

Percentage of household survey respondents who...



### Access to Justice

The absence of state authorities limits people's engagement with the state, increasing their interactions with customary authorities or non-state armed groups instead.<sup>40</sup> Focus group discussions in this study found that people in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles felt let down by the Malian government because of their inability to protect communities, which reduced their trust in the government. For the communities of central and northern Mali, customary law administered by traditional chiefs and religious norms governed by imams, Koranic scholars and Qadis courts play key roles in the administration of justice and the maintenance of social cohesion.<sup>41</sup> This study found that **78% of households surveyed referred to informal or customary authorities to resolve a dispute with 85% of those believing that the dispute was resolved in a just and fair manner.** Focus group participants often said that the village chief and his advisers are most commonly called upon to resolve community disputes because *"they are listened to and respected by the community"*. Conversely, of the 32% of households who referred to state authorities for matters relating to justice and conflict resolution nearly 70% stated that those disputes were not resolved fairly. Furthermore no witness protection programme exists to protect them from reprisals.

Non-state armed groups are a new justice provider to which some communities in Gourma-Rharous and Douentza turn to for help in resolving disputes. For example, Dogon women in Tongo-Tongo village in Douentza circle said that they turn to the Dozo militia for help resolving community disputes.

### Access to Basic Services

Central and northern Mali lack public services, particularly security and infrastructure, and the poor provision and limited effectiveness of the institutions responsible for delivering public services are reported to have serious effects on people's livelihoods. Three villages surveyed in Douentza circle (Orodou, Timba and Adia) report no presence of humanitarian agencies at all, while the other villages in the survey reported a mixture of local and international agencies.

This study found that 84% of families surveyed do not have access to any electricity within their household and those who do have access have less than two hours a day on average. 88% of households said they had access to firewood however 60% of them said that this resource was not sufficient for their needs. The seven households who said they do not have access to firewood live in Gourma Rharous circle, in the villages of Gossi, Nana and Bambara Maoude, as well as Orodou in Douentza circle. 34% of households do not have access to latrines. These households are mostly in Tango - Tango (Tedié) and Guèrè - Doundé villages in Douentza circle and Bambara Mounde and Gossi in Gourma-Rharous circle, therefore open defecation and attendant disease are likely to be issues of concern here which humanitarian agencies may wish to address.

In this study, people from the Peulh, Songhay and Tamashek ethnic groups said that they felt discriminated against because of their ethnicity. This discrimination and tension particularly arises at water sources. People from the majority ethnic groups did not feel discriminated against.

<sup>40</sup> SIPRI, October 2019, Op Cit.

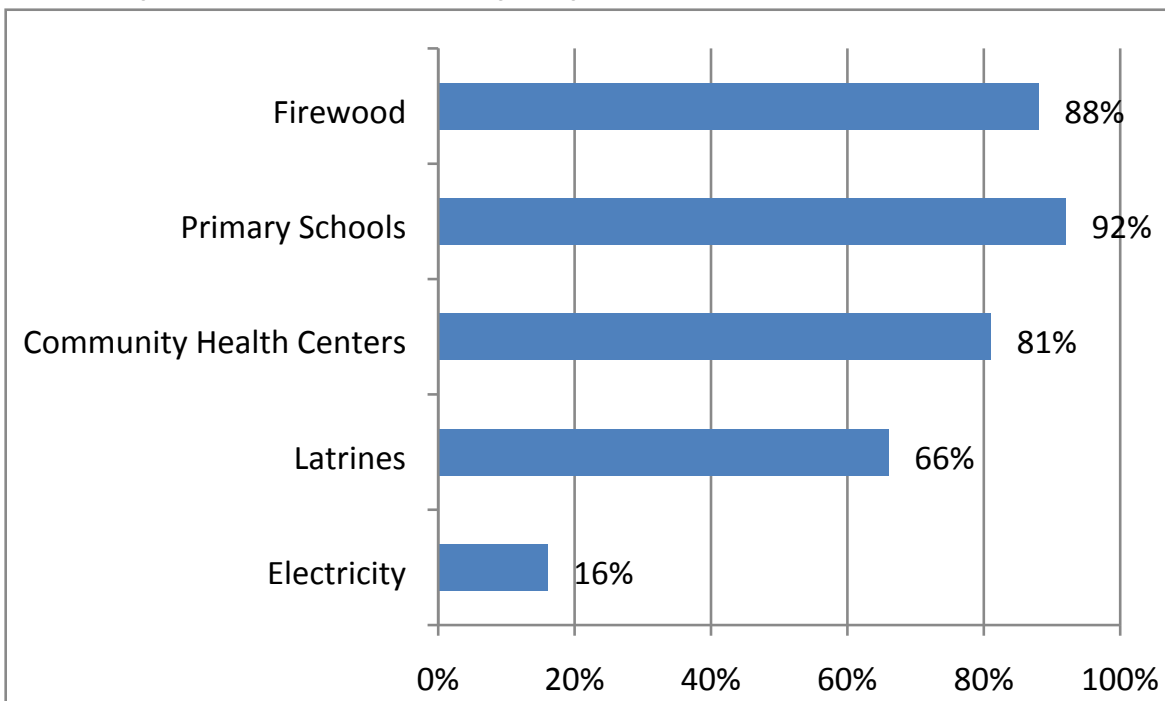
<sup>41</sup> SIPRI, October 2019, Op cit.

High levels of mortality were reported in the household survey in this study with 64 of the 122 households surveyed reporting at least one death in the household in the last year. 81% of households surveyed have access to a functioning community health centre, however, communities cannot afford to go to these clinics if the services are not free because of high levels of poverty. Therefore, there is a need for humanitarian agencies to assess the availability of specified services for women, the affordability of health care, as well as levels of access across Gourma-Rharous and Douentza circles.

41% of households surveyed had at least one family member with a disability and 12% had two or more people with a disability in their household. Therefore, the needs of people with a disability and families caring for a member with a disability are likely to be significant issues to take into consideration in any provision of humanitarian assistance.

Access to primary schooling is good: 113 out of 122 households said there was a primary school in proximity to their village and 99 of those 113 families confirmed that their children attended that school. Attending primary schooling for girls in particular is influenced by feelings of security and safety. The 9 households who did not have access to a primary school were all in Gourma Rharous circle: the displaced community of Bobangueye and host community families in Gossi, Kadago and Nana villages.

**Graph 8: Household survey respondents' access to basic services**





### Livelihoods and socio-economic situation

The economy in Mali's central regions is based on the primary sector and dependent on precarious resources: poorly secured land titles and limited access to water resources, markets and economic inputs. The population is particularly vulnerable to climate and security shocks, and have few alternative livelihoods in the event of a crisis.<sup>42</sup> Traditionally, the populations of these regions differentiate themselves from one another according to their dominant economic activities. However, community groups do not depend on a single economic activity, rather they diversify their livelihoods.

A total of 86% of households depend on a form of agricultural activity for subsistence. 75% of households in this study diversify livelihood options for income generation, practicing agriculture as a primary source of income with their secondary activity being either animal husbandry, small commerce, fishing or some other income generating activity. 68% use rainwater as their main source of irrigation and 90% of respondents confirmed that the amount of rainwater was insufficient. The large majority of households who practice agriculture but do not own their lands are displaced people or returnees who have lost their lands due to displacement. Out of the 73 households from the host community who practice agriculture, only 10 do not own their lands which shows the disparity in land tenure between host and displaced/returnee communities and thus their vulnerability to food insecurity.

80% of households practice some sort of pastoral activity and raise livestock. Pastoralism contributes to the resilience of rural populations in the Sahel who depend on their livestock for food and as a means of livelihood.<sup>43</sup> However, pastoralism can be difficult in the Sahel due to poor delimitation of pastoral areas and

annual lean periods where food and fodder are insufficient. Many households use water ponds to water their animals, but these are reported to be drying up, causing intense pressure on remaining water ponds which is not being addressed by state authorities. Households in all areas in this study with the exception of Orodou village in Douentza circle stated that lack of water for livestock and agriculture was a problem. A further issue is that non-state armed groups often steal animals leaving populations deprived of that livelihood and food security. Out of the 33 households who confirmed having had belongings stolen or destroyed recently, 28 confirmed that livestock had been stolen by non-state armed groups. The Mayor of Douentza also confirmed this during an interview for this study, stating that so much livestock had been stolen by armed groups that it was creating a serious issue for the populations by fueling insecurity through retaliatory attacks and increasing vulnerabilities of families who depend on livestock as a form of financial and food security.<sup>44</sup>

The Peul communities of Gourma Rharous circle practice animal husbandry rather than agriculture as a primary source of income, however, 60% of those families do not own their livestock, instead they provide shepherding services to others, which limits their financial security.

The security situation has had a significant impact on the majority of respondents' livelihoods, with 73% of households mentioning that it has impacted their livelihoods either quite significantly or strongly. Furthermore, 88% of households mentioned that they experienced a decline in their food consumption in the last six months, while 103 of the 122 families had not received any food aid in the last month despite it being the lean season at the time of the study.

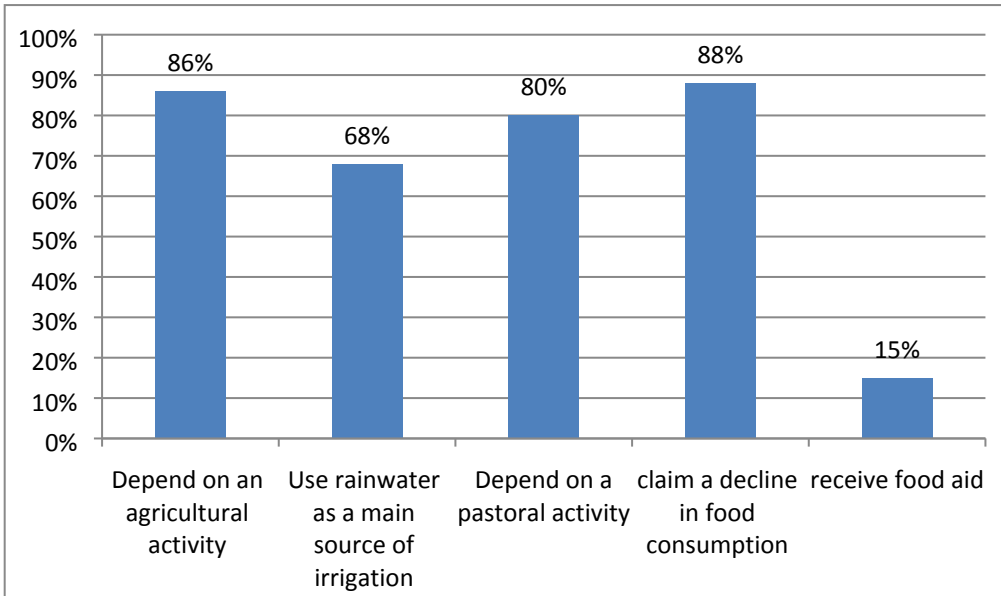
<sup>42</sup> Bodian, M, Tobie, A, and Marending, M. "The challenges of Governance, Development and Security in the Central Regions of Mali", SIPRI Background Paper, no.2020/4, March 2020

<sup>43</sup> Agence Française de Développement (AFD), "Le Pastoralisme, un facteur de stabilité essentiel dans le Sahel, ID4D, 18 Juin 2020 at <https://ideas4development.org/pastoralisme-facteur-stabilite-dans-sahel/> accessed 23 June 2020

<sup>44</sup> Husseiny Bocoum, Mayor of Douentza, interview on 17 June 2020

## Graph 8: Socio-Economic Situation

Percentage of households who...



### Women and Girls

84% of household survey respondents believe that women are in more danger than men. Women in focus group discussions across HC, IDP and returnee groups in both Circles expressed a fear of sexual violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups and bandits, movement restrictions and harassment. Main towns are perceived to be safer as they are more likely to have a presence of state security forces, but villages that are further away from towns are more likely to be out of state control and more insecure. In areas with a presence of Islamist armed groups, such as Nana village in Gourma-Rharous (which is 11km away from the town), there are additional restrictions imposed on women as a result of the group's extreme interpretation of Islam. When men were asked if women were more at risk than men, the response in an area with an occasional MUJAO presence was *"Yes, because women are exposed to rape and forced to wear the veil"*. Communities in Nana village feel that the Malian security forces cannot protect them because of their distance from the town.

When asked whether any women or girls in the household had experienced violence directly, many respondents were hesitant to respond due to the sensitive nature of the subject, however, 22 families out of 122 (18%) confirmed that they had experienced gender based violence (GBV). When asked whether the violence came from within the household, five of them confirmed that it had been perpetrated by the head of the household. Although this subject was too sensitive for most women to comfortably answer, in general it may be that while women and girls are fearful of violence from non-state armed groups, they are also vulnerable to GBV within their households. In the majority, men from all groups acknowledged that women were at risk of sexual violence and that they are in danger, however they said that targeted abductions meant men are at more risk than women due.

The female illiteracy level is extremely high amongst displaced communities. Out of 30 IDP households interviewed, only three households (10%) contained a woman who was literate. Despite the low levels of literacy among women in this survey (39% of all households surveyed mentioned that no women in their household

could read or write), 77% of households confirmed that their girls were attending school. However, schools have been closed recently due to Covid-19 and teacher strikes. Insecurity is also a significant barrier to girls' education with 35% of all families stating that girls were not safe on their way to school, due to the presence of non-state armed groups. Displaced Tamasheq households living in Douentza commune were least likely to allow their girls to go to school due to fear of attack.

52% of household survey respondents stated that girls in their household had married before the age of 18, which mirrors the national child marriage rate.<sup>45</sup> Marriage under the age of 18 is prohibited in Mali's formal legal code, but it continues to be a significant child protection issue. The focus group discussions with women revealed that girls are encouraged to get married to avoid unwanted early pregnancies. Marriage is also believed to relieve the family of an additional mouth to feed.

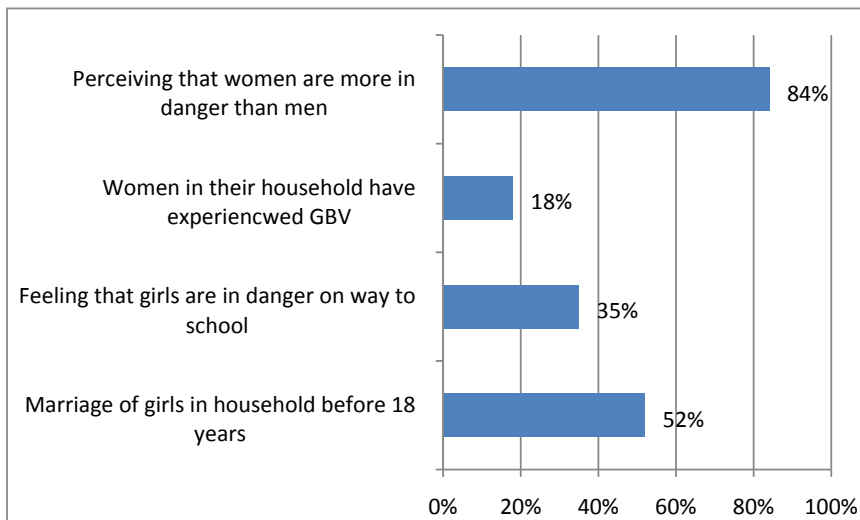
Households in the villages of Timba and Orodou in the Circle of Douentza have no access to a community health centre and although the other villages in this study have a health centre within reach, the cost of accessing services is a key barrier. Among the households who do have access to a community health centre, 38% do not have access to specific female health services and gynecological and family planning assistance. Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is also a significant protection issue of concern throughout Mali, which can also result in childbirth complications. The lack of female-specific health services in some villages and the cost barrier to access are key issues.

In Mali women and girls have primary responsibility for collecting potable water. In Douentza Circle, outside Douentza town, the time taken to reach a source of potable water is short (usually less than 15 minutes), but for displaced people in Douentza town it takes significantly longer (usually more than 30 minutes and often more than one hour) which increases feelings of insecurity among women and girls. In Gourma-Rharous Circle, the average time to reach a source of potable water is 27 minutes. As highlighted in this report, community tensions between different groups also further complicates access to water for IDPs.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/mali/>

## Graph 9: Impact of conflict on women and girls

Percentage of household survey respondents who report...



### Teenagers

According to UNICEF, attacks against children in the Sahel have spiked over the past year with Mali recording 571 grave violations against children during the first three quarters of 2019, compared to 544 in 2018 and 386 in 2017<sup>46</sup>. The spike in violence against children also has devastating implications for children's learning<sup>47</sup>. While primary school attendance is in theory reasonably good in the area of this study,<sup>48</sup> insecurity creates a barrier to children's attendance (particularly among girls) and also results in disrupted schooling. Douentza Circle was most affected by school closures with a total of 146 schools closed affecting some 44,000 pupils.<sup>49</sup> Secondary schooling is less accessible with only 62% of households stating that there was a secondary school within proximity of the village. Tango - Tango (Tedié) and Guèré – Doundé villages in Douentza Circle do not have access to a secondary school. Among households with access to a secondary school, 86% of households stated that teenagers in their household attend the school. Young people stated in focus group discussions that one of their most important needs was access to education and school materials.

Insecurity and displacement are also creating significant barriers for children and families trying to access essential services, safe water and food and nutritional supplies – risk factors that can lead to the deterioration of children's health and nutritional status. The latest OCHA humanitarian figures for Douentza Circle show that 9,800 children were at risk of malnutrition. In Gourma Rharous Circle, 8,500 children are considered at risk of malnutrition.<sup>50</sup> The focus groups discussions undertaken with youths for this study confirmed that they all (displaced, host and returnees) did not eat their fill and were hungry. They mentioned degradation of the economic situation of their parents, poverty and poor agricultural output as key problems.<sup>51</sup> As a result, 52% of households surveyed in this study confirmed that children under 14 were involved in some form of work contributing to the family's means of subsistence.

**When teenagers in Adia, Guere – Doundé and Douentza commune in Douentza Circle were asked whether they felt in danger, all three focus groups said yes, regardless of the ethnic group to which they belonged, or whether they were from displaced, host or returnee populations.** As one teenager living in Douentza commune explained *"Yes, we feel in danger because there are attacks by armed bandits who live among us in society, there is no more control, total insecurity"*. Focus group discussions with displaced teenagers in Gossi and with returnees in Benguel in Gourma-Rharous Circle also revealed perceptions of insecurity. However, teenagers from returnee populations in Gossi and displaced teenagers in Bobangueye villages in Gourma-Rharous said that they did not feel in danger.

This study did not collect information on recruitment of children within non-state armed groups due to sensitivities in discussing this issue, however focus group discussions with teenagers revealed that all teenagers from ethnic groups, apart from the Dogon ethnic group, were strongly against non-state armed groups that were present in their villages, from whom they felt great insecurity. However, teenagers from the Dogon group were very supportive of the Dozo self-defence groups who protect them and their families. *"They are our guardian angels and we trust them to protect our security"*, said Dogon teenagers from Adia village in Douentza Circle.<sup>52</sup>

Teenagers from the displaced, host and returnee communities stated that peaceful relations existed between them. As a group of displaced teenagers in Douentza and in Bobangueye in Gourma Rharous said: *"we have good relations with the host community children, we play together, go to school together and attend to our gardens together."*<sup>53</sup> This perception of good relations between teenagers from different communities is a valuable point of connection.

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF Press Release, Situation of Children in Sahel, 28 January 2020 at <https://www.unicef.org/pressreleases/nearly-5-million-children-will-need-humanitarian-assistance-central-sahel-year> accessed 9 June 2020

<sup>47</sup> Hammerschlag, A. "Out of School, forced to fight: Children pay price for Sahel War" Al-Jazeera News, 19 April 2020 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/school-forced-fight-children-pay-price-sahel-war-200415140942329.html> accessed 8 June 2020

<sup>48</sup>

<sup>49</sup> OCHA Profil Humanitaire de la Région de Mopti, May 2020 at [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2020\\_ocha\\_mli\\_profile\\_humanitaire\\_mopti\\_20052020.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2020_ocha_mli_profile_humanitaire_mopti_20052020.pdf) accessed 10 July 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.2

<sup>51</sup> Focus group discussions with youth (11 to 17 years old) groups in Douentza Circle (Douentza, Adia, Guere- Dounde) and Ghourma Rharous (Gossi, Bobangueye, Benguel), May 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Focus group discussion with Dogon youths from the host community (11-17 years old) in Adia, Douentza Cercle, May 2020

<sup>53</sup> Focus group discussion with displaced youths from Douentza (11-14 years) and Bobangueye, Gourma Rharous (11-15 years), May 2020.

# 3. Conclusions

This study found that relations between host community, displaced and returnees are generally peaceful and characterized by solidarity – displacement is not a key line of division between groups. Ethnic discrimination arose in this study as a background feature of conflict in this area of Mali, primarily because ethnic divisions fall along the same lines as livelihood divisions (e.g. farmers vs pastoralists) and because land use patterns and access to water have experienced significant upheaval, causing conflict. The association of non-state armed groups with particular ethnic groups and the rise of ethnically-based militia for self-defense exacerbates ethnic divisions, but the roots of conflict are not primordial conflicts between ethnicities, they originate in land and water disputes. While groups interviewed in this study expressed their fears and experiences of discrimination, they also expressed great empathy towards other groups and perceptions of peacefulness with their neighbours.

## Land and water disputes are the key driver of inter-communal conflict

Inter-communal conflict over land and water is the dominant feature of conflict in the Circles of Douentza and Gourma-Rharous, which is linked to poor land tenure, transformations to agricultural production which favour the commodification of land, state land policies which have disregarded the needs of pastoralists, the drying up of water ponds, impacts of climate change on resources, and weak land/water governance. **Because socio-economic differences in land use fall alongside ethnic divisions, conflicts originating in land or water disputes manifest as ethnic conflicts.**

- Humanitarian interventions which may have an effect on agriculture, pastoralism, land or water access need to be highly sensitive to the local context to avoid exacerbating these tensions. They also need to be aware that state land use policies may be perceived as discriminatory to pastoralists in the region.
- Land demarcation and the provision and management of water infrastructure for livestock, agriculture and drinking water are critical issues that need addressing in all areas (except Orodou village) but they are complex and require extensive consultation with all ethnic groups in areas to avoid exacerbating tensions.

Inter-communal conflict is complicated and worsened by the presence of multiple non-state armed groups (with differing ideological agendas) who exploit communal tensions for their own purposes, the presence of ethnic militia and widespread illicit economic activity.

- One possible point of connection across ethnic groups is religion, with Islam practiced by the vast majority of respondents, however Islam can also be a sensitive issue because of the presence of non-state armed groups in the region.

## Absent state security institutions increases perceptions of insecurity

This study found that local people in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous Circles overwhelmingly point to non-state armed groups as key drivers of insecurity. They are extremely fearful of these groups and many have experienced violence from them. However, people who live in villages with a strong ethnic militia (such as the Dozos) feel well protected by the militia if they belong to the same ethnic group. Nearly half of the surveyed households (primarily people from the Dogon ethnic group) confirmed that they trust ethnic militia for their protection. If they belong to a different ethnic group however, the presence of an ethnic militia or another non-state armed group makes people feel highly insecure and puts people at risk of violence. Men are most scared of abduction and torture while women are more fearful of sexual violence.

State security actors are not reported to engage in violence against civilians in this study and communities report relatively high levels of trust in them. Villages that have a presence of state security actors, or a patrolling group, such as FAMA, the National Guard or Gendarmerie reported that no violence by these state groups was perpetrated against them. This is a positive finding, especially since there have been many reports of violence and abuse from the armed forces against certain communities in other parts of Mali. 52% of surveyed households in this study live in areas which have a continuous or temporary state security presence and they tend to feel much more secure than people living in areas without a state security presence. However, the lack of a permanent and capable state security presence results in a failure of protection for communities in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles and perpetuates a cycle of insecurity as communities seek protection from other armed groups who tend to violate the basic human rights of people from different ethnicities to their own, creating a climate of fear, revenge and reprisals.

- The communities most at risk of violence by people outside the home, are those living in areas with no state security presence where there is a non-state armed group or ethnic militia from a different ethnic group to their own.
- Non-state armed groups are the primary perpetrators of violence and communities overwhelmingly point to them as the key driver of insecurity.

## Displaced communities are especially vulnerable

Displaced communities in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous are particularly vulnerable as they have lost their land and livelihoods and feel discriminated against in terms of access to basic services, particularly water points. Displaced households are largely composed of women and children. Women in these households are largely illiterate and displaced children within both circles do not usually attend school due to security fears, making them vulnerable to early marriage, child labour, exploitation or recruitment by armed groups. Displaced Tamasheq women and girls in particular feel very unsafe, having experienced GBV perpetrated by non-state armed groups.

- Security concerns among displaced Tamasheq women and girls are a high priority for them. Interventions which focus on improving security for them and relationships with the host community are likely to also benefit Tamasheq girls' access to education, reduce the risk of early marriage, reduce tensions around water sources and reduce the risk of violence against and exploitation of Tamasheq women.

### Access to justice is primarily through customary authorities

People in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous Circles usually turn to customary authorities to resolve community disputes as they are more accessible and are perceived to provide a much more just resolution. Customary law in Mali is administered by traditional chiefs and religious norms governed by Imams, Quranic scholars and Qadis courts. Although customary authorities wield some power, it is not absolute and is challenged by non-state armed groups.

- Customary authorities enjoy the most local legitimacy in terms of the provision of justice and the resolution of disputes.
- Community members in villages where an ethnic militia is present often also engage these groups in community dispute resolution.

### Livelihoods are under threat resulting in food insecurity and malnutrition

This study found that most people's livelihoods are under threat, with 88% of households reporting a decline in food consumption in the last six months. Most families are unable to grow enough food for their household's consumption. A significant factor is the stagnant or worsened security situation in many areas which has led to an increase in livestock theft, restricted access to agricultural land and restricted access to markets for the purchase of supplies or economic inputs, or the sale of produce. Livestock theft is a very significant issue for many of the communities in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous which contributes to continuing cycles of attack and revenge. Agricultural and pastoral livelihoods are also highly vulnerable to poor rainfall and insufficient fodder for animals.

- Food aid (or cash/voucher assistance in areas where market access is safe) should be considered to protect the civilian population from malnutrition and enable households to meet their minimum needs, particularly during the lean season
- Support for animal fodder should be considered alongside food aid to protect household assets in the form of livestock.

- Longer-term resilience interventions should consider enhancing subsistence production whilst also supporting households to diversify sources of production and income to enhance their resilience. Agricultural inputs (especially fertilisers), the provision of economic inputs for other sectors, rainfall conservation, improved irrigation technologies and production of animal fodder among pastoralists, taking into account the local impact of climate change, could all be considered.
- Lack of access to markets because of insecurity is a fundamental problem that continues to undermine local livelihoods and food security.
- **Livelihoods and food aid interventions must be extremely sensitive to socio-economic divisions in communities, which very often fall along ethnic lines. Insensitive interventions could increase inter-ethnic tensions and raise the risk of further conflict.**
- **Interventions could also look to integrate components that mediate or build relations between different socio-economic, ethnic and demographic groups.** A humanitarian mapping undertaken in the 12 villages during this study (See Annex 1), shows the discrepancy of humanitarian aid between villages and communities in need. While needs are great, little aid is actually given. Three villages in Douentza circle do not have access to any aid at all. High levels of insecurity are a significant barrier to humanitarian access.
- Barriers to humanitarian access in Douentza and Gourma-Rharous circles may be addressed by humanitarian mediation, and may provide agencies opportunities to secure access to deliver this assistance to communities in need of humanitarian aid.

### Access to basic services

Access to basic WASH services is critical in both Circles. Displaced households in Douentza commune and all households surveyed in Gourma-Rharous have to walk much further than other households to get potable water. As water collection is considered a duty of women and girls this puts them at increased risk of attack. Only 34% of households across Douentza and Gourma Rharous have access to latrines.

- Increased access to potable water in close proximity is needed for all households in both circles. Interventions should take into account safety and security of women and girls, particularly those from IDP households and should also seek to build community relations, ensuring equitable access for all.
- Latrines are urgently needed in Tango - Tango (Tedié) and Guèré - Doundé villages in Douentza circle and Bambara Mounde and Gossi in Gourma-Rharous circle.

Households in the villages of Timba and Orodou in the Circle of Douentza have no access to a community health centre. Households in Gossi in Gourma-Rharous also reported high numbers of deaths as a result of sickness. Among the households in the survey who do have access to a community health centre, 38% do not have access to specific female health services and gynecological and family planning assistance. However, living within proximity to a health centre does not guarantee households can access it, poverty prevents many households from using health services if they are not free of charge. It is concerning that within the 122 households surveyed, there had been 64 deaths in the last year.

- Free of charge health services are needed in all areas, most especially in Timba and Orodou villages in Douentza Circle which have no access to a health centre.
- Women-specific health services are needed.

41% of households surveyed had at least one family member with a disability and 12% had two or more people with a disability in their household. Therefore, the needs of people with a disability and families caring for a member with a disability should be taken into consideration in any provision of humanitarian assistance.

### Women and girls

The large majority of women in the surveyed villages felt more in danger than men, expressing fear of sexual violence from armed groups and, in some villages, from within the household itself. They were also subjected to movement restrictions and harassment from non-state armed groups. A third of families reported that their girls were not safe on their way to/from school. Half of families revealed that girls under 18 years are married. They say this is encouraged to avoid unwanted early pregnancies.

- Awareness raising on GBV in the communities is needed to reduce violence within and outside households and work towards gender justice.
- Child protection programming, specifically covering child marriage, is needed to enable girls to reach their full potential.
- Peacebuilding programming for women targeting issues such as access to water resources can support equitable resource use, minimize resource disputes and build connections between differing groups.

### Teenagers

Teenagers from all ethnic groups among displaced, host community and returnee backgrounds in Douentza, Gossi and Benguel in Gourma Rharous stated that they felt in danger because of insecurity and the presence of bandits. Insecurity has also exacerbated food insecurity with most families reporting a reduction in food consumption. Women, children and youth are the first to suffer from this. Half of the households in this study reported that children under 14 years old in their families contribute to their means of subsistence, by activities such as helping with animals or in gardens.

Access to schooling is precarious for girls, and while the majority of villages had a primary school in proximity, they were subject to closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic and insecurity. Secondary schooling is less accessible.

Regarding social cohesion, all of the teenagers interviewed expressed solidarity and compassion between themselves and youths of other groups such as displaced, returnee and host community.

- Ensure that humanitarian programming is sensitive to the nutritional needs of children.
- Education in Emergencies programming can be considered within these circles. During school closures community education projects to supplement gaps in education should be considered.
- Child-friendly spaces that engage children from host community, IDP and returnee families to support the psychosocial well-being of children and build on the positive relations between young people from these groups are recommended.
- Programming that connects children from IDP, host community and returnee households can support the maintenance of positive community relations, reducing fear or prejudice amongst children of other groups.



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# Annex 1

Circle	Village	Organisation	Type of Org.	Type of Assistance	Beneficiaries	Aid received
Gourma Rharous	Bobangueye	Islamic Relief	International NGO	Food	IDPs	Coupons, Food Voucher
		SADEV	Local NGO	Medical	Women, men, children	Medicine and medical personnel
Gourma Rharous	Bambara Maoudé	Islamic Relief	International NGO	Food	IDPs	Food Voucher
		SADEV	Local NGO	Medical	Women, men, children	Medicine and medical staff
Gourma Rharous	Nana	Humanité HI	International NGO	Food, Cash, income generating activities	Host Community	Millet, milk, sugar, cash, livestock
		ID - Sahel	International NGO	Development of irrigated perimeter	Host Community	Moto pump, seeds and petrol
		NRC	International NGO	Education, security and child protection	Women, men, children	School bags, books, civil protection of children
		IMC	International NGO	Medical	Host Community, IDPs	Medicine, GBV intervention
		AMSS	Local NGO	Conflict Management, Income generating activities	Host community	Training and awareness raising, cash
Gourma Rharous	Benguel	ADAZ	Local NGO	Food	Men, Women	Food aid through coupons
		HI	International NGO	Food	Men, Women	Food aid through coupons
Gourma Rharous	Kadago	PAM	UN Agency	Food	IDPs	Food aid through coupons
Gourma Rharous	Gossi	PAM	UN Agency	Food	Host Community, IDPs	Food aid through coupons
		CRM	Local NGO	Shelter, Electricity	IDPs, returnees	Materials
Douentza	Douentza	IRC	International NGO	Shelter, education, school material	IDPs	School for children
		MSF	International NGO	Medical	IDPs	Maternity, gynecology, family planning
		UNHCR	UN Agency	Non-food items, shelter	IDPs	Construction material, shelter material, kitchen material
Douentza	Tongo-tongo	GAS-Mali	Local NGO	Education	Tedie	Action against descolarisation of children
		GAS-Mali	Local NGO	Covid-19 awareness	Tedie	Prevention and action against Covid-19
Douentza	Guéné - Doundé	GAS - Mali	Local NGO	Education	Tédié	Action against descolarisation of children
		GAS - Mali	Local NGO	Covid-19 awareness	Tédié	Prevention and action against Covid-19
Douentza	Orodou	No humanitarian aid				
Douentza	Timba	No humanitarian aid				
Douentza	Adia	No humanitarian aid				



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