

Understanding How GBV Capacity-Building in Peacetime Has an Impact During Conflict - Mali Case Study

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About the project

As part of a multi-year Strategic Partnership between the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and DCAF, the Enhancing SSG/R Policy & Practice project forms an innovative instrument allowing both DCAF and the MFA to regularly identify and explore emerging issues of relevance to SSG/R (e.g. climate security, hybrid security dynamics, and trauma-informed approaches to reform) while concurrently strengthening DCAF's capacity as a knowledge partner. As part of this project, DCAF is conducting research to better understand current practices and challenges in CRSV response, while critically examining assumptions about the impacts of gender-focused SSR interventions on preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV). Key outputs of the project include two country-specific reports on CRSV response in **Ukraine** and Mali and a **third report** aimed at international audiences synthesizing the findings from Mali and Ukraine and presenting analysis and recommendations related to SSR and WPS programming.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MPFEF	Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SJU	Specialized Judicial Unit
SSG	Security Sector Governance
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study “Understanding How GBV Capacity-Building in Peacetime Has an Impact During Conflict – Mali Case Study”. The report is part of the DCAF Enhancing SSG/R Policy & Practice project on Security Sector Reform and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Understanding the Impacts of Peacetime GBV Capacity-Building”, which explores the impact of SSR approaches on combating GBV using Mali and Ukraine as case studies. The project seeks to determine the factors that facilitate or limit the impact of capacity building delivered in peacetime on security sector capacity in times of conflict or war, with the goal of developing recommendations for improving the effectiveness and lasting impact of capacity-building activities in the context of SSR interventions.

From 2017 to 2023, the delivery of gender and GBV training to the Malian National Police and National Gendarmerie was a major focus for DCAF and a number of other international organizations. Capacity building was central to these initiatives, which focused on institutionalizing gender mainstreaming in order to reduce gender inequality and prevent and respond to GBV, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) within the armed and security forces in Mali.

The study has produced encouraging findings regarding acquisition of knowledge and technical skills concerning GBV, with interviews indicating that police and

gendarmerie personnel have indeed improved their skills in handling cases of GBV, resulting in increased public trust. Capacity building has also contributed to greater awareness of the importance of integrating a gender perspective within the security institutions, and has paved the way for a number of gender-related initiatives.

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However, we found a more mixed picture regarding the impact of capacity building in relation to CRSV. The obstacles here include persistent confusion about the different forms of violence, as reflected in a lack of ownership of protocols and strategies for combating GBV and CRSV. Despite efforts by the international community to develop action plans and strategies for combating CRSV, our interviewees reported that security personnel are often unfamiliar with these plans.

Furthermore, the training provided by international actors often focuses on improving technical skills, without considering the capacity of security institutions in terms of their resources and personnel. Our study found that developing technical skills is not enough to improve the response to GBV in itself, but must be accompanied by consideration of how to incorporate these skills into day-to-day work, the roles and responsibilities of the personnel who need to adopt them, and the resources that need to be put in place. Moreover, as the training provided has not been adequately followed up, it is difficult to assess long-term institutional changes. Based on these findings, we conclude that capacity building needs to go beyond simply providing training. It should instead be seen as a broader task of supporting institutional development so that these new skills can be implemented.

Our document review also reveals the limitations of capacity-building projects in a context in which the legal and political framework does not recognize all forms of GBV. Despite the adoption of strategies and protocols to combat GBV, the lack of specific national legislation on GBV represents a major obstacle to taking legal action on such cases, and contributes to the impunity of perpetrators.

The information gathered shows that the international community has supported numerous initiatives involving capacity building and developing action plans to combat GBV and CRSV. However, we found that some of these activities, in particular the training, were seen as merely an obligation imposed by technical partners. One of the

main reasons for this perception among the security institutions appears to be the requirements of the programmes run by international organizations, which include a monitoring and evaluation framework focused on activities and short-term tangible results, whereas these institutions require longer-term support that goes beyond individual activities. The frequent turnover of staff within international organizations is another obstacle to supporting national institutions to make lasting structural changes, and contributes to duplication and confusion between different activities.

Overall, this study reveals the need to adapt the concept of capacity building to have more of a focus on a change management-based approach, within the context of better coordination between national and international actors.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, Mali experienced major political upheaval and escalating security problems that had an exacerbating effect on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV),¹ particularly in the northern and central parts of the country. According to figures from humanitarian organizations, in 2020 there were 1,020 cases of CRSV affecting 510 women, 489 girls, 15 boys, and 6 men, and 68 cases of children conceived as a result of rape (UN Security Council, 2021). According to UN sources, sexual violence is the main safety concern for girls, and the second most important concern for women in the areas of Mali affected by the conflict (UN Peacekeeping, 2022).

Security sector reform (SSR)² and good security sector governance are essential to preventing CRSV, particularly in fragile conflict-hit regions. When done effectively, they ensure that the security forces operate in accordance with the law and human rights, thus creating a climate of trust between themselves and the public. When the police and other security bodies respond to the needs of citizens without distinction as to gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status, this supports social cohesion, and reduces the risk of violence and conflict.

More specifically, one of the fundamental ideas behind SSR is that developing the capacity of institutions³ to prevent and respond to violence in peacetime will enable the security sector to better protect civilians in times of war or escalating violence. In particular, SSR policy, steering, and support

are based on the idea that if a country's police, army, and justice system are aware of gender inequality and gender-based violence (GBV), they will be more willing and able to prevent and respond to CRSV.

Various different bodies are involved in preventing and responding to GBV in Mali. The public bodies playing a key role include the police and gendarmerie, alongside other public services such as the justice, health, and social security systems, civil society, and communities.

In Mali, DCAF has supported gender awareness raising within the police since 2017, and in the gendarmerie since 2019. UN actors, including the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have also worked with the police and judicial police officers on capacity building in relation to handling GBV and CRSV.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine SSR interventions in Mali with a focus on their impact on gender equality, and on preventing and responding to GBV and CRSV. DCAF's continued engagement with the Malian police, gendarmerie, and civil society puts it in a strong position to examine the impact of work on gender and GBV within the security sector within a context of rising violence and an increase in CRSV.

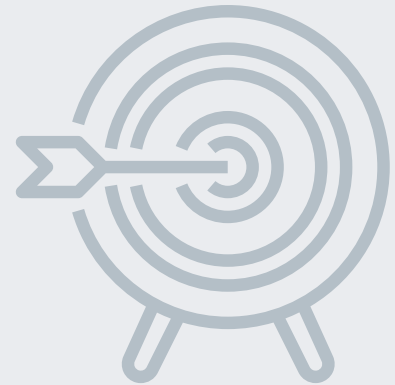
SSR approach and gender capacity building in Mali

Drawing on lessons learned from the multidimensional crisis that began in 2012, the Malian government has gradually embarked on a process of reforming its security policy, with a focus on human safety. The national vision for SSR recognizes the importance of integrating a gender perspective and combating GBV to ensure this reform process is inclusive and participatory.

In its national strategy for SSR, the government also emphasizes the importance of improving the operational capacity of the security, defence, and justice institutions in order to better meet public expectations related to security (Republic of Mali, 2022).

Participant during group work as part of a DCAF training course on GBV, © DCAF.



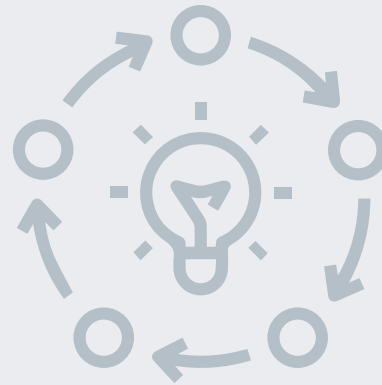


Study objectives

This study aims to determine the suitability of capacity-building programmes implemented in Mali, and to what extent they have contributed to fostering a proactive attitude to embedding gender mainstreaming, and prevention of and protection against GBV, in particular CRSV, within the police and gendarmerie.

Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the impact of capacity-building activities (in particular those run by DCAF) in combating gender inequality and GBV, in order to identify the factors that facilitate or inhibit the translation of GBV capacity-building initiatives in peacetime into meaningful action in times of conflict or escalating violence. The study findings will be used to inform SSR policies, steering, and programmes at both the national and international level.

The purpose of this report is not to provide an exhaustive list of all initiatives for combating GBV and CRSV, or to evaluate all capacity-building activities in this area. Based on a document review, and discussions with beneficiaries of DCAF training activities, the study aims to provide insight into the Malian context regarding GBV and CRSV, and to reveal certain aspects that need to be considered in order to improve the effectiveness of capacity-building projects.



Methodological approach

The methodology was developed by the authors of the report in collaboration with the Gender Focal Points within the target institutions (police and gendarmerie).

Data collection was based on a review of the literature, policy documents, and relevant reports on SSR, gender equality, and prevention of GBV in Mali, including an analysis of the main institutional initiatives for preventing and responding to cases of CRSV. The analysis is also based on internal reports produced by DCAF for project monitoring and evaluation purposes.

The document review was supplemented by 7 interviews and a survey sent to 17 police and gendarmerie personnel, along with members of civil society working in the One Stop Centres in Bamako, and a representative from UN Women working on a GBV prevention programme. The survey was an important supplement to the interview data, as some participants were not available to speak to us directly.

The study participants were selected in partnership with the General Directorates of the Police and Gendarmerie. To be eligible, they needed to have handled cases of GBV or CRSV and have benefited from DCAF capacity-building activities between 2019 and 2023.

CRSV IN MALI

Since the crisis broke out in Mali, CRSV has been the focus of particular attention from the UN and the Malian government. Since 2013, this concern has been continuously monitored in the annual reports of the UN Secretary-General on CRSV, and in the Security Council resolutions on the mandate of MINUSMA (UN Security Council, 2013, 2016, and 2017). The actors involved in the conflict resulting from the crisis in Mali had incorporated combating CRSV in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process that was terminated by the Government of Mali in January 2024.

According to the latest report on CRSV from the UN Secretary-General, in 2023 MINUSMA recorded 98 cases of CRSV affecting 85 women and 13 girls. Other figures reveal cases of CRSV affecting 392 women and 294 girls (UN Security Council, 2023). Most of this violence is committed by members of armed groups, militias and self-defence groups, and foreign security personnel, although there have been a number of cases involving members of the Malian security and defence forces. Sexual violence has been used in the conflict in Mali to strengthen internal cohesion between group members, as a reward for fighters, and as an intimidation strategy (UN Security Council, 2020).

Conflict is an aggravating factor that intensifies the various forms of GBV and places women and girls in increasingly vulnerable situations. Forced marriage and child marriage, for example, are a major

challenge, particularly in the northern and central areas of the country. Almost 66 per cent of reported cases of forced marriage involve girls under 18 years of age, who are married off to protect their family, or to move them away from dangerous areas (UNFPA, 2024a). The country's insecurity has also resulted in the displacement of over 390,000 people, of whom 57 per cent are women. This displacement increases the risk of GBV for women and girls by exposing them to poverty and loss of community ties: 11 per cent of survivors of GBV or CRSV are internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in camps (UNFPA, 2024a).

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GBV and CRSV

The scale of GBV in Mali has been exacerbated by the security crisis that broke out in 2012. In the areas affected by the conflict, restricted humanitarian access, the inadequacy and inaccessibility of support services, growing insecurity, fear of reprisals, and sociocultural pressure create a culture of silence around cases of GBV (MPFEF, 2018).

Obtaining accurate data on the various forms of GBV committed in conflict zones in Mali is therefore a challenge. Over the first three months of 2024, of 709 reported cases of sexual violence, around 162 cases concerned CRSV by armed perpetrators (UNFPA, 2024b). 'Standard' forms of GBV such as domestic violence continue to exist in various forms alongside violence directly related to the conflict, such as sexual slavery or survival sex (MPFEF, 2018). Although displaced persons are at increased risk of GBV, the majority of victims (71 per cent) are in fact people who have remained in their community of origin, while IDPs or returnees represent 29 per cent of victims. Furthermore, there is not always a clear line between 'standard' cases of GBV and cases of CRSV. According to GBV victim support organizations, the various victims who use their services may not identify themselves as being affected by the security situation (UNFPA, 2024b).

Conflict exacerbates existing gender inequality, putting women and girls at increased risk of various forms of GBV. While there is a lack of data on this, sexual violence is also known to be perpetrated against men and boys in a conflict context, for example as a means of humiliation. Conflict-related violence takes place everywhere, including in households, detention centres, and camps for the displaced. It is committed by various perpetrators, including government armed forces, armed groups, peacekeeping personnel, and civilians (CEDAW, 2013).

It is therefore important to place CRSV within the broader context of GBV: CRSV originates in inequality between men and women within society, collective tolerance for discrimination towards women, and impunity for the perpetrators of violence. That is why the legal and political framework, and initiatives for preventing and combating CRSV, including capacity-building activities, must take a broad, holistic view of the problem of GBV that encompasses CRSV and sexual violence exacerbated by conflict.

The difficulty with collecting data on these crimes is partly due to reluctance to report them: less than 10 per cent of victims file a case, due to the proximity of armed groups and fear of reprisals (UN Security Council, 2023). Insecurity and lack of resources also impede national and international actors from obtaining comprehensive statistics about the scale of the problem.

LIMITATIONS OF THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK IN RELATION TO GBV

Mali has ratified several international and regional instruments prohibiting GBV, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (known as the 'Maputo Protocol'). However, the country's national legal framework has several limitations that impede legal action against GBV. The lack of specific legislation defining and penalizing GBV continues to be a major obstacle to punishing perpetrators of violence and securing justice for victims (MPFEF, 2018).

The only forms of GBV listed as crimes in the Malian penal code are rape⁴ and indecent assault.⁵ It therefore does not address many of the various forms of GBV, including CRSV, and thus prevents appropriate legal action from being taken. In 2001, a list of sexual crimes⁶ constituting international crimes was introduced into the penal code, but no cases of CRSV have been tried under this category. And although the remit of the Specialized Judicial Unit (SJU) has been expanded to include international crimes, no cases have been pursued via this route. The recorded cases of CRSV have thus not been prosecuted under either national or international law (FIDH and ASFC, 2022).

Although the legislative framework does not make it easy to access justice or prosecute perpetrators, it is even harder to prosecute specific conflict-related cases, since in these circumstances the security risks and lack of support services further deter victims from coming forward. Conducting investigations also involves security risks for security personnel, particularly in areas outside government control.

In 2017, the Ministry for Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family (MPFEF) did propose a specific law on GBV. The draft bill was set to be examined by the Malian parliament in 2018, but was opposed by the High Islamic Council of Mali, and ultimately withdrawn (Mali Actu, 2021).

However, in a bid to ensure national coordination of the fight against gender inequality, the Malian government introduced a National Gender Policy, adopted in 2010, which constitutes Mali's overall framework of engagement for achieving equality between men and women. This policy reaffirms the importance of combating all forms of violence against women and girls. It also advocates incorporating gender as a 'principle of good governance', and makes public institutions and services responsible and accountable for achieving goals relating to the promotion of

gender equality. At the time of this study, the policy was being revised under the leadership and coordination of the MPFEF.

In the absence of a specific law against GBV, Mali has also adopted its *Stratégie nationale holistique pour mettre fin aux violences basées sur le genre 2019-2030* (MPFEF, 2018). By 2030, this strategy seeks to improve ‘the well-being of girls and women, boys and men ... through reducing gender-based violence and sexual abuse and exploitation (SAE) and integrated management of GBV and SAE survivors at the national level, with a particular focus on areas affected by humanitarian situations’. Despite the adoption of this strategy, the lack of a national approach for allocating resources to combat GBV, and the lack of coordination between the various state and civilian actors, represent major obstacles to its implementation (MPFEF, 2018).

Overview of institutional mechanisms for combating CRSV in Mali

Several initiatives have been developed in Mali to prevent and combat CRSV, involving various different actors from government, civil society, and development partners. These interventions fall into four main categories: supporting the adoption of action plans and formal or informal institutional frameworks; developing a specialist training module on CRSV; setting up the One Stop Centres; and creating a centralized mechanism for collecting data on GBV.

Adoption of action plans and formal or informal institutional frameworks

In 2019, Mali and the UN signed a joint communiqué on prevention and response to CRSV. In October 2021, this commitment was taken a step further with the finalization and validation of a three-year action plan to implement the communiqué. This plan, a collaboration between the Malian government and MINUSMA, seeks to ensure a holistic response to CRSV. It covers targeted interventions on prevention and social mobilization, protection, fighting impunity, and access to multi-sectoral care for victims of sexual violence, such as medical assistance, psychosocial support, security and protection, and access to justice (UN Peacekeeping, 2022).

MINUSMA played an important role in combating CRSV, and although it is as yet too soon to predict the medium – to long-term effects of its withdrawal (which occurred at the end of 2023), its absence will clearly have a significant impact on the continuation of activities, particularly in terms of implementing the action plan for prevention of and response to CRSV. In particular, our interviews revealed that this action plan has not been adequately integrated at the operational level, suggesting the need for better institutional ownership. In other words, for the plan to be more effective and properly implemented, local institutions and stakeholders must fully own it, ensuring that it is suitably tailored and applied to operations on the ground.

Initiatives by the security institutions in this area include the National Police's three-year action plan to combat gender-based violence (2018-2020). This plan, designed to act as a reference point for the police's work on GBV, sets out a clear and coherent framework for guiding action and structuring all of the cross-cutting, multidimensional, and multisectoral measures and actions taken by the Malian Ministry of Police and Civil Protection and its partners to prevent and crack down on GBV, and to provide holistic support for GBV survivors.⁷ The preventative actions taken by the security forces as part of implementing this plan include stepping up patrols in at-risk areas and reinforcing security at camps for the displaced. They have also conducted CRSV awareness-raising campaigns among local communities.

Major progress has also been made in combating CRSV through collaboration with non-state actors such as religious authorities. This includes, for example – although its impact is difficult to assess – a declaration of commitment to combat CRSV signed in 2020 by the President of the High Islamic Council in Bamako. MINUSMA provided technical support for developing an action plan that emphasizes the main commitments of religious leaders, including the issuing of a fatwa (a legal opinion on a point of Islamic law) in 2023 (MINUSMA, 2023) prohibiting these forms of violence. The High Islamic Council has also worked alongside MINUSMA to raise awareness of the importance of integrating action against GBV and CRSV into the work of the police, gendarmerie, and armed forces.

Development and integration of a module on CRSV in the Police Academy training programme

In June 2021, MINUSMA and the Malian Police Academy launched a joint project to incorporate new modules on CRSV into the national police training programme, and to build the capacity of the Malian police in this area. This project was developed in response to the high level of under-reporting by victims, and sought to prevent sexual violence perpetrated by national police personnel. The Malian police authorities have also appointed two senior Regional Focal Points for combating CRSV across the country. The Gender Focal Points in northern and central Mali have also contributed to awareness raising among the Malian security forces, and to building their capacity in relation to preventing and handling CRSV (UN Peacekeeping, 2022).

Setting up One Stop Centres

The One Stop Centres provide holistic services (health, psychosocial, security, and legal) for GBV survivors, 99 per cent of whom are women, and 61 per cent under 18 years of age (Direction nationale de la population, 2021). The country has 17 of these units spread across the Bamako district and in the regions outside the capital.⁸ A number of units are also embedded in the Bamako police force. These facilities are made up of teams of psychologists, legal experts, security personnel, social workers, and doctors, who provide a listening service, guidance, and individual and group therapy in both specialist units and within the community. The creation of these centres is a major step forward in the organized response to GBV, ensuring access



Participants during a group exercise as part of a DCAF gender training course, © DCAF.

to holistic support services for a large number of women and girls.⁹

Despite continual growth in the number of One Stop Centres, particularly since 2019, including in northern and central Mali, GBV victims living in isolated areas still struggle to access these services. Staff working in victim support services estimate that in 2022, 92 per cent of sexual violence victims were unable to access safe shelter, and 42 per cent were unable to access medical help (UN Security Council, 2023).

Creation of a centralized data collection system

Since 2015, the data collected on GBV has been centralized in the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System

(GBVIMS). This platform is used by 42 organizations in Mali, including the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and UN Women, 8 healthcare providers in the north and central regions, 10 One Stop Centres, and 14 civil society groups specializing in management of GBV cases. Centralization of the data collected by these actors facilitates inter-agency coordination on GBV (UNFPA, 2024a). However, the security situation has created problems with data collection in the conflict zones, limiting the production and scope of reports, and thus undermining the effectiveness of the platform as a monitoring tool.

DCAF'S STRATEGY TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND COMBAT GBV IN THE CONTEXT OF SSR IN MALI

DCAF's mission is to make people safer by supporting states to implement inclusive and participatory SSR based on international norms and good practice.

In the context of promoting gender equality, DCAF works with the Malian government across the defence and security sectors. Building capacity and increasing accountability within the security forces in relation to combating GBV form a key component of DCAF's programmes for supporting SSR.

As such, DCAF has supported a number of different capacity-building initiatives with a view to promoting the integration of a gender perspective in institutional procedures and service provision. DCAF's work in this area has primarily focused on the National Police and National Gendarmerie.¹⁰

Within the gendarmerie, this support began with capacity building for the Gender Focal Points, including training on gender-related concepts, and on GBV and how to handle it. It then mainly focused on assisting with the initial stages of the gendarmerie's Gender Committee, with DCAF running a workshop to discuss this topic, then supporting the creation of the committee. Following this, the institution underwent a gender self-assessment in collaboration with the newly

established committee. Based on this report, an action plan for promoting gender equality was drawn up and presented to various partners with a view to securing support for its implementation. Alongside the development of this plan, a training module on handling GBV was developed, and training of trainers was provided to ensure the gendarmerie had sufficient internal resources to deliver the module. DCAF attended the first sessions delivered by the new trainers to gendarmerie personnel in order to offer support if required.

Likewise within the police, the Gender Focal Points first benefited from capacity building on topics related to gender and GBV. The Focal Points also took part in a training of trainers programme that prepared them to deliver workshops on handling GBV. Finally, a Focal Points training manual was drawn up with support from DCAF, providing a reference guide for their internal training initiatives. The police also conducted a gender self-assessment, the results of which were brought together in a report serving as a basis for developing the Strategic Plan for Promoting Gender and Female Leadership in the National Police. In parallel, DCAF provided support for promoting leadership and risk management skills for female officers in the police by running various workshops on this topic.

STUDY FINDINGS

KEY FINDING 1

SSR programmes have promoted greater awareness of gender issues and GBV among internal security force personnel, and contributed to the development of national policies and strategies.

Between 2017 and 2023, SSR programmes supported by the international community, including DCAF, played a significant role in capacity building among the security forces, and in raising awareness about the importance of gender and combating GBV, particularly within the police and gendarmerie. Study participants reported that the initiatives by the international community responded to specific needs identified by national policies and actors. Elements such as capacity building, making security personnel more accountable for gender issues and GBV, and improving the representation of women within the security institutions have enabled national actors to take a holistic view of gender. These programmes have also promoted cooperation between international and national (state, non-state, and civil society) actors. One example of this cooperation is the visit from the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General that led to the signing of the joint communiqué by the UN and the Malian government. Joint development of the action plan to combat CRSV also illustrates effective cooperation between national and international partners, and in a further example of developing cooperation between different types of actors, a regular meeting

has been established between the actors working on gender issues and GBV. This approach has made it possible to deal with various problems in national policies and strategies, such as violence against people in vulnerable situations, in particular women and children in conflict zones, and descent-based slavery in certain parts of Mali. Several survey respondents emphasized the relevant nature of these initiatives by reporting that the programmes met their expectations and needs, and observing that the training and awareness-raising initiatives had contributed to professionalization of their day-to-day work. One respondent, for example, explained that she had initiated the GBV handling procedure and drawn up an official report for filing a case on behalf of a victim, despite attempts by the latter's parents to get their daughter to withdraw her complaint. Some respondents, however, suggested expanding the scope of training to include the judicial system, in order to include all actors involved in handling GBV. From the interviews and document review, we also found that the programmes gave insufficient prominence to the management of CRSV specifically, as they were mainly centred on methods of responding to GBV in general. Finally, while significant progress

has been made, the integration of the gender approach in the procedures governing police and gendarmerie operations is still perceived to be limited, with the survey respondents apparently not informed about all of the ongoing or completed initiatives.

The interviewees appreciated the degree of flexibility in the planning and implementation of activities. This approach enabled initiatives to be tailored to the changing human rights violations situation, notably in relation to vulnerability to GBV.

The interviews and document review also enabled us to identify the overall impact of SSR programmes in improving consideration of gender and GBV within the security institutions, and among the population. First, we note that tangible results on gender issues have been achieved within the security institutions. Examples of this include the development of action plans to combat GBV within the police and gendarmerie, the development of action plans to promote women within the two institutions, the creation of GBV units within the investigation teams, the creation of the One Stop Centres, the way in which oversight is conducted, and the launch of free phone lines for victims of GBV. Gender Focal Point roles have also been created within the security institutions. Within the gendarmerie, the profile of this post has recently been further raised by including this individual in the Director General's team, and making it a dedicated role rather than an ancillary responsibility, as was previously the case. The interviewees confirmed that there was better consideration of gender within these institutions, as characterized by better understanding of the legal and political frameworks, and above all by greater

awareness among security sector personnel. One female respondent, for example, told us that: 'Many of our officers didn't realize the severity of domestic violence, but now we've seen a big shift. Public awareness raising has also taken some of the stigma away from female survivors.' Another female respondent observed along similar lines that: 'The value of training lies in raising awareness among the security forces that gender is not a handicap. Before, we weren't aware of these issues, but now almost everyone is aware of GBV and knows what to do about it.' Our interviews with One Stop Centre staff also confirmed that security personnel have indeed improved their skills in supporting victims of GBV, contributing to increased trust between the public and the security forces.



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In summary, capacity-building programmes as part of SSR have played a key role in increasing the focus on integrating gender equality into the security sector, and in the professionalization of the police and gendarmerie in handling and managing GBV. The gradual increase in awareness among internal security personnel of the risks and vulnerabilities related to GBV appears to have contributed to behaviour change.

KEY FINDING 2

Personnel capacity building alone is insufficient, and must be accompanied by structural change.

Almost all of the respondents, and in particular the female respondents, identified the fact that considerations relating to gender or gender equality are not literally or explicitly included in the remit of the security services as a major obstacle to the effective translation of capacity-building initiatives into action. The low profile of gender-related issues in the missions of the security services is partly explained by limited awareness of such issues among senior managers and authorities within the police and gendarmerie – the result of social norms that confine women and girls to familial support roles.

The lack of specific regulations and clear procedures for handling cases of CRSV discourages the police and gendarmerie from taking action in this area. Several respondents noted as an issue the lack of protocols that provide the police and gendarmerie with practical guidance on how to respond effectively and that incorporate gender issues and GBV, including in a conflict context.

Our study also found that while the focus of capacity building has hitherto been on ‘technical’ capacity, such initiatives need to centre on ‘functional’ capacity. Specialists in the sector argue that capacity-building programmes need to go beyond technical training in order to develop functional capacity within the security sector, and even the justice sector, to take effective decisions and measures in response to CRSV.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that training can be perceived as merely an obligation imposed by technical and financial partners and international organizations, rather than an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of internal work and programmes, resulting in increased responsibility and accountability in the performance of duties. While the training is useful, it represents only part of the changes that are required, but the monitoring and evaluation models used by international partners focus primarily on activities and products, without considering the impact of changes on the public. This approach to evaluating the effectiveness of programmes satisfies the needs of partners, since the training is delivered and produces positive results, but overlooks the beneficiaries (within an institution or among the public), who should be able to notice a change in the services that are delivered. Training is not an end in itself, and there needs to be more of a

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focus on measuring institutional change and service provision. The system of monitoring and evaluation therefore needs to adapt. To better assess changes, programmes should stop monitoring activities and products and instead measure their results and impact. The survey respondents told us that funder requirements are a strong incentive to adopt best practice in relation to combating GBV. However, high staff turnover in certain international funding organizations makes it harder to maintain continuity and consistency in SSR work when a project is passed on to a new team.

Several of the interviewees, in particularly the female interviewees, emphasized the poor starting position of the police and gendarmerie in terms of taking on and dealing with GBV and CRSV. It remains important to focus on technical capacity as the counterpart to functional capacity, and to develop it further. This poor position also includes equipment and infrastructure. At present, infrastructure and equipment tend to be either non-existent or unsuitable, preventing access to protection services and handling of cases of GBV in line with the required norms and standards. Police stations do not typically have rooms that offer the necessary confidentiality and privacy for victims to be properly taken care of and listened to. Moreover, the equipment available to the teams handling cases of GBV, including computers, is at best antiquated and more often non-existent, weakening the response capacity of officers.

Our analysis also revealed inadequate knowledge among police and gendarmerie personnel about their mandate and functions, and about the objectives and

sectoral practices related to national investigation procedures. This includes a lack of familiarity with safety protocols for victims of CRSV, and the protocols and best practices recognized as international norms for handling CRSV.

These deficiencies prevent staff from putting into practice what they have learned from capacity-building initiatives, particularly since, as discussed above, the institutional and regulatory environment in Mali still does not support a stringent response to GBV. In future, it would therefore be useful to combine capacity-building initiatives with support for structural change, combined with a pragmatic approach to investment in and planning of material and personnel resources proportionate to the ambitions set out in the various strategies and action plans.

This approach would notably help increase the professionalization of the police, gendarmerie, and justice system in combating GBV and CRSV. Capacity building, standardizing practices, the existence of appropriate high-quality infrastructure, and the development of internal skills to support the long-term impact and independence of institutional training are all necessary elements for ensuring professionalism among the police and gendarmerie. The progress and sustainability of these elements largely depends on the availability of resources, and their strategic, planned use. Improvements of this kind would increase the likelihood of a professional institution being able to offer better service provision, while demonstrating greater resilience, transparency, and accountability.

The translation of new knowledge into effective skills with an identifiable impact on the population also increases trust among the public, victims, and survivors. It is essential that the security sector inspire trust among the public, otherwise violence will not be reported. This trust is created over the long term, but can be broken at any time if someone goes to file a report with the police or gendarmerie and experiences poor treatment during the process. One individual's negative perception can have an unfavourable

impact on the entire community, with a knock-on effect on collective trust. The sense of security is derived not only from the capacity of the officers who interact directly with the victim, but also the quality of the facilities, and the equipment available to security sector personnel. One respondent working in a One Stop Centre stated, for example, that the programme has strengthened trust in the area she works in, but stressed that this will only be maintained if commitment and resources are guaranteed over the long term.

KEY FINDING 3

The legal and regulatory response to GBV and CRSV remains inadequate.

Sexual violence remains relatively poorly documented in Mali, and the institutional and regulatory framework to prevent and respond to it remains weak. Our interviews also revealed that people have a narrow view of what constitutes gender-based sexual violence. Finally, personnel within the security institutions, but also practitioners working in GBV response, are unclear on the distinction between GBV and CRSV, and the latter concept has only been introduced very recently. This distinction is not considered relevant in terms of victim protection and first response, since the One Stop Centres and security personnel have a mandate to respond to all cases of violence, whether or not they are related to conflict. The lack of clarity also stems from the fact that it is not always possible to make a clear distinction between 'simple' violence, and violence

related to the security situation. The effects of the security situation are also felt in Bamako, for example in managing victims among IDPs. In the context of prevention activities, however, there is a need for deeper understanding of the security issues that exacerbate cases of violence, in order to develop actions to minimize the risks to which victims are exposed.


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This lack of understanding about the different forms of violence is reflected in limited ownership of protocols and strategies for GBV. Some respondents felt that these tools, where they exist, are not familiar to or properly understood by police, gendarmerie, or even justice professionals. There is thus poor ownership of them, particularly among personnel in the security forces, justice system, defence forces, and healthcare sector. All of these actors see CRSV as something that mainly happens in the remote parts of the country, and thus does not concern them. This attitude prevents them from grasping the reality of CRSV, reinforcing their lack of familiarity with the phenomenon. This observation points to the importance of improving understanding of CRSV, since these forms of violence are not solely linked to the geographic area in which the conflict is taking place. The most obvious aspect for actors based in the capital or other major cities outside the conflict zone is that of forced displacement. Sexual violence committed in the spaces to which IDPs are relocated, often sited in outlying areas or in towns or cities unaffected by the conflict, can represent cases of CRSV that will be handled by the very security personnel who believe this topic does not concern them.

Our interviews with actors in the security sector also revealed that communication of GBV protocols and strategies is particularly poor in the regions most affected by the conflict. The inadequate dissemination of these materials and their limited integration into the day-to-day work of actors within the system thus limits their effectiveness.

Another reason for the poor ownership and usage of these tools is the fact that

they are dense and highly detailed, and therefore poorly understood. The documents are presented in accordance with standard practice in international cooperation, including, for example, dense logical frameworks that bring together a large amount of information, but need to be simplified for personnel who are not used to such materials, and only see the final product. The format of the documents thus represents an obstacle to their use, and some of these procedures require updating to integrate the specific contexts of each sector. Personnel working in the institutional response to CRSV should therefore receive training in interinstitutional cooperation, and collaboration protocols.



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Finally, even where action plans designed to fill personnel knowledge gaps have been developed by the management of certain organizations, relevant figures in other organizations are unfamiliar with them. In our interviews, we thus found that



Participants and gender focal point of the National Police during a DCAF training course on handling GBV cases, © DCAF.

the Gender Focal Points in the security institutions were unaware of the existence of the action plan to combat CRSV approved by the Malian government, and implemented by MINUSMA. This lack of coordination and circulation of information could lead to duplication of initiatives, or programmes that compete or are inconsistent with one another. Implementation of an effective response to GBV and CRSV requires coordination, including in the context of developing holistic reception facilities such as the One Stop Centres, which receive victims of both GBV and CRSV alike.

The ‘GBV training’ approach has been widely used, and has been successful. However, these sessions have rarely tackled issues concerning CRSV. Our interviews and analysis of the reports of the training delivered revealed that the latter provided very little information about CRSV. The beneficiaries of capacity-building initiatives only remembered aspects of the operational training on GBV, and nothing about CRSV. While an action plan to combat CRSV has been developed, general unawareness of its existence prevents it from being implemented in an effective manners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The initial objective and remit of the capacity-building programmes – to contribute, at the government level, to capacity building in accordance with the principles of good governance, the rule of law, and equality between men and women – remain appropriate.

Based on the weaknesses identified in the capacity-building programmes, and in particular the failure of the latter to prioritize the problem of CRSV as a key topic, the following recommendations are designed to increase the professionalization of the police and gendarmerie in the cross-cutting approach to combating CRSV in all its dimensions and forms:

Recommendations for national institutions (police, gendarmerie, justice system)

- 01** | Strengthen the skills of personnel in relation to GBV, including CRSV, and ensure these are kept up to date.
- 02** | Adopt standard operating procedures that define the roles and processes applicable to handling individual cases within police and gendarmerie services, in order to improve procedures for interventions to prevent and respond to GBV and CRSV and monitor these interventions.
- 03** | Improve multisectoral collaboration between the key actors within the institutional response mechanism, including by establishing effective channels of communication between the different response systems in order to improve the consistency and effectiveness of the work of each actor, particularly in the police, gendarmerie, and justice system.
- 04** | Create a directory of experts on GBV and CRSV, draw on them to deliver personnel training on these topics, and include them in the development of institutional policies.
- 05** | Implement a system for monitoring and evaluating the promotion of gender equality and prevention and response initiatives in the security sector, particularly within the police and gendarmerie. The creation of tools and a guidance document will make it possible to monitor and coordinate implementation. Developing monitoring and evaluation indicators will also make it possible to assess the implementation and results of these initiatives.

Recommendations for the Malian government and legislative authorities

- 01 | Adopt legislation translating international commitments on combating GBV and CRSV into national law.
- 02 | Ensure the police, gendarmerie, and justice system have the necessary resources to handle GBV and CRSV victims and survivors in a professional manner.

Recommendations for the international community

- 01 | Ensure CRSV is better incorporated into programmes on gender and GBV, and develop programmes with a specific focus on this topic.
- 02 | Focus on supporting national initiatives, implementing existing plans, and filling gaps where necessary, instead of additional, independent, and non-coordinated initiatives.
- 03 | Make a case for developing a plan for building the response capacity of security actors in combating CRSV. This process must take a participatory and inclusive approach given the horizontal, cross-cutting dimension of approaches to combating CRSV. Beyond the police and gendarmerie, participation should be encouraged from the justice system, as an immediate partner in criminal prosecution, the civil protection agency as first responders, and the health and social security ministries.
- 04 | Support the development and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation plan for the results of capacity-building initiatives in the services and organizations benefiting from them within the police, gendarmerie, civil protection agency, justice system, and civil society organizations.
- 05 | Support accreditation for national CRSV training providers.
- 06 | Focus capacity-building initiatives on the following actors in order to increase the likelihood of effective translation of knowledge into skills:
 - › Specialist Judicial Unit judges;
 - › judicial police officers;
 - › military judges and paralegals;

- police and gendarmerie personnel;
- police and gendarmerie training academies;
- senior leaders in the police and gendarmerie;
- oversight bodies; and
- police commissioners and deputies.

In order to ensure these initiatives are effective, we recommend ensuring that all of them conform to the following two criteria:

National ownership: from the development stage onwards, capacity-building programmes must take a participatory approach in order to identify capacity-building needs within the police, gendarmerie, and civil protection authorities. All processes for developing initiatives to strengthen individual skills and build institutional and operational capacity in relation to GBV and CRSV must be drawn up based on previously identified needs.

Behaviour Change Communication: capacity-building programmes must have the goal of initiating key changes in behaviour, organizations, and regulatory norms in order to enable the police and gendarmerie to act and respond in an effective and sustained manner to GBV, and in particular CRSV.

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Endnotes

1 The term ‘conflict-related sexual violence’ encompasses acts such as rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict (see definition in UN Security Council (2024)).

2 This study is based on a broad conception of what ‘capacity building’ in a security sector institution can consist of:

- › training;
- › technical assistance (advice, mentoring, legal drafting);
- › organizational support/development (vetting, right-sizing, gender-balancing, setting up new departments/processes);
- › infrastructure development;
- › supplying equipment; and
- › awareness raising.

See Denney and Valters (2015).

3 We understand security sector reform as meaning ‘the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. The goal of SSR is to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector’ (DCAF, 2015).

4 We note that the definition of rape remains relatively narrow: Article 226 of the Malian Penal Code defines rape as ‘any act of sexual penetration, of any kind whatsoever, committed on another person, using violence, constraint, threats or surprise’. This definition excludes cases in which the victim is forced to commit an act of sexual penetration on the perpetrator, and does not encompass certain circumstances that can constitute rape, such as psychological violence, moral constraint, coercive environment, detention, the victim’s age, or legal status as a minor, and the de facto or de jure authority of the perpetrator over the victim. See FIDH and ASFC (2022).

5 Article 225 of the Penal Code defines indecent assault as: ‘Any act of sexual nature and contrary to morality performed intentionally and directed against a person’. While this definition would thus appear to include various acts of a sexual nature, it is unclear whether it encompasses forms of GBV including CRSV, since the concept of ‘morals’ is difficult to interpret, particularly amid social tolerance of GBV. See FIDH and ASFC (2022).

6 Articles 29-30 of the Malian Penal Code state that the following acts shall be considered crimes against humanity: ‘rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization and any other form of sexual violence of comparative seriousness’. However, no cases of CRSV have been tried under this category of offence. See FIDH and ASFC (2022). In the draft penal code recently submitted to the National Transitional Council, sexual violence is also considered and treated as a war crime *constituting a serious infraction of the Geneva Convention* (Chapter 3, War Crimes, in the revised, as yet not adopted penal code).

7 This plan has been developed with financial support from the Peace Building Fund, through joint projects implemented by UN Women, UNFPA, and MINUSMA.

8 The Spotlight Initiative supported both existing units and the creation of new ones. This was a European Union-funded initiative working to eliminate all violence against women and girls.

9 The statistical reports for GBV record 5,694 cases of GBV managed holistically in 2020.

10 Programmes of this kind have been run with financial support from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, and Norway.



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