RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS ON POWER AND PARTICIPATION

-Ségou region, Mali

GENRE+II PROJECT

Strengthening climate resilience, social cohesion and gender equality in Ségou, Mali

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TABLES

ABBREVIATIONS

ASACO	Community Health Associations
CAFO	Coordination of Women's Associations and NGOs in Mali
CBO	Community-based Organisations
CMC	Conflict Management Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
COFO	Land Commission
EDS Mali	Demographic and Health Survey, Mali
FCDO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
MJT	Muso Jigiya Ton in Bambara (Women's Hope Group)
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PDSEC	Social, Economic and Cultural Development Plans
RGA-P	Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation
SMC	School Management Committee
VCC	Village Chief's Council
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WMC	Waterpoint Management Committee
WO	Women's Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) is part of the GENRE+II project in the cercles of Bla, Ségou and Barouéli in the Ségou region of Mali. The project is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO) to build capacity for climate change adaptation, gender equality and social cohesion in the Ségou region.

This RGA-P is the first step in **CARE's Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) model**. It summarises the impact of the crisis on gender roles and relations, the capacity of women/girls to cope, participate and influence decision-making in response to the crisis, and offers ideas on how women can strengthen their own participation and leadership. The RGA-P is based on secondary and primary data collection carried out in March 2023 in eight communes in the cercles of Ségou, Bla and Barouéli in the Ségou region.

1. General context

Climate change in Mali has led to increased competition and conflict between farmers, herders, fishermen and foresters over limited resources. This situation is exacerbated by the inability of governments to manage the decline in productive land, and to mediate the power of armed Islamist groups who exploit climatic and ethnic grievances. In the communities participating in GENRE+II, however, according to CARE's March 2023 conflict assessment, in this local context, the impacts of extremist or vigilante groups are limited and community conflicts rarely turn violent. However, when conflicts do arise (most often over access to land), social cohesion is eroded and the seeds of future conflict take root.

Women are considered "pillars of the community" and "key players in promoting peace" in Mali, as they are expected to raise and educate children (SIPRI 2019)[1] However, their influence is mainly limited to the private sphere or participation in women-only groups. Furthermore, despite being heavily involved in land cultivation and often affected by the consequences of resource depletion and land conflicts, women in Mali have little say in customary practices for allocating agricultural land, their inheritance and access rights are not protected by law, and they rarely have access to systems for mediating land conflicts.

2. Key Findings

Governance and decision-making structures: In the 16 villages studied, several governance and decision-making structures are active in the field of NRM and conflict management. These include structures set up by the state, such as the Land Commission (COFO) and the village chiefs' councils. Non-state structures include conflict prevention and management committees, water point management committees, forest monitoring committees, as well as the Coordination of Women's Associations and NGOs in Mali (CAFO) and communal youth committees. However, the youth committees and the women's association (CAFO) were active in only three and four of the 16 villages respectively. The Land Commission (COFO) was cited as active in 8 of the 16 villages, as were Conflict Management Committees (CMC).

Role of women in NRM and conflict management structures: During the RGA-P interviews, interviewees stated that all natural resources management (NRM) and conflict management decision-making bodies included men, women and young people. The Land Commission

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[1] Hand in hand: A study on insecurity and gender in MaliSIPRI, December 2019

(COFO), in particular, explicitly calls for the inclusion of a women's representative and for consultations with women. However, this is not the norm.

Furthermore, as the selection of members of all bodies is based on status, education and the level of community trust in an individual, this excludes comparatively more women. It is therefore not surprising that, with the exception of CAFO, respondents indicated that members of the main decision-making bodies were **predominantly male**. In addition, **the majority of respondents in all villages said that men make the decisions and that the influence of women is almost negligible**. The women said that if there was a problem affecting them, it was the leaders of the women's organisations who were called in. However, the women leaders said that women do not have the opportunity to complain about decisions taken without their consent.

Women's participation and influence in informal women's groups: In all 16 villages studied, women actively participate in informal women's groups, with at least one women's group per village. The majority of these are women's empowerment groups (village savings and credit associations, VSLAs), which are also networked at village and commune level. Within these spaces, women collectively seem to have some influence at community level. Led by women leaders, their tenacity and commitment to defending women's rights has paid off. In Sakoïba, for example, a woman leader declared: *"We fought to obtain the market garden that we currently own (as a collective) by canvassing the village chief and his wife despite the opposition of certain men".*

Obstacles and risks to women's participation in public decision-making: Men felt that the obstacles to women's participation were linked to a lack of information, financial and logistical resources, illiteracy and lack of understanding of the subject, lack of confidence or fear of expressing their point of view in public. Some even said that women had less intellectual capacity and less ability to manage complex situations than men. In comparison, women feel that it is men who put pressure on them not to express their views in public.

In this case, women mainly mentioned problems such as the need to obtain their husband's permission, being considered inferior and the burden of household chores as major obstacles, as well as problems such as illiteracy, non-formalisation of groups, fear and lack of mastery of public speaking. Women leaders also mentioned gender-based violence, forced early marriages and "gender conflicts" as obstacles to women's participation and leadership. Similarly, the women interviewed mentioned domestic violence, separation and divorce, curse words and the denigration of members of the husband's community and family as risks that women face when participating in public bodies and decision-making spaces.

Changes in women's access to public decision-making: The extent to which women's access to public decision-making has changed with the evolution of the crisis is a mixed picture. In CARE's 2022 RGA survey, some respondents felt that women's access had not changed, while others felt that women were no longer involved in decision-making where they once were. Interviewees said, for example, that women were afraid to participate because of the threats they faced during the communal and legislative elections. However, the women leaders interviewed for this RGA-P said that progress had been made thanks to the efforts of external actors (NGOs) in development programmes that promote equality between men and women. Here, women feel that they have enough power in these areas because they are better regarded and more involved.

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3. Promising directions for women's groups

CARE's Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) model aims to directly support informal women's groups to reflect on the barriers they face and take steps to strengthen their participation and leadership in community decision-making. We are therefore not predetermining the actions of/for the women's groups, as it is they who will decide on and implement their priority actions. However, on the basis of this RGA-P, ideas for WLiE women's groups to promote their leadership and active participation in NRM and social cohesion in Ségou are as follows:

a) Addressing barriers to women's participation in public life

Through their action plans and budgets, WLiE groups could consider actions such as:

- Organise childcare for women, offer basic literacy courses or training on crucial issues (e.g. land tenure or mediation techniques) to boost women's confidence and their ability to take part in decision-making;
- Raise women's awareness of the existence and functioning of decision-making bodies linked to NRM and conflict management;
- Consider formalising women's groups ;
- Work with respected women leaders in women's associations such as MJT (VSLA) and CAFO to set an example for WLiE groups and other women in the community;
- Engage men as allies to raise awareness of women's rights and the benefits of having women leaders active in NRM and conflict management, and to help men and boys reflect on their own perceptions of the changing roles of men and women in public and private spheres;
- Set up a mentoring system with female and male role models to strengthen communication and advocacy skills when dealing with community leaders;
- Strengthen networking between women's groups to reinforce internal solidarity systems, facilitate discussions on gender roles and norms in relation to women's leadership in the management of natural resources and peace, and promote collective positioning in this regard;
- Work with women leaders to help them strengthen their technical knowledge and their ability to express themselves in decision-making bodies dedicated to NRM and conflict management, in particular the COFO, the village chief's council and the parallel committees set up for conflict prevention and management.

b) Promoting women's direct influence on NRM and conflict management

WLiE groups could also consider taking direct action to address their needs by influencing local responses to strengthen climate resilience and social cohesion. Some actions that WLiE groups could consider include:

Natural resource management and conflict issues :

- Organise meetings with relevant power-holders to ask them to provide safe spaces for women/girls to report climate and conflict-related threats (including GBV) and access justice and mediation services;
- Lobby the relevant bodies (COFO, UN bodies, conflict management or natural resource management committees) to address the specific challenges faced by women/girls due to the effects of climate change/natural resource management,

such as: land inheritance issues, secure access to water or arable/pastoral land, government subsidies and incentives in favour of agricultural production over livestock production, and protection of forest resources from vigilante groups.

<u>Livelihoods and income generation</u> to reduce the pressure of natural resource depletion, negative coping strategies and the development of a platform for women's collective voice and leadership.

- Invest in strengthening and expanding existing savings and credit associations/ networks;
- Lobby the relevant agencies to create short-term jobs through targeted cash-for-work programmes, unconditional financial assistance and start-up grant initiatives for small businesses (e.g. women's market gardening);
- Work with VSLA women's networks at village and commune level and with CAFO to create a platform for women to engage with decision-making bodies, such as COFO or commune councils, on key issues of NRM and social cohesion.

1 INTRODUCTION

This Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) is part of the GENRE+II project in the cercles of Bla, Ségou and Barouéli in the Ségou region of Mali. The project is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO) to build capacity for climate change adaptation, gender equality and social cohesion in the Ségou region.

The project aims to achieve this objective by: (i) improving governance in natural resource management (NRM), making it more inclusive, consensual and collaborative, (ii) revitalising traditional conflict prevention and management mechanisms and strengthening community adaptation to reduce vulnerability to climatic and social shocks, and (iii) transforming negative gender norms to ensure the inclusion of women in strategic decision-making spaces linked to NRM and peace-building.

This RGA-P provides an overview of the impact of climate crisis and conflict on gender roles and relations and on the ability of women/girls to cope with, participate in and influence decision-making in response to crisis. This is based on the recognition that in emergencies there is often little information available about how decisions are made about people's access to different types of rights, entitlements and resources, how gender and other inequalities affect this, and how this has been affected by the crisis. The RGA-P is based on secondary and primary data collection undertaken in March 2023 in eight communes in the cercles of Ségou, Bla and Barouéli in the Ségou region.

Key terms

Meaningful participation of women/girls in this project means that women can actively participate in public decision-making on natural resource management and community conflict prevention/management, that they feel able to freely express their opinions and that they have a real influence on the decisions that are taken.

Peace: When people anticipate and manage conflict without violence, and engage in inclusive processes of social change that improve their quality of life. 'Positive peace' is therefore <u>not only the absence of violence</u>, but also tackling the root causes of conflict.

Social cohesion: The bonds or 'glue' that hold a society together, often through shared values, beliefs and behaviours. It manifests itself through cooperation between different groups within the community, particularly when working towards a project that will benefit society as a whole.

1.1 Objectives of the RGA-P

The main aim of this study was to assess, from different community perspectives how women participate in decision-making and what the obstacles to this participation are. More specifically, it aimed to :

1. Analyse the participation and influence of women/girls affected by the crisis in decision-making spaces, as well as the barriers to this, and risks faced;
2. Provide practical entry points to help women directly affected by the crisis to participate more meaningfully in humanitarian and community decision-making

processes, with a focus on natural resource management and social cohesion processes (for use by the project team/partners and participating women's/girls' groups);

3. Identify gaps for further evaluation and analysis to better understand women's/girls' participation and leadership in Ségou over time.

1.2 Methodology

A participatory and qualitative methodology was adopted for this study. It took place in 16 of the 48 target villages in eight communes of the GENRE+II project, on the basis of random sampling. The villages were Koni and Tomi (in the commune of Sanandi), Konpere and Pingala (Benguene), Bla and Toukoro (Bla), Soke and Kanquata (Kemeni), Touna (Touna), Fambougou and Kondogola (Cinzna), Quedenbougou and Siribougou (Konodim) and the village of Sakoiba (commune of Sakoika).

The total population of the GENRE+II Project intervention areas in Ségou is 137,672, including 67,446 men and 70,226 women.[2] The 16 intervention villages selected for the RGA-P have 63,219 inhabitants (31,029 men and 32,189 women) in 10,536 households.

Five junior consultants received training and pre-tested the tools. Two mixed research teams spent 12 days collecting data, under the supervision of CARE's MEAL advisor and the GENRE+II project manager.

Primary data collection tools

Five tools have been developed by CARE to assess women's knowledge, beliefs and activities regarding leadership and participation in community decision-making in relation to natural resource management and conflict, as well as their aspirations, needs and protection risks. These tools were used to undertake:

- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with 16 male traditional leaders (village chiefs or councillors) with responsibility/influence over resource allocation or conflict mediation within the community, and KIIs with 16 women leaders of civil society organisations (CSOs) and women's organisations (WOs).
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with 156 participants in 16 men-only FGDs and 16 women-only FGDs;
- Mapping through an Observation Grid: this tool aimed to understand the roles of women, men, boys and girls in practice, and to identify protection risks. Information was collected in the 16 villages selected.

This research has several **limitations:**

- While data collection has been disaggregated by gender, the lack of disaggregation of data by age, disability, etc. means that data analysis is limited with regard to the broader dimensions of vulnerability. This should be taken into account in follow-up evaluations.
- Limitations in assessing the changing needs and roles of women over time (before and after the crisis). To fill this gap, the report relies on secondary data sets.

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[2] According to a simulation of the increase in the number of inhabitants based on official data from the 2009 General Census of Population and Housing in Mali (RGPH 2009).

- Lack of time to undertake the research has limited the range of tools and scope available. Research will continue throughout the project and the RGA-P will be updated as necessary. The findings of the report will also be validated and corrected with the women's groups involved in Women Lead in Emergencies from the start of the activities.

1.3 Background Context

Climate and conflicts

Climatic and social shocks, compounded by security and health crises (COVID-19), are exacerbating existing vulnerabilities in the central regions of Mali in general and in Ségou in particular. The effects of climate change and human development factors have led to a scarcity of natural resources and increased tensions. The traditional complementarity between different means of subsistence (e.g. agriculture and livestock farming) has gradually been broken down. These factors have led to increased competition and conflict over scarce resources (water and pasture) between farmers, livestock breeders, fishermen and foresters. Stray animals, conflicts over grazing land, theft of livestock and a general lack of access to land are all factors in conflict.

In the past, conflicts over natural resources between herders and farmers were resolved relatively peacefully. However, in recent years, armed Islamist groups have exploited the grievances of pastoralists, leading to escalating tensions between the groups and the formation of ethnically aligned vigilante groups. These confrontations over natural resources have become deadly, as self-defence groups have filled the state vacuum by taking over security.

Ninety-five per cent of Mali's population is Muslim. While religious tolerance and acceptance used to be the norm in Mali, the imposition of Sharia law by certain militant groups in 2012/13 and the involvement of extremist Islamist groups have added a new dimension to the conflict. The largest and most dominant ethnic group, the Bambara, live in central and southern Mali. The Bambara, and to a lesser extent the Malinke, have dominated Mali's political life, and around 80% of all Malians speak Bambara (UNHCR, 2017).[3] While ethnic rivalries have not been a major feature of Mali's political scene, conflicts over natural resources can have an ethnic dimension. The Peulhs (also known as Fula or Fulani), who are predominantly herders, have, for example, been accused of complicity with armed terrorist groups, particularly in the central regions and in Mopti.

However, in the communities participating in GENRE+II, according to the **conflict assessment carried out by CARE in March 2023**, the impact of extremist or self-defence groups is limited and community conflicts rarely turn violent. However, when conflicts do arise (most often over access to land), social cohesion is eroded and the seeds of future conflict are sown.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate and conflict in Mali. As the main producers and providers of food for their families, they face the heavy burden of reduced arable land and food insecurity. With limited access to clean water, women and girls are often forced to walk long distances, and travelling to collect water and food can increase the risk of gender-based violence. A woman's age can also affect her vulnerability,

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[3] https://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce5bc.html

with younger women being more at risk of violence than older women, as are certain ethnic minority groups.

Weak governance

While climate change is a key driver of resource-related conflicts in Mali, the inability of governments to manage the decline in productive land available to farmers and herders is also a key factor. This is reflected, for example, in the lack of transparent and responsive policies and plans to address issues related to land inheritance and access to arable/pastoral land, government subsidies and incentives for agricultural production over livestock, and access to water as a driver of conflict.

While the State is much more present and active in Ségou than in most other regions in the centre and north, local governance remains weak. There are many problems with local governance, including corruption in the way leaders are elected, widespread injustice and impunity, and conflicts between political parties.

With two military coups since 2020, the people of Mali face a referendum ballot in 2023 as part of the country's return to constitutional order in the first quarter of 2024. With demonstrations and rising tensions expected, the political context continues to be turbulent for Malians.

Economic and humanitarian shocks

Conflict-related displacement, climatic shocks and food insecurity have contributed to an estimated 8.8 million people requiring humanitarian assistance in Mali in 2023, an increase of 17% compared to 2022 (UN Security Council, 2023)[4] . While humanitarian actors have requested US$751.4 million to help 5.7 million people, humanitarian access remains a serious challenge in some areas. In December 2022, there were an estimated 412,000 internally displaced people and 175,000 refugees in neighbouring countries (ibid).

In Ségou, the lack of access to banking services, goods and trade, due to the closure of borders and limitations on freedom of movement, has led to an increase in the price of basic products such as oil and soap, a reduction in household income and the emigration of men/boys for work (CARE Rapid Gender Analysis, 2022).

Statistics on gender equality

In Mali, 90% of the population is Muslim and some aspects of family life, such as inheritance, divorce and marriage, are based on a mixture of local traditions and Islamic laws and practices. According to the 2018 Mali Demographic and Health Survey (EDS Mali), an average of 17% of households in Mali are headed by women. Women and girls over the age of 15 spend 20% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 2.5% for men (UN Women Data Hub).[5] In 2018, according to UN Women, 54% of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18; 41% of women had their family planning needs met by modern methods; and 18% of women aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

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[4] Report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the situation in Mali, March 2023
[5] https://data.unwomen.org/country/mali

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In the villages studied, the main safety issues raised by the women interviewed were: domestic violence, difficulties in accessing resources, the risk of assault when travelling outside the community, early and forced marriages and sexual violence.

Gender in household decision-making

Expectations of women and their role in decision-making in Segou are clearly divided between their decision-making power in private and public spaces. According to a 2019 SIPRI study, women are seen as the pillars of the community as they are expected to raise and educate children, helping to develop young people's sense of morality. Women are also expected to advise the men in their families and are seen as key players in promoting peace.[6] CARE's 2022 rapid gender analysis indicates that men and women make joint decisions within the household about children's health and education. However, household income and assets are controlled by the head of the household who, in over 90% of households in the communities studied, is male according to CARE's baseline survey data for this project.

The role of women in NRM

In Mali, women have little say in customary practices for allocating agricultural land, their inheritance and access rights are not protected by law, and they rarely have access to mediation systems for land disputes.[7] One of the main laws restricting women's access to land is the Personal and Family Code. For example, women cannot inherit land if they have brothers, as the land is transferred to the men in the family. Girls are also often seen as temporary family members, destined to marry and leave the family to join their husband's family. Yet they are heavily involved in cultivating the land and are often affected by the consequences of land disputes.

In the distribution of roles within Malian communities, particularly in rural areas, men are mainly responsible for agricultural and livestock activities, although they are strongly supported by women, particularly for preparing the fields, ploughing and other tasks. Women are the main actors not only in market gardening and sheep farming, but also in all household chores and childcare. However, conflict and climate change are having an impact on the distribution of roles between men and women to some extent. Following armed conflict, women may be forced to take on more traditional male responsibilities, such as household security and food production, while men are involved in the conflict or migrate to find work. The consequences of climate change, such as prolonged droughts and the depletion of land and resources, may also force women to migrate to more fertile regions in search of work.

The role of women in conflict management

According to the FGD and KIIs with women for this report, traditional conflict management mechanisms are seen as generally unfavourable to women and only involve them when the

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[6] Hand in hand: A study on insecurity and gender in MaliSIPRI, December 2019

[7] Customary practices are based on local traditions and agreements. Most agricultural land is communal or village land managed by village chiefs or traditional organisations. Land is allocated to community members according to their needs and ability to use it. Land is also allocated for specific activities such as farming and livestock rearing. In rural areas, although women rarely own agricultural land, they can benefit from the use of communal or village land.

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conflict directly affects them, thus undermining their contribution and value as peace builders and active members of the wider community. However, according to a 2016 ACCORD study, some community members (mainly men) feel that women are indeed involved, "*but not like in Western societies*".[8] As outlined in a 2019 SIPRI survey, and again verified in this research, women tend to be seen as the most effective at talking about conflict and peace with other women. [9]

Nevertheless, this analysis indicates that there is scope for increasing women's participation in local dialogue, not least because they are seen as playing a key role in the education of young people and are among the most influential voices in decisions to join, leave or remain in violent groups. While weak state structures limit the progress of gender equality by reinforcing reliance on traditional mechanisms, informal peace initiatives could therefore enable women to play a more central role in turning the tide of conflict.

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[8] Women's Participation in Conflict Management and Peacebuilding in Mali, ACCORD, June 2016
[9] Hand in hand: A study on insecurity and gender in MaliSIPRI, December 2019

2. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RGA-P PRIMARY RESEARCH

2.1. Governance, decision-making and accountability structures in natural resource and conflict management

The governance and decision-making structures for NRM and conflict management within the 16 village research sites were found to be similar. The main decision-making bodies most frequently cited were:

*Image 1*Focus Group with the men of Fanbougou, Ségou district

State structures

Commission Foncière (COFO) or Land Commission: this is a formal community body set up within a village to manage conflicts relating to natural resources in Mali. The COFO is established by government decree, which sets out the composition and operating procedures of the village or fractional land commission. Chaired by the village chief, it is made up of the customary chief and representatives of the village council and professional bodies, as well as a youth and women's representative for a renewable 5-year term.

Village Chief's Council (VCC): this is a group of leaders who meet around the village chief to help him make decisions for the smooth social and economic running of the village, including the management of community conflicts. This body is formal under the law and normally exists in all villages in Mali. The number of councillors can vary from 5 to 11, depending on the number of inhabitants in the village, and they sit for a five-year term. It is possible to find female presence on the VCC. In the two of the research villages, Sakoïba and Touna, where there is at least one women councillor.

Non-state structures

Conflict Management Committees (CMC): these are committees set up within a village to prevent and manage community conflicts. These committees are generally set up as part of the activities of a project aimed at strengthening the community's resilience to conflict and violence.

Waterpoint Management Committees (WMC) : in Malian localities, these committees are set up to manage community water points such as boreholes, large-diameter wells and water fountains.

Forest Surveillance Committee: this is a committee set up by certain villages to safeguard forest resources;

Coordinations des Associations et ONG Féminines du Mali (CAFO) : This is the largest women's organisation (NGO) in Mali, established from national to village level, represented by women leaders to protect women's rights and promote the well-being of women, children and the family.

Communal Youth Committees: these are committees set up by young people at communal level, with representation in the villages, to which all young people can belong. These committees defend the rights of young people and organise themselves to support their development of their localities, in particular by helping to prevent and manage conflicts with community leaders.

Key villages :

- Commune of Barouéli: 1. Koni, 2. Tomi,
- Commune of Bla: 3. Bla, 4. Djina, 5. Kanouala, 6. Kompere, 7. Pingala, 8. Soke, 9. Toukoro,
- Commune of Ségou: 10. Touna, 11. Diasseboubou, 12. Fambougou, 13. Kondogola,
- 14. Quedenbougou, 15. Sakoiba, 16. Siribougou.

Table 1 Active NRM and conflict management bodies identified by village

Institution	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total #
Town Council	X												X				1
Commission foncière (COFO)			X	X		X			X				X	X	X	X	8
Natural Resource Management Committee				X				X									2
Water Management Committee	X		X	X			X		X							X	6
Forest Management Committee	X	X			X		X		X								5
Conflict Management Committee			X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X			8
Land Perimeter Committee									X								1
Women's Association (CAFO)										X		X	X		X		4
Youth Committee					X			X		X							3
Religious Committee for Conflict Resolution	X																1
Committee to Combat Violence Against Women						X			X	X				X			4

The commune of Bla was reported as the best represented in terms of natural resource, water and forest management committees and conflict management committees, in part because it is urban and has more active development initiatives than in other communes.

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Youth committees and the women's association (CAFO) were active in only three and four of the 16 villages respectively, with a more active presence of CAFO in Ségou. The Commission foncière (COFO) or Land Commission was cited as active in eight of the 16 villages, as were the Community Management Committees (CMC). However, as CMCs are generally set up as part of aid project activities, this raises questions of sustainability, as parallel structures may be established, without official recognition, and may be difficult to maintain after the end of a project.

2.2.   Women's participation and leadership

During the RGA-P research, interviewees generally stated that all committees or decision-making bodies related to NRM and conflict management included men, women and young people. The Land Commission (COFO), in particular, explicitly calls for the inclusion of a women's representative, and consultations are held to enable the integration and consideration of women in these bodies. However, the governance protocols for Communal/Village Councils do not specify that the gender composition of their members must be taken into account .

Communal Council bodies are elective, while positions on the COFOs and Village Councils are nominative. Nomination of members is based on status, education and the level of trust the community has in an individual, which excludes comparatively more women. It is therefore not surprising that, with the exception of CAFO, respondents indicated that members of the main decision-making bodies (COFO, Village Chief's Council, Conflict Prevention and Management Committee and Forest Monitoring Committee) are **predominantly male**. Furthermore, **the majority of interviewees in all villages stated that men make the decisions and that the influence of women is almost negligible**.

Instead, women are members of women's groups, and if a problem affects them, it is the leaders of these women's organisations who are called upon by bodies such as the Village Council. However, even then, the women leaders interviewed indicated that women do not have the opportunity to complain about decisions taken without their consent, because community practices and socio-cultural constraints require women to support and carry out men's decisions, and because they do not feel qualified to do so.

In the village of Sakoïba, the women in the FGD believed that the management of natural resources is a matter for men:

> *"It's the men who make the decisions about resource management because they are our husbands and the management of natural resources belongs to them".*

In the village of Fanbougou (cercle de Ségou), one FGD participant felt that women did not have the necessary analytical skills:

> *"It's the men, in particular the village chief, village elders, councillors and heads of family, who make the decisions in our region because they have the ability to analyse".*

Female FGD participant in Quedenbougou village:

> *"Some women leaders take part, but they have no influence over the men".*

The extent to which women's access to public decision-making has changed with the evolution of the crisis is a mixed picture. In CARE's RGA 2022 survey, some respondents felt that women's access had not changed since the crisis, while others felt that women were no longer involved in decision-making where they once were. Interviewees said that today, meetings are held with hunters, community and religious leaders and heads of family. Women are afraid to participate because of the threats they faced during communal and legislative elections, when hunters forbade them to vote for the Peulh, a minority ethnic group (CARE RGA 2022).

The women leaders interviewed as part of this RGA-P, undertaken in 2023 in all the localities visited, noted that women's access to and participation in decision-making has evolved over time in their communities. This evolution is generally attributed to the efforts of development programmes that promote gender equality.

2.3. Women's organisations and groups

In the 16 villages studied, women actively participate in women's groups. **Each village has at least one women's organisation or group.** The majority of these are informal women's empowerment groups (savings and loans) , which are also networked at village and commune level.[10] These women's organisations, or associations are run by women leaders, and are noted within their communities for their bravery, tenacity and commitment to defending women's rights. In Sakoïba, a woman leader interviewed said:

> *"We fought to obtain the market garden that we now have (as a collective) by canvassing the village chief and his wife, despite the opposition of certain men".*

The most frequently cited groups are:

- Muso Jigiya Tin (MJT): these are self-managed village savings and credit associations (VSLAs) made up of 15 to 25 community members who meet regularly to save their money in a safe space, access small loans and obtain insurance in the event of an emergency;
- MJT Village Network: is a network set up by women to coordinate the activities of the various VSLAs in a village;
- The MJT Communal Network: is a network created by women to coordinate the activities of the various MJT village networks in the commune;
- Association des Femmes du Village: is a large association of women from a village, known in Bamanankan as "Musow Ka Dugu Tôn Ba". These associations seek to bring women together to promote social cohesion, understanding and the defence of women's interest.
- Coordination of Women's Associations and NGOs of Mali (CAFO)

In addition to women-only groups, women in the villages studied also attend other informal decision-making groups or organisations (CBOs), made up of both men and women. These include: market garden management committees; school management committees (CGS); community health associations (ASACO), hygiene and sanitation committees, health and nutrition committees, water management committees and sesame cooperatives.

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[10] CARE is currently creating a database of VSLAs in Mali, which will be available soon.

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Table 2 Active women's organisations or associations by village

Key villages :

- Commune of Barouéli: 1. Koni, 2. Tomi,
- Commune of Bla: 3. Bla, 4. Djina, 5. Kanouala, 6. Kompere, 7. Pingala, 8. Soke, 9. Toukoro,
- Commune of Ségou: 10. Touna, 11. Diasseboubou, 12. Fambougou, 13. Kondogola,
- 14. Quedenbougou, 15. Sakoiba, 16. Siribougou.

Type of women's group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total #
CAFO			X			X				X		X			X	X	6
Village Women's Association	X	X				X	X		X		X	X		X	X		9
MJTs (individual VSLAs)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	16
MJT village network			X	X								X					3
Municipal network MJT	X															X	2
GBV Protection Committee			X														1
Organisation of women market gardeners and farmers			X														1
Soap manufacturing group											X						1
Shea butter processors												X					1
Women's rights organisation																X	1
Centre for young women and girls										X							1
Health Committee																X	1

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2.4. Barriers to women's participation and leadership in decision-making

Image 2 Interview with a woman leader in her garden in DIASSEBOUGOU, cercle de Ségou

In all the villages visited for the RGA-P, the men and women interviewed said that there were barriers to women's participation in decision-making in general, and in NRM and conflict resolution in particular. These obstacles are mainly linked to cultural, customary, religious and social barriers that are rooted in the community customs of the various villages. Beyond these underlying barriers, interviewees cited similar barriers in many of the villages studied, namely:

- Lack of information for women in setting up or running organisations;
- Women's lack of awareness of their role and responsibilities within the organisation;
- Women's lack of self-confidence;
- Female illiteracy;
- The low involvement of women in decision-making bodies (lack of consideration);
- The categorical opposition of certain men;
- Fear of speaking out amongst men;
- The burden of household chores;
- The social pressure that demands spousal approval for everything.

In the focus group discussions in all the municipalities, men felt that the obstacles to women's participation were related to lack of information, lack of financial and logistical means to participate, illiteracy, lack of understanding of the subject, lack of confidence or fear of expressing their point of view in public. It was noted that men are less sensitive to

gender issues, stating for example that women have less intellectual capacity and less ability to manage complex situations than men.

On the other hand, women felt that it was men who put pressure on them not to express their views publicly. The women who took part in the focus groups mainly mentioned problems such as the need to obtain permission from their husbands/heads of household, being considered inferior and the burden of household chores as major obstacles, as well as problems such as illiteracy, non-formalisation of groups, fear and lack of mastery of public speaking. Women leaders also mentioned issues of gender-based violence, forced early marriage and "gender conflict" as obstacles to women's participation and leadership. On the other hand, women feel that they have enough power in the spaces initiated by external actors (particularly NGOs) because they are considered and better involved in the spaces of dialogue and decision-making.

2.5. Risks associated with strengthening women's participation and leadership

According to the village chiefs and councillors interviewed in the villages of Siribougou, Fanbougou and Kondogola, there can be risks in supporting women's participation and leadership. These include the creation of misunderstandings within households, with some husbands not accepting their wives' involvement in community bodies, and the risk of women being exposed to dark attacks (curses) to dissuade them and other women from public participation. With the exception of the villages of Soké, Toukoro and Touna, in all the other villages visited, the women in the focus groups validated these points. In addition, other risks associated with women's public participation were raised during FGDs, such as :

- Denigration of community members and spouses' families;
- Domestic violence due to a woman's decisions;
- Risk of separation or divorce due to the woman's choice to participate;
- Risk of being intimidated by a participant in the decision-making process who does not agree with their choice.

2.6. Recommendations from women to facilitate their participation in decision-making

During the KIIs and FGDs, women were asked to give their opinions on actions likely to increase their capacity to influence public decisions. Overall, it emerged that they would like to see their ability to mobilise and speak out strengthened, but above all that they thought that men should be made more aware of the need to facilitate women's access to and participation in decision-making bodies. The points that generally emerge from the women's comments during this study are as follows:

- Strengthen their ability to mobilise and express themselves;
- Improving women's literacy ;
- Raising awareness of women's rights among men and the community;
- Establish dialogue with men ("their husbands") to facilitate their access to and participation in decision-making;
- Strengthen their economic resilience by supporting income-generating activities that will enable them to increase their financial and logistical resources;

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- Reinforce their knowledge of their rights and how to defend them;
- Raise women's awareness of the existence and functioning of decision-making bodies linked to NRM and conflict management;
- Encourage men to get more involved in household chores to reduce the burden on women.

2.7. Promising directions for women groups

This section presents entry points and promising directions for increasing women's active participation through decision-making and leadership in Ségou. The WLiE model does not include pre-determined recommendations or actions for women's groups, as it is they who will decide and implement their priority actions. The aim is therefore to provide advice on potential opportunities to promote women's leadership/active participation, based on the above assessment.

a) Combating obstacles to women's participation in public life

These barriers may include illiteracy, lack of education, lack of effective communication skills, limited access to information, women's awareness of their rights and social norms. WLiE groups could consider the following actions:

Short term :

- Organise basic literacy courses for women to boost their confidence and ability to participate, particularly for women/girls most exposed to the effects of climate conflict (such as Peulh women and female heads of household);
- Organise childcare for young women with family responsibilities so that they can attend meetings and access services more easily;
- Conduct information campaigns on services related to climate adaptation, security and justice to ensure that information is accessible to all categories of the population affected by the crisis;
- Raise women's awareness of the existence and functioning of decision-making bodies linked to NRM and conflict management;
- Provide training on key issues to boost women's confidence and ability to engage in decision-making (e.g. land tenure or mediation techniques);
- Consider formalising women's groups ;
- Work with respected women leaders in women's associations such as MJT (VSLA) and CAFO to raise awareness of women's leadership in the community and to set an example for WLiE groups and other women in the community.

In the longer term

- Identify and engage with men as allies in accepting and raising awareness of women's rights and the benefits of having women leaders active in decision-making in natural resource management and conflict management;
- Set up a mentoring system with female and male role models to strengthen communication and advocacy skills when dealing with community leaders;
- To strengthen networking between women's groups in order to consolidate internal solidarity systems and collective positive adaptation mechanisms among participants, and to initiate discussions on gender roles and norms in relation to women's leadership in the field of natural resource management and peace;

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- Work with women leaders to help them strengthen their technical knowledge and their ability to express themselves in decision-making bodies dedicated to NRM and conflict management, in particular the COFO, the village chief's council and the parallel committees set up for conflict prevention and management;
- Work with community men and boys and community leaders to help them assess their own coping strategies and perceptions of changing socio-cultural norms, gender roles and household responsibilities.

b) Promoting women's direct participation and influence on NRM and conflict management

WLiE groups could also consider taking direct action to address their needs by influencing local responses to strengthen climate resilience and social cohesion. While these actions can address their gender-specific needs and benefit the wider community, they can also demonstrate the value of women's leadership and build women's confidence in their participation and leadership roles. Actions that WLiE groups could consider include:

Tackling natural resource management and conflict issues to build climate resilience and reduce the risk of conflict and violence. This may include :

In the short term: Organise meetings with the organisations concerned to ask them to provide safe spaces for women/girls to report climate- and conflict-related threats (including gender-based violence) and to access justice and mediation services.

Longer term: Lobby relevant bodies (COFO, UN bodies, conflict management or natural resource management committees) to address specific challenges faced by women/girls due to the effects of climate change/natural resource management. These may include priorities for women/girls in the following areas

- land inheritance issues,
- secure access to water or arable/pastoral land,
- government subsidies and incentives for agricultural production compared to livestock production);
- protecting forest resources from self-defence groups.

Tackling livelihoods and income generation to reduce pressure from natural resource depletion, falling incomes and conflict-induced price rises; minimising negative coping strategies and gender-based violence through increased women's control over household resources, and creating a platform for women's collective voice and leadership more generally.

Short-term: Strengthen and extend existing savings and credit associations/networks and connect them to the market;

Longer term :

- Advocate with relevant agencies for the creation of short-term jobs through targeted cash-for-work programmes, unconditional financial assistance and start-up grant initiatives for small businesses (e.g. linked to women's market gardening). These initiatives could include interventions to facilitate women's participation, such as the provision of transport, childcare and home-based income-generating activities.
- Work with VSLA women's networks at village and commune level and establish links with CAFOs to create a platform for women's engagement in key decision-making

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bodies, such as COFOs or commune councils, on crucial issues of NRM and social cohesion.

2.8. Areas for future research

As the project progresses, further exploration will be necessary on:

- Intersectional dimensions of climate/conflict vulnerability and barriers to participation in natural resource/conflict management (e.g. by gender, age, religion/ethnicity, socio-economic group);
- The real or perceived threat of vigilante/terrorist groups in this context ;
- Capacities, strengths and weaknesses of decision-making bodies related to NRM and conflict management in the project areas;
- Opportunities to strengthen and build on existing informal and formal women's groups, particularly where mobilisation is strongest among VSLA groups.

This understanding will be built up iteratively as the project progresses and will be underpinned by the results of the conflict and climate vulnerability impact assessments, also undertaken by CARE in March 2023.

3. CONCLUSION

In Mali, weak state structures reinforce reliance on traditional NRM and social cohesion mechanisms and limit progress on gender equality by excluding women from active participation and influence in NRM and conflict management decision-making. However, men also dominate positions of power in traditional community-based NRM/conflict management mechanisms, and where women are present, their influence is negligible, due to socio-cultural barriers and protection risks.

In Mali and the Ségou region, it is in the private sphere and in informal women's groups that women hold the most power. In this area, progress has been made in terms of women's participation, thanks in particular to aid programmes focusing on gender equality. There is evidence, for example, that collective public action by women has been successful in project areas, particularly through women's economic empowerment groups such as savings and credit associations.

Through CARE's Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) model, by building women's collective knowledge, power and leadership within existing informal women's groups, creating platforms for their networking and collective voice, facilitating links with official state structures (such as the Land Commission) and involving men and boys in the process, NRM and peace initiatives could therefore enable women to play a more central role in reversing the impacts of climate change and conflict in the region.

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