



Plan
Ireland

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

Barriers to Conflict Affected
Malian Children's Education

Acknowledgements

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Who is this report for?

The aim of this research was to uncover key barriers to children's lack of educational access in light of the 2012 conflict in Mali in order to improve upon existing programming occurring in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Further, this report contributes to fill a gap in evidence for education in emergencies in West Africa.

Key audiences for this report include those working in the Sahel to respond to the continued education needs of children through the contribution of funds or the implementation of programs. These groups include: 1) Ministry of Education officials in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, 2) United Nations agencies, and 3) donors and 4) INGO/NGOs.

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Executive Summary

Since the 2012 eruption of violence in Mali, instability and myriad challenges have continued throughout the country and the region. Malians have been injured, some have lost their lives and thousands more have been displaced from their homes. It is estimated that about 300,000 people have fled from the north to the south of the country while about 200,000 have crossed the border into Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.¹

Schools and places of religious or cultural importance have been destroyed, severely damaged, or taken over by armed groups to use as a base for military operations.² This has severely impacted children's access to quality and relevant education. Estimates from the Ministry of Education in Mali and UN agencies indicate that approximately 800,000 school-going children have been negatively affected, on top of the 1.2 million children who were out of school prior to the crisis.³ A Watch list report indicates that 27% of Malian children have dropped out of school, most of whom are girls.⁴ The Education Cluster in Mali reported in March 2013 that 130 government schools were occupied, looted or destroyed by armed forces and armed groups; many additional schools in the North have closed as a result.⁵ There is further evidence that armed groups are using schools to base their operations and train new recruits.⁶ This upsurge in violence has undermined Mali's progress to reaching its Millennium Development Goals in Education.

While efforts are being made by the Ministries of Education in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to support these out of school children access education, there have been numerous challenges. In the Niger refugee camps, humanitarian and education agencies have only been able to enroll a little over 4,000 children in learning activities out of the estimated 18,000 school-aged children.⁷ In the Burkina Faso refugee camps, there are similar results with only about 4,900 out of 23,200 children being reached.⁸

The continuing challenge supporting conflict-affected children's learning is the impetus for this investigation. ***The research aimed to identify and explore the myriad barriers to conflict-affected children's educational access in Mali and in the refugee camps in Niger and Burkina Faso.***

While all conflict-affected and displaced children face difficulties in accessing education, the most vulnerable include: adolescents and in particular adolescent girls and girl mothers, children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and nomadic communities.

There are 9 clear barriers to children's access to education in the conflict-affected areas; while explored individually here, they are inter-connected and reinforce each other, each exacerbating the other. They include: 1) poverty; 2) ethnic identity; 3) perceptions on education's value; 4) discrimination against girls; 5) insecurity; 6) physical distance; 7) challenges for adolescents; 8) poor learning environment; and 9) insufficient teachers.

The main conclusion of this research is that many barriers existed prior to the conflict, but were aggravated by it; other barriers have emerged as a result of the fighting and related insecurity.

Poverty, a poor learning environment, and insufficient teachers have been endemic challenges to children's enrollment in schools. The conflict has worsened this as armed groups have offered financial incentives for those who join or support them, thereby pulling poor individuals and families away from education. This has particularly affected adolescents' enrollment as some have joined armed groups for those resources. Armed groups have pillaged, damaged, destroyed and occupied schools, thereby further deteriorating students' learning environment. Teachers have been injured, died or been displaced, and face psychosocial distress, preventing them from teaching or doing so in a manner most relevant for displaced children and particularly the most vulnerable mentioned previously.

There has been widespread discrimination along ethnic and religious lines against the Tuareg and Arab groups in the North. Since Mali's independence from France in 1960, the ethnic groups living in the more populous South, including the Bambaras, have held the majority of power in government. Over the years, there have been few Tuaregs holding positions of power. Further, development of the country and outside aid has focused on the South rather than equally in all parts of the country, thereby fomenting discontent among the Tuaregs, resulting in an ethnic based rebellion. Around the same time, Al-Qaeda-linked conservative Islamic groups infiltrated Mali and used the Tuareg dissatisfaction and uprising to assert their influence and push for Sharia law. This all has major implications for education, and particularly girls' education. The armed groups have begun to force a conservative form of Islam that does not allow girls to walk alone or sit with boys in the classroom.

Discrimination against girls, due to their traditional roles in society, early forced marriage and the radicalization of Islam, has deterred them from going to school. Adolescents and girl mothers have been most affected. Females are expected to get married young, have families and take care of them. Most do not have time to consider studying because of household responsibilities and often do not have access to flexible education opportunities that could allow them to learn while fulfilling their expected roles. Together with the teachings of the armed groups' ideologies, there has been a noticeable shift in the perception on the value of education among parents.

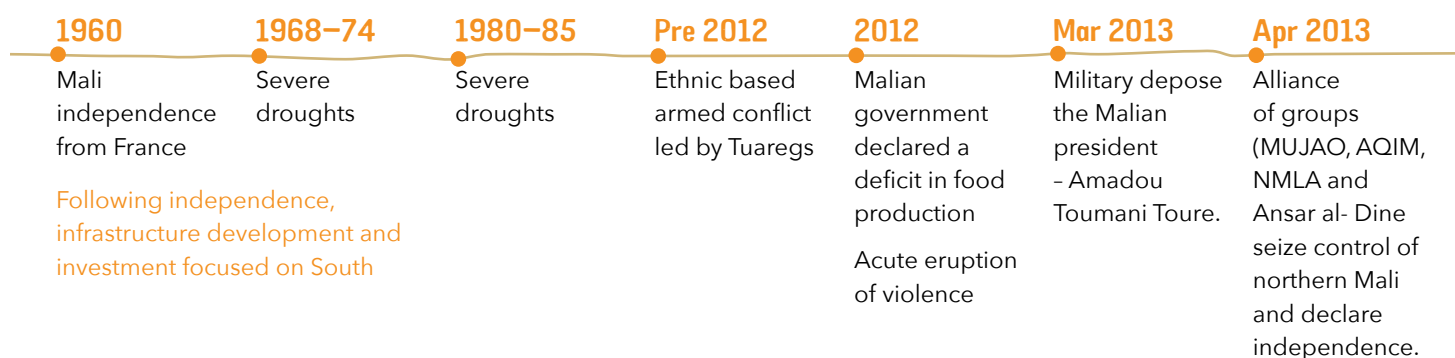
Many Malian families believe that that education is not useful for certain children, including adolescent girls, those with disabilities and those who are nomadic. The field research found that during the emergency, parents saw less utility in educating these most vulnerable groups as they faced additional pull factors away from school and did not see sufficient relevant learning opportunities.

Lastly, the fighting has led to greater insecurity in the region. Parents in this study expressed greater reluctance to send their children, especially younger children and girls, to school. There have been reports of sexual violence, rape, and kidnappings that parents want to protect their children from.

While there are many challenges to children's educational access, there are solutions as well. The report concludes with practical ways to overcome the barriers that children face. **The key recommendation, which applies to all recommendations, is that education programming has to be revised using a conflict-sensitive approach which would consider the power and conflict dynamics of this crisis.**



Timeline



375,000-475,000

UNHCR and OCHA estimated Malians displaced

300,000 

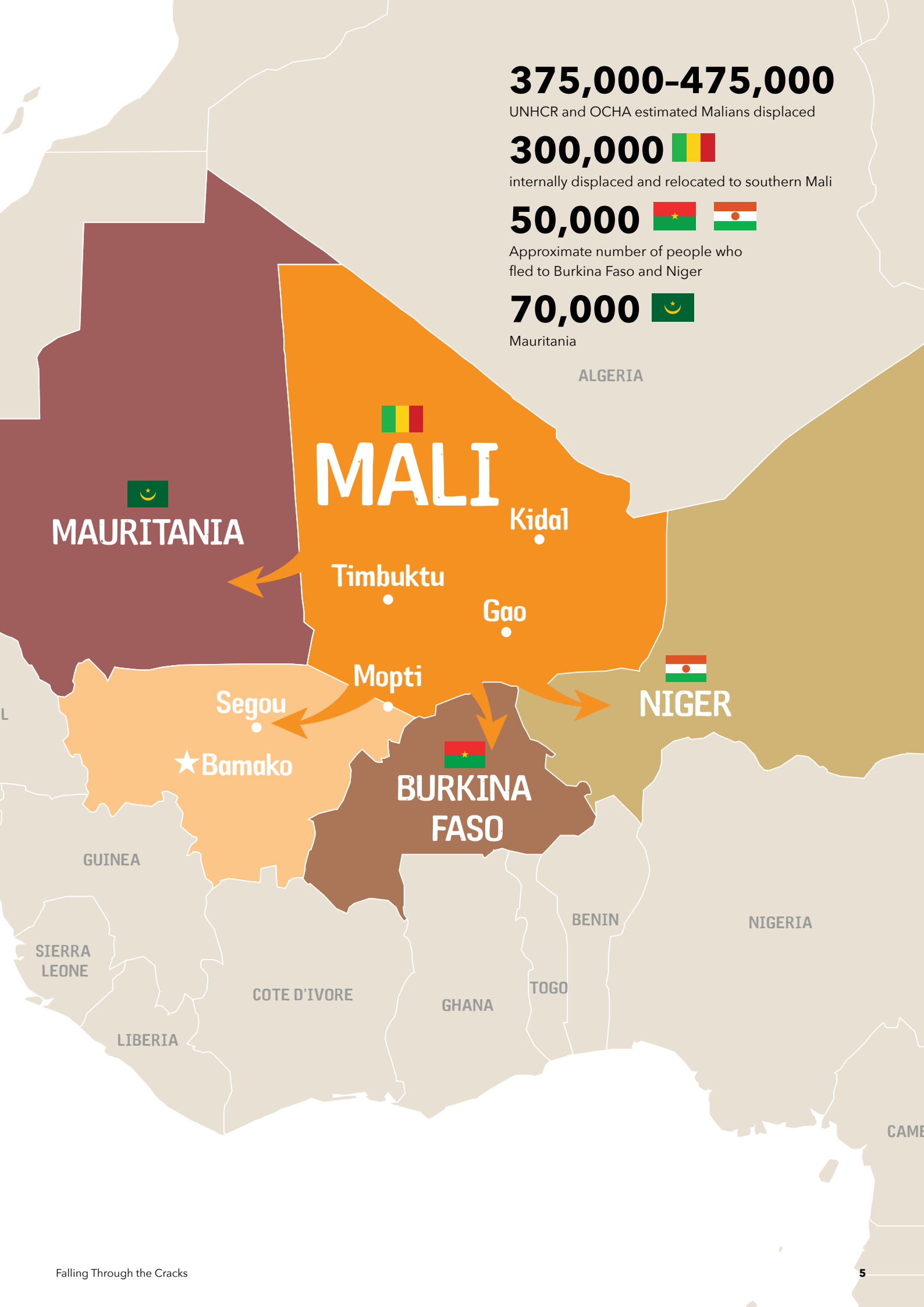
internally displaced and relocated to southern Mali

50,000  

Approximate number of people who
fled to Burkina Faso and Niger

70,000 

Mauritania





Introduction

While there has been chronic tension among various ethnic groups in Mali since the country's independence from France in 1960, an acute eruption of violence occurred in 2012. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (NMLA) began its insurgency by attacking towns in northern Mali, which has caused a great deal of instability throughout the country and region. Neighbors Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania have been affected as Malians have crossed into their borders.

During the fighting, many people were injured or died; schools and places of religious and cultural importance were destroyed or severely damaged along with the infrastructure necessary to provide basic services.⁹ Since the escalation of the conflict in the North, Mali's progress in advancing educational access – which had been significant – was halted and even reversed. Human Rights Watch found evidence of grave human rights violations including executions, floggings, amputations, and recruitment of children as young as 11–12 years to join the armed groups.¹⁰ The Watch list on Children in Armed Conflict documented numerous cases of rape, sexual exploitation and cases of forced early marriage.¹¹ Families from particular ethnic groups were targeted along with families with inter-ethnic marriages.¹²

As a result, thousands left their homes and went to southern Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso in search of a safe haven.¹³ Estimates of those displaced vary based on when data was collected. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and OCHA estimated that between 375,000 and 475,000 Malians have been displaced, about 300,000 of which have been internally displaced and relocated to southern Mali near the capital Bamako.¹⁴ Approximately 50,000 people fled to Burkina Faso and Niger and about 70,000 to Mauritania.¹⁵

'I rescued the textbooks before they raided my school.' A teacher from Gao (Mali) speaks out

UNESCO, 2013

Mali's Independence and Background

Most of the NMLA's members come from the Tuareg ethnic group which is the majority ethnic group in the sparsely populated northern region of the country, but makes up only 10% of the overall Malian population.¹⁶ Tuaregs have faced discrimination since Mali's independence; the first post independent Malian government did not include representation from the Tuareg ethnic group at the senior level.¹⁷ To this day, the majority of the Malian government consists of people from the Bambara ethnic group.¹⁸ Infrastructure development and investment up until the 1990s has focused on the southern part of the country where land is more fertile and where there are more economic options. This favoritism toward the southern parts of the country has continued thereby increasing discontent among those living in northern Mali.¹⁹ The southern part of the country, near and around the capital Bamako has 80% of the overall population, but very few Tuaregs thereby creating differences along ethnic lines. Severe droughts between 1968–1974 and 1980–1985 further deepened the Tuareg's perception of discrimination as they felt more aid went to the southern parts of the country.²⁰ Therefore, ethnic-based armed movements had tried three times, prior to 2012, to incite a rebellion in hopes of greater autonomy. Some Tuareg groups advocate for an independent state which includes northern Mali, northern Niger and southern Algeria.

A few months before the eruption of the most recent spate of violence, the Malian government declared a deficit in food production in many parts of the country, caused by lack of sufficient rainfall and rising food prices.²¹ The tensions that existed among the various ethnic groups were exacerbated as people were competing over fewer resources to feed their families and earn a living. This contributed to the escalation of the Tuareg-led rebellion in northern Mali and in turn the NMLA's attacks further deteriorated the basic living conditions of civilians in this part of the country.²²

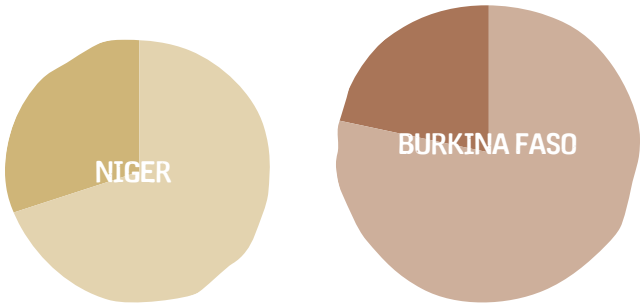
While the NMLA instigated the most recent eruption of violence, other armed groups took advantage of the instability it caused with the Malian central government and began fighting as well. In an attempt to strengthen their power and ability to win the rebellion, the NMLA merged with another armed group, the Ansar al-Dine, whose name stands for 'Defenders of Islam' in Arabic.²³ Ansar al-Dine advocated for the imposition of Shariah law and to turn Mali into a theocracy.²⁴ In March of 2013, the military deposed the Malian president – Amadou Toumani Toure. The other armed groups, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), taking advantage of the instability caused by the military coup, joined forces with NMLA and Ansar al-Dine, and in April 2013 the alliance of groups seized control of northern Mali and declared independence.²⁵

Impact of the Conflict on Education

The ongoing conflict has severely affected the already fragile education system and countered the progress that Mali had made over recent years. According UNICEF, between 2008–2012, just net enrollment of boys in school was 71.6% (with 60.2% attendance) while net enrollment of girls was 62.6% (with 54.6% enrollment).²⁶ Net primary school enrollment (including boys and girls) in 2011 was 71%, net enrollment in secondary school (including boys and girls) was 34% and gross tertiary school enrollment (for boys and girls) was 7%.²⁷ The overall adult literacy rate in Mali between 2008–2012 was 33.4%.²⁸ Literacy rates were increasing and during this same period, for male youth, the literacy rate was 56%. However, for female youth, the literacy rate was closer to the overall adult literacy rate at 38.8%.²⁹ In 2009, Mali had shown significant progress and met its Millennium Development Goal Target 2 on educational access, six years early.³⁰

However, the outbreak of conflict has severely disrupted this progress. An estimated 800,000 school-aged children were affected by ensuing complex emergency, in addition to 1.2 million children who were out of school prior to the crisis.³¹ The disruption of education has been due to school closures and their occupation, destruction and pillaging by armed groups.³² Some education personnel closed schools for fear of being attacked by armed groups; others were found to be occupied and used by them as locations to base their operations and to train new recruits.³³ The Education Cluster in Mali reported in March 2013 that 130 government schools were occupied, looted or destroyed by armed forces.³⁴ Further, the Education Cluster also reported that landmines and unexploded ordnances were located in and around educational spaces in northern Mali, placing thousands of children at risk of injury or death.³⁵ Amnesty International found that schools in the North were more vulnerable to attack if they used only French as the language of instruction – rather than including Arabic – and if they had both boys and girls in the same classrooms.³⁶ It is estimated that 80% of education personnel fled the region leaving few remaining teachers.³⁷ Amnesty International also found recruitment of children occurring in some schools, particularly the madrassas, which teach in Arabic and include study of the Koran³⁸

Almost half of the children in all three countries never enter school and there has been a trend of drop-outs since the beginning of the crisis for those refugee children.³⁹ The Education Cluster in Mali has estimated that 80% of Malian refugee children of primary school going age do not have access to education while 27% of those who did have access dropped out because of the war.⁴⁰ In Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, an average of 32.1% of children of primary school age are out of school.⁴¹ The chart below provides more details on the number of Malian refugee children accessing education showing 77% of children in Niger and 79% in Burkina Faso not in school.



	Niger	Burkina Faso
Total estimated school-aged children	17,675	23,149
Number of children receiving education services	4,068	4,878
Total % gap	77%	79%

Source: Data from UNICEF (2014), Niger Humanitarian Situation Report and UNICEF (2013), Burkina Faso Mid-Year Humanitarian Situation Report

Part of this is due to insufficient funding for education in emergencies, but a major part is due to the myriad barriers children face in accessing education. This has revealed that there is a need to further investigate those barriers which are keeping children – both IDPs and refugees in Mali and Burkina Faso – out of the schools which have been set up. This would enable relief agencies to strengthen their programming, addressing all the relevant dynamics.

This report aims to contribute to this need. **The key question is: What are the various barriers to conflict-affected Malian children’s education?**

The research investigated these barriers in northern Mali, but also in IDP and refugee camps through primary and secondary research. While there are Malian refugees in Mauritania as well, the scope of this research does not cover this country. The report examines these key barriers and poses some recommended actions to increase all conflict affected children’s access to educational opportunities.

The main conclusions from the research are that some barriers were present in Mali prior to the conflict, but the recent violence has further exacerbated them. The fighting and resulting insecurity has also brought up additional barriers to children’s educational access.

‘All children have the right to primary education, which should be free...’

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29

The right to education in a situation of armed conflict is further protected under International Humanitarian Law by the Fourth Geneva Convention, and Protocols I and II. Primary education for refugees is protected by the Refugee Convention of 1951.



II Research Methodology

In order to answer the key research questions about conflict-affected Malian children's barriers to educational access, the research team used qualitative methods and a desk review of relevant research and reports. Primary data was collected from affected adults, adolescents and youth and children, teachers, parents using focus group discussions (FGD). Key informant Interviews (KII) with staff from the Ministry of Education, United Nations, INGOs, and NGOs provided further primary research data. Three countries were targeted in this research and four locations. In Mali, data was collected in Koira Beiry where many internally displaced persons (IDPs) still live. At the time of the data collection, IDP camps had already closed down. In Burkina Faso, data was collected from Mentao refugee camp and in Niger, data was collected from Mangaize and Tabareybarey refugee camps.

A total of 11 FGDs were conducted, reaching a total of 112 people. In Burkina Faso, four FGD were conducted: one with adults, one with adolescent females, one with adolescent males, and one with children. Each of the youth focus groups included 10 participants; the adult focus group included 12 participants, in order to allow for each ethnic group to feel adequately represented. This allowed for a total of 42 participants in Mentao camp in Burkina Faso.

In Niger, four focus group discussions were conducted in two camps, Mangaize and Tabareybarey: one female adolescent discussion group and one adult discussion group in Mangaize refugee camp; one female adolescent discussion group and one male adolescent discussion group in Tabareybarey refugee camp. Each of these focus groups included 10 participants, reaching a total of 40 participants in Niger. In Mali, three focus group discussions were conducted in one village, Koira Beiry, which had been impacted by the conflict in the north: one each with adolescent males and females and one with adults. Each of these group discussions included 10 participants, for a total of 30.

The number of key informant interviews varies from country to country as well, based on availability of education authorities in the country. In total, 11 Key Informant Interviews were conducted in the three countries. These key informants included Ministry of Education staff or agencies working on education for Malian children including UNHCR, UNICEF and Plan International.

Totaling the number of participants in the FGDs and KII, this research collected primary data from 123 individuals.

Prior to conducting the FGDs and KIIs, ethics approval was sought and obtained. All participants were explained their rights regarding the research and each participant gave informed consent either verbally or in writing.



Limitations

There were four key limitations to this research. These include general time available to collect data for the project, the security situation in the three countries, availability of targeted research participants and language.

Due to the time-bound nature of the work, the research team was limited to one week in each country to conduct research, which limited the number of people the research team could interview. Actual time limits in terms of presence in the camp were a limitation as well; in each refugee camp, the research team was given a limited amount of time due to security constraints. This limited the number of focus group discussions and interviews that could be conducted on the ground. Gaps in primary research data were then filled through secondary data, if this was available.

Security was another major limitation. The most severe effects of the conflict have been in northern Mali, from which many people fled, but due to security reasons, these areas were not accessible. So, the data collection in Mali was confined to areas where Plan International has a presence and which were deemed safe for travel. Further, the team included a non-resident researcher from Europe, so certain guidelines and restrictions had to be followed. Insecurity also limited the amount of time researchers could spend collecting data in each location. In Niger, in particular, the security requirements meant that the staff members had to have a military escort into the field. The local conflict dynamics further made it difficult to discuss the dynamics of the conflict and other sensitive issues such as the recruitment of children into armed forces and sexual violence/rape in depth. For these areas, secondary data had to be used to fill in informational gaps.

Obtaining informed consent of all participants posed another limitation to the study and determined who could participate, particularly for children and adolescents. For minors, we required the presence of parents and their signatures so they could clearly convey that they understood the purpose of the study, that their children's participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The availability of children and their parents often determined who could participate in the study. For example, in Burkina Faso, the adolescent focus group discussions coincided with market day, which meant that many parents were not available to sign consent forms for their children. In other cases when parents were not present, but adolescents wanted to participate in the study, we allowed a teacher to sign as a consenting adult for these young people.

Language and translation were another limitation of the research. All of the research tools were translated into French, but many participants only spoke local languages, which no one in the research team spoke. Therefore, translators from the community were necessary in each FGD. While efforts were made to find female translators for the FGDs, the research team was unsuccessful. However, there were females present from the research team. In several of the focus groups in Burkina Faso, the translator was the school teacher, which is a limitation in terms of how honest the participants were willing or able to be with their responses. In Mali, the translator was the mayor of the village so his role in the community may have affected the candidness of the participants. Finally, all interviews and data, once translated during the conversation into French, had to be compiled and put into English for this report.



A young girl with dark skin and a pink headband is looking over a dark, textured sign. The sign has the Roman numeral 'III' and the text 'BARRIERS TO ACCESSING EDUCATION' in white. She is wearing a colorful patterned garment. The background is blurred, showing other people in a similar setting.

III

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING EDUCATION

III

Barriers to Accessing Education

The research found that while a small percentage of children in the refugee camps in Niger and Burkina Faso had opportunities to learn, and some for the first time, the majority of conflict-affected school-aged children in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso were not accessing any education. The main groups not participating at all or in low numbers include adolescent boys and girls (particularly adolescent girls who were pregnant or already mothers), nomadic children, those from certain ethnic groups, and children with disabilities. Some of these barriers were present before the eruption of fighting, but were further exacerbated by it while others are new difficulties that arose due to the conflict.

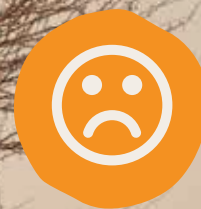
Through primary and secondary data collection the research team identified 9 barriers to conflict-affected children's educational access, with each worsened or brought on by the violence.

These barriers include:

- 1) Poverty 
- 2) Ethnic identity 
- 3) Perceptions of education's value 
- 4) Discrimination against girls 
- 5) Security 
- 6) Physical distance 
- 7) Challenges for adolescents 
- 8) Poor learning environments 
- 9) Insufficient teachers 

While each of these factors is analyzed separately, they are linked and reinforcing, creating an environment which blocks vulnerable children's access to education. Programmatic and policy responses need to address the entire system of barriers in order to have discernible effects. Many of the most vulnerable conflict affected children not accessing education face a number of these barriers.

1



POVERTY

Poverty, or even lack of expendable income, is a major barrier to children's access to education. Statistics from 2007-2011 indicate that 50.4% of Malians were below the international poverty line of earning US \$1.25/day.⁴² With 70-80% of the Malian population living in rural areas and dependent on agriculture, focus group discussions indicated that children's labor is considered by many families to be more valuable than sending their children to schools where they have to pay school fees, purchase learning materials and forgo additional income.⁴³ Focus groups further mentioned that the opportunity cost for sending girls to schools is even higher as they have more household responsibilities than boys, resulting in wide gender disparities in educational enrollment.⁴⁴

Therefore, poverty was already a major impediment to children's educational access. The study revealed, through focus group discussions and key informant interviews in all three countries, that the conflict further exacerbated people's situations and plunged many already struggling families into deeper poverty, thereby making it even harder to access education. Study participants said that many displaced Malian families lost animals and land they used to earn a living due to the armed conflict in the North. The situation in internally displaced camps in Mali and refugee camps in Niger and Burkina Faso made it difficult for families to earn a living as aid support did not provide land they could use for agriculture or animals for grazing.

Ministry of Education and United Nations staff from key informant interviews in Burkina Faso indicated that the majority of out-of-school children were from the most impoverished families. The adult focus group in Burkina Faso's Mentao camp indicated that poverty was more likely to keep a child from school attendance than any other barrier and adults from FGDs in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali said that many parents cannot afford the supplies such as backpacks, pens, pencils, notebooks, uniforms necessary to for school attendance.

The Rand Corporation's (2013) research found that the northern region's extreme poverty and its reliance in recent years on external sources of resources and money has contributed to driving individuals to join whichever armed group offers the best economic options. Individuals from poor families have also switched from one armed group to another based on the benefits provided. There is evidence that the Ansar al-Dine and MUJAO armed groups used their wealth to recruit men into their ranks, often providing extensive financial support to recruits' families.⁴⁵ These factors have further pulled children away from education for more lucrative options.

In the refugee and IDP camps, aid agencies and the United Nations have taken steps to help families overcome this barrier by providing school supplies and uniforms, paying teachers' salaries so families would not have additional expenses in order to send their children to school. However, despite this, many families needed more incentives to send their children to school.

2

ETHNIC IDENTITY



Ethnic identity is another major barrier to conflict affected children's access to education according to data from this research. This barrier was present before the conflict erupted in 2012, but it has deepened the divisions and tensions, which has affected access to learning.⁴⁶

There are at least 6 major ethnic groups in Mali and while they share similar historic, cultural and religious traditions, they do have separate identities. Each ethnic group has traditionally been connected to a specific occupation such as farming, fishing, herding animals etc... The main groups in Mali include the Mande (50% including sub-groups of Bambara, Malinke, Soninke). The Fulani (Peul 17%), Voltaic (12%), Songhai (6%), Tuareg and Arab (10%) and others (5%) make up the rest of the various ethnic groups of Mali.⁴⁷ The two nomadic groups – the Tuaregs and Arabs – particularly see themselves as distinct from the rest of the society.

The Tuarag and Arab tribes consider themselves 'white,' while groups in the South such as the Bambara, Songhays and Peuls consider themselves 'black'. The identification of being 'white' or 'black' is based more on ethnic connections with the greater Arab world than on skin color.⁴⁸ For centuries, the Tuareg and Arab groups have perceived themselves to be dominant over others in the middle and southern parts of Mali and therefore being entitled to special treatment. However, after Mali's independence from France in 1960, they have faced discrimination from the groups in the South, having little political power in Bamako. Further, the North has generally received less development aid than the South.

In Niger's Mangaize refugee camp, the ethnic makeup includes Tuaregs (40%), Arabs (20%), Peuls/Bambaras (10%) and Djerma/Haoussa (30%). In Burkina Faso's refugee camps, the majority come from the Tuareg and Arab ethnic groups.⁴⁹ As the IDPs in Mali are scattered throughout the South, some who were in IDP camps and others in cities, there is no clear information on their ethnic make-up.

The study revealed that the Arabs and the Tuaregs are believed by other groups in the IDP and refugee camps to receive special treatment compared to members of other ethnic groups. This reaches the institutional level whereby committee leaders belong to a specific ethnic group and very little importance is given to inclusive representation. In social gatherings, sharing takes place selectively and more important information is shared selectively and in a language unknown to members of other ethnic groups' according to one key Informant.

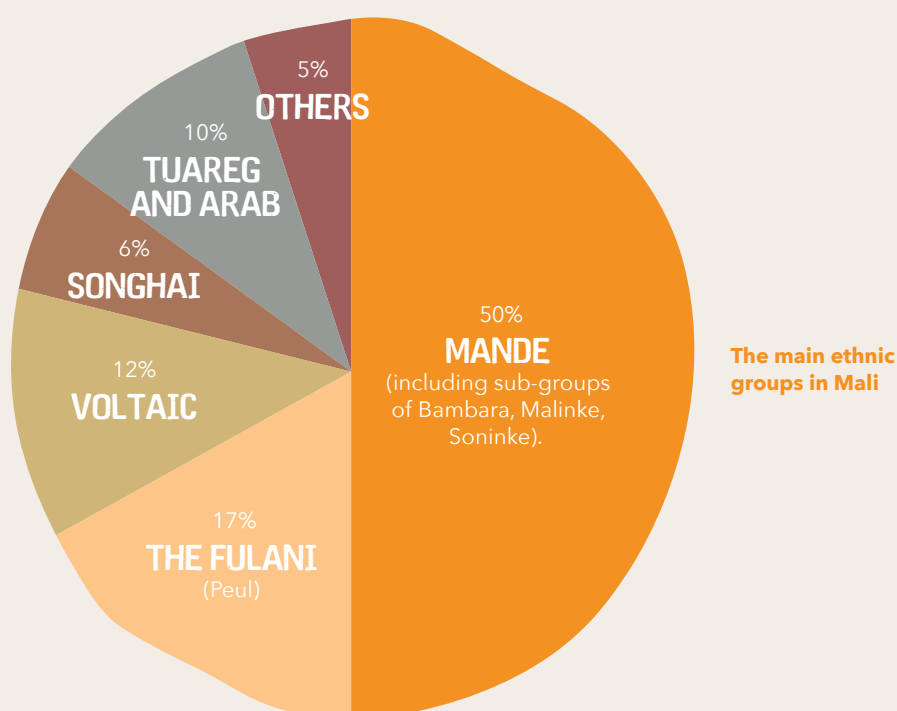
Several key informant interviews in Burkina Faso indicated that the Bellas, a sub-group and lower caste in the Tuareg ethnic group are 'disadvantaged' compared to the others in the refugee camp. While the Bellas are part of the Tuareg ethnic group, they are seen as different from those of higher castes who are believed to have received special treatment in the camps.⁵⁰ The Bellas are darker skinned than higher castes in the Tuareg ethnic group and have traditionally been treated as slaves, thereby not attending school.⁵¹ With all Tuareg castes displaced and having few resources, discrimination has increased. Higher caste Tuaregs are in the same situation as lower caste Bellas, which was not the case prior to their displacement.

Moreover, in the situation of the Bella, research does not indicate that they were specifically blocked from accessing education, but they faced discrimination when they tried to attend schools. In Mentao camp in Burkina Faso, key informants indicated that the disadvantaged groups participated in educational activities, which differs from the situation in Mali. According to one key informant, some Bellas attend school in the camp where they did not in Mali, but there are still many Bella children who do not attend school at all. The same informant explained that these children continue to not attend school because they felt it was a waste of time. They said that once they go back to Mali, they will not be able to continue their education so why attend school for a short period of time in a refugee camp.

While the issue of discrimination did not emerge in the focus groups, the marginalization based on ethnicity was at work and observable. Focus group participants who were identified as being from the Bellas sat alone, separate from the participants of other groups who bunched in and shared benches. The research team observed that those participants who sat alone, were darker skinned and rarely spoke or participated even when asked by the research team if they had anything to add to the discussion.

The existing ethnic divisions have been exacerbated and eroded trust because of the armed conflict, food shortages, and shifts in the economic environment.⁵² In recent years, traditional occupations of ethnic groups have changed as they have begun seeking different sources of income.⁵³ Further, with the strengthening of power and influence among the armed groups in Northern Mali, including those which have strong ties with extremist Islamic groups outside of the country, the situation among various ethnic groups has become worse. Human Rights Watch found both Tuareg dominated armed groups and the government armed forces (whose include the Bambara and other groups from the South) abused civilians from Kidal in North Mali due to their ethnicity.⁵⁴ Evidence points to armed forces and groups using racial slurs, beating people and threatening to kill them because of their ethnic group and skin color even if they have no involvement in the conflict. The Ansar al-Dine, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) all have ties with extremist groups in Algeria, Al Qaeda in the Middle East and Libya. They have used the instability and rising discontent among Tuareg and other Malian groups in the North to highlight ethnic differences and deepen discrimination.⁵⁵

The Malian school curriculum currently does not specifically promote an understanding of ethnic groups, tolerance and peace. Efforts could be made to integrate this into core subjects with technical support from UNESCO, UNICEF and INGOs/NGOs. Further, broader peace building initiatives could be supported. While they may not directly impact education, they would address underlying root causes of the ethnic based discrimination that does affect children's educational access.



3



PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION'S VALUE

Perceptions of education's value emerged as another key barrier to many children's access to learning. Focus groups revealed the perception that some children benefit more from education than others, thereby impacting who goes to school. The additional economic pressures heightened through the conflict and the promotion of a conservative interpretation of Islam, have further decreased girls', children with disabilities' and nomadic children's ability to participate in learning opportunities. Having been influenced by the views of armed groups and pressured by their own economic constraints, parents, and even children themselves, have created the barriers to educational access.

Some key informants and focus groups indicated that parents can be children's first barrier to accessing learning as they may not have gone to school and so have not seen the benefits of it. The adult focus groups in Burkina Faso and Niger indicated that many adults in the camps never attended school. While some of the adult participants wanted their children to attend school in the camps, they all said that many other parents do not realize the benefits of education, especially for the most vulnerable groups: adolescent girls, children with disabilities and nomadic children.

Focus groups also revealed that parents do not understand the schooling process and this affects children's attendance and success. The adult focus groups in Burkina Faso and Niger noted several times that many parents lack experience with the formal school system, placing them at a disadvantage when it comes to supporting their children who are participating. Parents who have never been formally educated do not understand what their children need in terms of support. In Burkina Faso's adult focus group, the parents explained that they had never been to school, so once their children were enrolled, they believed that that was the end of their responsibility. They were not aware of additional steps that would support their students' attendance and academic success. In this case, offering awareness campaigns for the parents could enable them to better support their school-going children.

Financial reasons are huge pull factors which keep children out of school. Parents in focus groups in all three countries explained the necessity of keeping their children at home because they could be of more use supporting household work or doing some income generating activities.



'...the best school that is reserved for them is the kitchen...'

Quote from a Tuareg parent in Burkina Faso

Plan, in its study focused on children with disabilities, found that some parents believed their special needs child would not succeed in education and so therefore investment in them was not the necessary.⁵⁶ Parents' financial constraints often force them to choose which of their children they can pay to attend school; those with disabilities and girls are usually the ones that are not sent to school in favor of boys. During the conflict, focus groups of parents mentioned that their finances had become tighter and so this further reduced girls and those with special needs' chances of being sent to school. Parents of children with disabilities are further influenced by societal reactions and may fear stigma by sending their disabled child to school or may want to shield him or her from adult or peer discrimination. Sometimes, children with disabilities themselves do not want to go to school because of prejudice they face from others.⁵⁷

Young people themselves present a barrier to attendance as well. Focus groups with adolescents in Mali and Niger highlighted that some teenagers simply do not want to attend school. Reasons for this vary from being discouraged by a teacher to simple boredom in class as the learning content did not feel relevant for their lives. This was evidenced by the adolescent's desire for educational games and other activities that would motivate them to come to school. Many focus groups, both adolescents and adults, indicated that such educational activities would be a major incentive to attend school.

In Burkina Faso, however, interviews and the adult focus group led to the conclusion that some of the children in the camp do not attend school because of the apparent futility. They felt that the situation in the camp is not the reality of the situation in Mali. While they may have access to education in the refugee camps for a short period of time, they believed they would not have access when they return to Mali so why attend for a short period of time. Nomadic communities may also perceive education as undermining social learning and their way of life.⁵⁸ The current government curriculum does not include topics such as environmental education, farming and herding practices, which might make education more relevant particularly for nomadic children's needs.

The rise in power of radical Islamic armed groups has further pressured families away from education, especially for girls. This is more prevalent in northern Mali where armed groups do not support girls' education, which will be further explained in the next section focused on discrimination against girls.⁵⁹ This is evident from the spate of attacks against French-language schools and those with mixed gender classrooms.

Back to School campaigns are often used in emergency contexts to raise awareness about the importance of education and the learning opportunities available. Mali and UNICEF conducted a Back to School campaign in Mali and in the Niger and Burkina Faso refugee camps. Unfortunately, this was not enough to bring a majority of displaced children into schools. Activities that promote children's enrollment into schools could be continued over a longer period of time or on a regular basis. Various methods including street theater, music and community meetings could further strengthen the effort.

4

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GIRLS



Discrimination against girls, which stems from cultural and religious beliefs about their role in society, is another major barrier to their enrollment in schools and other educational opportunities among those displaced. Prior to the conflict, girls were already less represented in the education system due to traditional household and child care responsibilities. Girls' net school enrollment considering the whole country was 62.6% with 54.6% attendance while boys' net enrollment was 71.6% with 60.2% attendance.⁶⁰ The image on the opposite page illustrates the differences in overall gross education enrollment in Bamako, the capital, vs. cities in the north, Tombouctou, Kidal and Gao. It shows that Bamako has a higher gross enrollment rates overall, but it also shows that girls in all of these locations have a lower gross enrollment rate.

The conflict has had detrimental effects on girls' education. While there is not specific data available yet from the Malian Ministry of Education on enrollment rates of girls and boys in the most conflict affected locations after the 2012 eruption of violence, the Education Cluster in Mali and other sources indicate a sharp decrease in educational access, especially for girls. A representative from the Ministry of Education in Mali explained that girls were more affected by the crisis in 2012 than boys, which impacted their attendance at school.

The problems identified in most refugee situations apply with Malian IDPs and refugees. They can be described within three levels:

- At the access level: Girls/women's role has been defined by the community as 'household managers' which triggers lack of social support on girls' education resulting in low enrolment. However there are other issues such as boys being able to lodge in a nearby town to attend a class not found in the camps, while a girl cannot. This is mostly due to cultural beliefs that girls cannot travel alone.
- At retention level (in the school): The student-to-student relationship at school could include stigma and discrimination against girls. The school itself may not be girl friendly in that they do not have separate private toilets for girls. This was mentioned in many focus groups and key informant interviews. Without sufficient female teachers, girls may not feel encouraged in class.
- At completion level: The number of girls and other marginalized groups who successfully finish a school year is very low compared to those enrolled according to education data from the camps.⁶¹

A main reason for girls' - particularly adolescents and mothers - lower participation rates than boys stems from traditional roles they play in society and a practice of early forced marriage.

Traditional Roles and Early Forced Marriage

In Niger and Burkina Faso refugee camps, a large majority of girls who participated in the research stated that they never went to school in Mali. They said that the role of girls is limited to household level whereas that of boys is animal grazing and carrying out petty trade. These roles do not require much education thereby limiting the degree of motivation to go to school.

For example, the research revealed that in many cases, girls' role in their communities and societies influences their possibilities for education. Across the board, discussions and interviews indicated that girls' role is that of domestic work that is, taking care of the home and children. The exact obligations varies from group to group, but generally includes cooking, cleaning the home, fetching water, and caring for younger children. One informant said that the role of daughters in their households is to act as a second mother. These tasks are considered to be more important, more useful, than attending school and take precedence over education.

The research found that boys also struggle with the balance between family obligations and school. Some boys in the various adolescent boy focus groups explained that they stay at home in order to fulfill their familial responsibilities such as caring for animals. According to focus groups in Mali, this obligation increases when the father reaches a certain age and is no longer able to adequately care for the livestock. However, the evidence suggests that girls are much more likely to be kept at home to help than boys.

Parents from Arab and Tuaregs societies, who participated in this study, stated that marriage is their priority for their daughters and that any empowerment scheme for girls should primarily aim at training them to be good wives.

Early forced marriage is common in Mali as well as in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania and this was mentioned in all focus groups and by all key informants. While Malian Person and Family Code Law sets the legal age of marriage at 15 for girls and 18 for boys,⁶² early marriage is common; in Mali an estimated 55% of females are married before age 18 and 15-25% are married before age 15.⁶³

However it was reported that it did not occur in all regions or amongst all ethnic communities; in some communities that practice child marriage, parents and the local imams usually need to approve. With the conflict, the choice that lay with parents and local religious leaders has been taken away. There were reports that parents, especially poor ones, had increased economic pressures for their families and so married off their daughters in order to both stay safe and obtain the money from a dowry.⁶⁴

As this young marriage age often coincides with schooling years, marriage poses an impediment, as explained by the representative from the Ministry of Education in Mali. This Ministry of Education representative mentioned that the belief among many communities was that brides could not look after both school and their family so they must choose one. As soon as the girl is married, she is expected to take over running the household and steps into the role her mother once filled in her own home, leaving her little to no time for studies.

Further, the husband plays a large role in his young wife's ability to continue education. Focus groups of all ages and locations indicated that while some husbands are supportive of their wives' continued education, many are not and, ultimately, they have the final say in their wives' attendance.

'Most of the problems we are facing is not because we don't want to study but because of cultural practices that are concealed to the outside world and also because we are given little chance.'

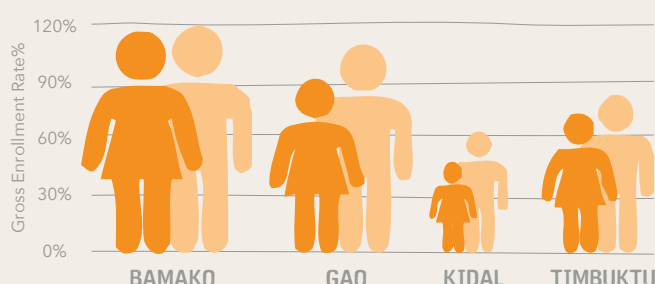
A young married girl in Niger.

The Radicalization of Islam and Girls' Education

The radicalization of Islam has further compounded the obstacles girls face in attending school. The armed groups in northern Mali, especially Ansar al-Dine, AQIM and MUJAO, follow Salafism. As they have gained strength in the rebellion, they have been able to gain followers among those previously holding moderate Sufi beliefs. This has affected the way women and girls are viewed and therefore their access to education.

One of the main armed groups in northern Mali, Ansar al-Dine, who strongly hold onto Salafi beliefs, does not support girls' education.⁶⁵ A teacher in the town of Gao in Mali told UNESCO that all women and girls were forced to wear a veil and be completely covered – even baby girls as young as one year old. If women or girls were found not fully veiled, they were beaten.⁶⁶ Further, the armed groups were very strict about the movement of women and girls; they could only move around alongside their fathers, husbands or brothers. The armed groups have proclaimed secular, co-ed schools in the north forbidden and have threatened teachers who teach a curriculum outside of the scope of traditional Koranic schools. While girls and boys can attend these schools, they are separated in the classroom, with girls sitting in the back.⁶⁷

Removing these deep rooted barriers deterring girls from going to and continuing their education is not an easy task. However, the Ministry of Education in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, donor agencies, the UN, INGOs and NGOs can take measures to assist girls. Raising awareness among the community about the importance of girls' education and how this can help the girls and their families can begin to change perspectives and can easily be done through entertainment and community discussion. Flexible learning options, especially for adolescent girls, are really important so they can study in their homes and when they are completed with household or child care responsibilities. Establishing more Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) options would allow adolescent mothers with babies to have a safe place where they can be cared for while they study. Along with household and child care duties, girls may also be expected to bring in some income for the family so they should be included in income-generating activities and vocational training opportunities.



Mali, Gross Enrollment Rate 2011, Urban Rural Combined, Primary, Ministry Of Education

Source: Ministry of Education of Mali (Data obtained from FHI Education Policy and Data Center, www.epdc.org)

5 SECURITY



'Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war. Children under 15 should not be forced or recruited to take part in a war or join the armed forces. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict further develops this right, raising the age for direct participation in armed conflict to 18 and establishing a ban on compulsory recruitment for children under 18.'

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 38 (War and armed conflicts)

With the eruption of conflict in Mali and the destabilization of the region, security has become a major barrier to conflict affected children's educational access. In northern Mali, there is evidence of recruitment and use of children by armed groups. There is also evidence of schools being attacked, looted and used by armed groups as bases for their operations.⁶⁸

Primary data from this research also revealed that the security and instability particularly affected girls' access to education, especially those that had to walk far distances to school. This was particularly the case with IDP girls in Mali and adolescent girls in Niger and Burkina Faso who had to go outside of the safety of the refugee camp to a host community secondary school.

Human Rights Watch, The Watch list on Children and Armed Conflict and others found children being recruited by the various armed groups, particularly in northern Mali.⁶⁹ There is evidence that Ansar al-Dine, AQIM, MUJAO and the MNLA all recruited and used children, as young as seven years old, for various roles, including manning check points and cooking. Some children were seen carrying guns. There were three recruitment modalities: voluntary recruitment or those that joined because they were idle or wanted revenge, recruitment through association with a family member and forced recruitment which occurred in public places, including Koranic schools or madrassas.⁷⁰

In the refugee camps, Plan's primary data collection did not uncover patterns of recruitment occurring in the camps itself. However, in Niger, it was reported that about 20% of young people knew friends or age mates who were at some point involved with armed groups. In Mali among the displaced population, recruitment was also not mentioned, but Plan was limited in the number of people accessed for the research in Mali due to security reasons.

Higher risks for girls during conflict

The violence and instability of the situation in the region has also impacted girls' access to education. Parents mentioned in focus groups that they were more concerned about their daughters' safety and security than their boys', especially if their daughter had to go outside of the camp or walk far from her home. An interview with a Ministry of Education representative and focus groups with parents said that girls are at a greater risk of being attacked en route to school than boys. Parents in Niger feared sending their daughters to secondary schools in the nearby town due to the risk it posed to their safety and security. Other parents cited insecurity and potential threats to their child(ren)'s safety as major concerns when sending those children to school, an issue that is compounded by the distance between their homes and the school. A female teacher in northern Mali mentioned that parents were keeping girls home and away from school once the fighting started for fear they would be assaulted.⁷¹ She reported that one of her female students was raped on her way to school.⁷² The Watch list on Children in Armed Conflict found the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by all four armed groups.⁷³ While documentation of sexual violence has been limited, all four armed groups have been implicated in rape and forced marriage. The main reason for the limited documentation of sexual abuse and exploitation among Malians is the shame and social stigma attached to survivors of sexual violence. Girls who are raped will never be able to marry and for this reason, families prefer to keep these incidences hidden.⁷⁴

Further, sexual abuse and exploitation is also tied closely with the tension between ethnic groups which underlies the conflict. It has been reported that the rape victims are usually 'black' while the perpetrators are 'white'.⁷⁵ In Malian culture, the Tuareg and Arab ethnic groups are considered white.⁷⁶ This suggests that the escalating ethnic tensions of the conflict have resulted in an increase in rape and other sexual abuse and exploitation.

6



PHYSICAL DISTANCE

Physical distance is another barrier to children's access to education. Schools in Mali are not always close to where children live, especially in rural areas so students often walk long 4-6 km per day according to a UNHCR staff member. Small children, under 8 years, and girls are then less likely to go to school. The conflict has further compounded this difficulty as children's lives and daily routines have been disrupted. Those that had managed a system to get to school may have been displaced to another location, which could be even further from the school. As fighting and kidnappings continue in Mali and in the border areas where the refugee camps are set up, families choose to not send their children out of the camps or safe locations for fear for their safety.

According to FGDs in the Malian refugee camps in Niger and Burkina Faso, physical distance was a greater obstacle for children at the secondary level. They mentioned that primary schools were established inside the refugee camps and in close proximity to where their housing was based on minimum standards stated in the Sphere Humanitarian Standards. This actually facilitated the enrollment of children who may not have had access to education in Mali. However, UNHCR has been unable to support secondary education for the refugees in Niger and Burkina Faso. So children at the secondary level who wish to continue their studies must either commute (which is time and resource consuming) or they must find lodging in a nearby host community town. There is also a security risk for young people going to secondary schools alone. Research participants in Niger mentioned their fear in sending their daughters to secondary schools due to the deteriorating security situation between the refugee camps and the host community secondary schools.

The research revealed that physical distance was also particularly challenging for conflict-affected children with physical disabilities. Transport support is needed for these young people to go even from one part of the camp to another just to attend a class. Sometimes family members may be willing to carry or somehow take the child, but it is a major commitment and some study participants mentioned it is difficult to sustain this.⁷⁷

Often, the complication of distance is compounded by the nomadic nature of groups particularly from the north of Mali. Several FGD indicated that the nomadic way of life hinders or even prevents attending traditional school due to the lack of stability in terms of location. Where a family might be located close to a school for part of the year, that access is affected when the community moves on. The Director of Fundamental Education in Mali mentioned that there were teachers who were trained to travel with nomadic groups so their learning could continue, but there are insufficient teachers able to do this. The violence has further prevented potential teachers from accepting jobs traveling and supporting nomadic children as they do not want to go to unstable places. Therefore, while there is a process for this to occur, the lack of sufficient teachers means only a small percentage of nomadic children receive this assistance.

One way to mitigate the difficulties of physical distance could be to package the curriculum into small modules that children could use at home or where they are located, thereby taking away the need to travel to a particular location to learn. The Ministry of Education could reach out and recruit people to be teachers from the nomadic communities so these people could teach the government curriculum while moving with their families and community.

7



CHALLENGES FOR ADOLESCENTS

Adolescent boys and girls face additional challenges than younger children in accessing education for three key reasons related to their role in society, stigma of being much older than other students in the class and because learning offerings are not relevant to their needs. There is a belief among Malians that there are greater benefits from a teenager working rather than going to school. For adolescent girls, they are expected to get married and care for their families. For young people who have passed the age of school entrance (7 years old in Mali), they themselves do not want to sit in early classes such as levels 1-2 with much younger children. A third reason adolescents do not access education as much as younger children is that if they have never been to school, the learning options do not consider their specific needs such as vocational training and flexible/modular approaches.

The conflict and instability has created extra pull factors away from education. As mentioned in the section on security, the option of earning money from armed groups deters young people from choosing education. Human Rights Watch (2013) and Watch list (2013) found reports of children as young as 12 years, around the beginning of adolescence, being recruited by armed groups.

Many of the adolescent participants interviewed through this research, especially in Niger, had never been to school before. In a female FGD conducted in Niger, only two out of the 20 participants in two separate camps knew how to read and write, and none were enrolled for the coming school year. Several teenage boys in a FGD in Niger and Mali also mentioned that they did not go to school because they were too old. Despite living in a camp with easy access to primary education, many adolescents in the Niger refugee camps did not participate in formal schools because they felt they were too old to attend. The social stigma of being in a basic level class at the age of 15 or 16 and the lack of appropriately flexible alternative educational opportunities is simply insurmountable for many young people in the refugee camps and in Mali.

1.2m



Out of school Malian children prior to crisis

59%



Girls

50.8%



Boys

35%



Out of school children from urban areas

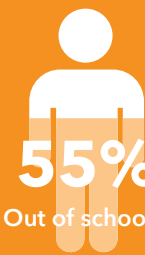
63%



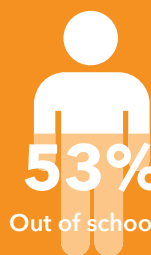
From rural contexts

Age 7

The official primary school entry age in Mali.



Age 15



Mali Ministry of Education, May 2013

According to KII, efforts are being made in the refugee camps in Niger and Burkina Faso to provide flexible learning options for young people who have never been to school or started school late. Other opportunities for education exist, or are currently being put in place to offer greater access to those who will be starting school later than the traditional 7 years of age in Mali. La Direction Regionale de l'Enseignement Primaire (DREP), the Regional Department for primary Education of the Ministry of Education, implements an accelerated learning program in Mali and in the refugee camps, but this focuses on children between 9-12 years who are either behind in their studies or who have never had formal schooling. However, there is a gap in accessing formal education for children over the age of 12 who have never been to school.

Other learning options, particularly for those older than age 12, are technical and/or training schools (called formations or métiers), as well as literacy classes for adults in the Malian refugee camps. The research team saw evidence of the success of the literacy classes in Burkina Faso. In the adult focus group discussion, the women made a point to tell the researchers that they were learning to read and write for the first time. Another man in the same focus group showed off a letter he had written, the very first letter he had written in his entire life. Those achievements are due to the alternative education being offered in the camps, but these are insufficient to meet the needs of all refugees.

Some ways for adolescents to overcome this barrier is to expand accelerated learning programs and target young people over 12 years. This would entail a revision of the learning materials so it is more relevant to older children's lives. Further, there could be a provision of functional literacy classes for adolescents and adults along with expansion of technical/vocational training opportunities.



8



POOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A poor learning environment emerged as another barrier to children's school attendance in Mali and in the Niger and Burkina Faso refugee camps. There are four areas which are creating a poor learning environment: 1) lack of proper infrastructure and classes, 2) insufficient teaching and learning materials, 3) insufficient latrines and places to wash hands and, 4) no places to eat. In Mali, a poor learning environment has posed challenges for children's school attendance for many years, but the armed conflict has worsened existing conditions by destroying existing school buildings and destroying already meager teaching and learning materials. During the 2012 conflict, schools were looted and partially or completely destroyed. Teachers and other Ministry of Education personnel were injured, they died or were displaced.⁷⁸ In emergencies, education is consistently one of the least funded sectors with less than 2% globally of all humanitarian aid going the sector.⁷⁹

Many FGDs and KIs mentioned that there are not enough schools and insufficient teaching and learning materials for the schools that have been established in the IDP sites and refugee camps. A female adolescent FGD in Mangaize refugee camp in Niger pointed out that the physical structures, once set up, need to be taken continuous care. Even in places with schools, they sometimes lacked proper care and management, or had been negatively impacted by the effects of the weather. In one camp in Niger, the research team was informed that the wind had torn the roof entirely off of one of the classrooms, which presented a new set of challenges regarding the available facilities. KI in all countries explained that classes are often mixed in terms of age and level because there was not enough space to separate students by grade level. Focus Groups in Koira Beiry in central Mali explained that they only had three classrooms where they were supposed to have six, one for each grade, which necessitated the combination of several different grade levels into the available classrooms. This further increased each classroom size.

Most schools in Mali are also not equipped to support children with disabilities. The Education Cluster's 2013 assessment report found that out of 56 schools in Mali found to have children with disabilities, only 2 of them had some facilities to support these children. In the refugee camps in Niger and Burkina Faso, no specific measures have been taken for children with disabilities. There is no way for those with physical handicaps to get to temporary learning spaces and there are no learning materials suitable for young people who are blind or have a hearing impairment.⁸⁰



56 

Schools in Mali found to have
children with disabilities

2 

Schools with some facilities
to support these children

In addition to relevant teaching and learning materials for children with disabilities, the study found a general lack of teaching and learning materials for all students. These educational materials include books, notebooks, pens, school bags, uniforms, curriculum and materials relevant for nomadic children, adolescents and in particular adolescent girls and mothers. Female adolescent focus group participants with student attendees remarked on the lack of appropriate uniforms as a difficulty for their attendance. They did not wish to attend school improperly dressed. The boys in Mali and Niger also remarked on their desire for what they called '*kits scolaires*' – that is, kits of educational supplies. A representative from the Malian Ministry of Education indicated that basic supplies are lacking and providing these to conflict-affected children would increase their enrollment.

Further, some adolescents in focus groups mentioned that they were not motivated to go to school because what they were learning was not relevant to their lives. While education is mostly provided in French, many children do not speak French. Moreover, while adolescents may not want to sit in a first grade classroom with young children, they may be more interested in vocational training or functional literacy and numeracy and income generating activities.

Specific structural challenges or needs mentioned by key informants were latrines and water and sanitation facilities; the lack of these facilities, separated for boys and girls, needs to be addressed. Research participants mentioned that while some schools have latrines for boys and girls, most do not. Menstruating girls in particular want and need privacy and when this is not available, it can pull them away from schools. Proper separate facilities for girls and boys are important in order to facilitate the access of this group to attend school.

According to the focus groups, the lack of school cafeterias and school feeding is another important element contributing to a poor learning environment, thereby deterring people from participating in educational activities. All FGDs and a majority of KII commented on the need for cafeterias, to give lunch during the school day as both a motivator to attend school and contribute to children's physical health and ability to concentrate in the classroom.

So, while humanitarian agencies have made efforts to support educational access in Mali and in the refugee camps of Niger and Burkina Faso through the establishment of temporary learning spaces, the resumption of learning and in some cases building water points and latrines, they have been limited by the total amount of funding going to education related work. For example, UNHCR and UNICEF in their support of Malian refugees and IDPs, have not been able to fully fund secondary education or technical and vocational training for adolescents.

Some ways to mitigate the challenges of a poor learning environment is to make concerted efforts to ensure temporary learning spaces in the refugee camps are accessible to children with physical disabilities. The Parent Teacher Association, School Management Committee, Child Protection Committee or another community group could be in charge of transporting children with physical disabilities to school every day. This has been done in the Darfur refugee camps in Chad and other places. Further, concerted efforts could be made to provide learning materials for children who are deaf or blind and at least one teacher per temporary learning space. Latrines and water points could be built and one hot meal prepared per day as cash for work projects that then slowly transfers full responsibility to the community.

9



INSUFFICIENT TEACHERS

An insufficient number of teachers prepared for the challenges of a conflict-affected context is another barrier that has come out from the research. The availability of well-trained and high quality teachers is crucial to children's access, motivation, retention, and learning outcomes.

Prior to the conflict, Mali struggled with ensuring sufficient number of recruited and trained teachers to meet all of the education needs in the country.⁸¹ In 2008, the general teacher: pupil ratios in primary school were 1:64 in public schools with many classes exceeding 1:100.⁸² This includes all teachers, both certified and ones with limited or no training from the communities. Considering only trained and fully certified teachers, the ratio was on average 1:181 in public schools. The Mali Ministry of Education estimated that it needed 27,250 new teachers, or 45,350 including both new teachers needing to be recruited and existing teachers who need to be trained.⁸³

The 2012 conflict has made this situation worse as teachers have lost their lives, been injured or themselves displaced. Reports indicate that 80% of education personnel in the north fled to the south of Mali and neighboring countries, thereby increasing the gap for them in the north.⁸⁴ Teachers have also experienced psychosocial distress which according to KII and FGDs made it harder for them to concentrate on teaching. The study revealed that many of the teachers in the refugee camps were facing the same issues as other refugees: poverty, hunger, psychosocial distress.

Study participants, including a Malian Ministry of Education representative, emphasized the need for more teachers, whether they are certified or community based to handle the large number of students. More staff would allow for smaller classroom sizes. Insufficient number of female education personnel was specifically mentioned as a huge need. For children with disabilities, there are even fewer teachers able to support their specific needs.⁸⁵



Teacher:Pupil ratios in public primary school (2008)

1:64 (with many 1:100+)

Includes certified and those with limited or no training



1:181

Trained and fully certified teachers



27,250

Estimated new teachers needed



45,350

Estimated teachers needed to be recruited and trained



80%

Education personnel from the north who fled

In Burkina Faso and Niger, several focus groups and interviews emphasized the need for additional training for educators so they could handle children's diverse needs during an emergency context in refugee camps. As in non-emergency contexts, education staff need to manage large classes, but they also need to use a slightly altered curriculum or teaching strategy. While some non-formal and flexible learning options are available in the camps, many teachers are not prepared to teach because they have not received training and support on how to do so. For example, some teachers were teaching Accelerated Learning Program curriculum, but had no training or experience in doing so. Further, normal teacher training conducted by the Ministry of Education in Mali does not include topics specific to emergencies such as how to use class room based activities to promote children's psychosocial well-being, how to promote tolerance and peace. The adult focus group in Mentao Camp in Burkina Faso even remarked that respectable teachers are needed, giving the impression that the quality of teachers present may be inadequate in some cases.

With limited resources that the education sector generally receives in humanitarian situations, education implementing partners can divert funds from construction of schools to teacher training. Further, teachers could be recruited from the refugee and IDP population and provided some support so they can be assistant teachers if not lead teachers. Mali currently does not have a system of certifying teachers in refugee camps, but the Ministry of Education could provide a path for people hired to be teachers from refugee camps become fully certified teachers for the Malian government. This might also provide additional incentive for more people who want to become teachers.







IV

MOVING FORWARD

Solutions for Children's
Access to Education

IV

Moving Forward: Solutions for Children's Access to Education

While this report outlines numerous barriers to children's educational access exacerbated by the conflict, there are possible solutions as well. The Malian education system includes public and private schools that follow the government curriculum and are taught in French. Local languages are used in public and private schools during the early grades. Additionally, there are Koranic schools or Madrassas that include the basics of the government curriculum, but also include the study of religion and are taught mostly in Arabic.⁸⁶ According to a Malian government official, all of the countries in West Africa generally follow a very similar curriculum, with differences only in the teaching of history. This has made it easier for refugee children to learn in the camps and earn credit from the Ministry of Education, which is positive for children.

Despite positive steps taken to provide for all children's educational access, this report shows that some groups are falling through the cracks. This section outlines some possible solutions to this and recommendation for the Ministry of Education officials, United Nations, INGOs and NGOs and donors.

A key recommendation that is relevant to all solutions offered below is to re-frame education programs using a conflict sensitive approach. Conflict sensitive education is the process of:

- 1) understanding the power and conflict dynamics of a country**
- 2) Analyzing the two-way interaction between education and the conflict**
- 3) Minimizing negative impacts and maximizing positive ones.⁸⁷**

By viewing education through a conflict sensitive lens, finding creative solutions to the various obstacles mentioned in this report will be easier.

While many of these recommendations would need to be led by the Ministry of Education, the United Nations, INGOs, NGOs and donor agencies can support and contribute to each of these solutions. All recommendations presented here consider the perspectives of participants interviewed during the study.



Solution 1

Expand Accelerated and Alternative Learning Opportunities

Flexible learning options are important so adolescent girls and boys can access education, whether it be formal education or functional literacy/numeracy paired with vocational training or other income generating activities. In Mali, there is an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) curriculum specifically for children 9-12 years old called *école passerelle* (also known as Speed Schools). The aim of *école passerelle* is to re-integrate children into formal school. This program begins teaching students who have never accessed education for three months in a local language. At 6 months the teaching slowly shifts to French. Plan has carried over this model into the Malian refugee camps in Niger based on the Malian curriculum. Unfortunately, there are insufficient teachers to teach this and insufficient ALP materials and classes to meet all of the needs. Further, it does not address the specific needs of children over 12 years.

Many people interviewed also mentioned the need for technical training opportunities, especially for adolescents who have never been to school or dropped out during the early years. While there are vocational training schools in Mali, they are mostly in Bamako and are insufficient to meet the needs of young people. Unfortunately, few education in emergency programs specifically target training opportunities for adolescents as many projects are only 6 months in duration, not leaving enough time to see results. Donors can support education in emergency programs for longer durations – 12 to 18 months so students can complete a full course of learning and see lasting results.

Solution 2

Access to Relevant Teaching and Learning Materials

In order to meet the various needs of children not accessing education, concrete steps should be taken to ensure teaching and learning materials are accessible and relevant.

- *Develop mobile modules:* Nomadic children move around and so the government curriculum could be packaged so these students could take the modules with them and study together in small groups.
- *Invest in people from nomadic communities:* These people could become teachers and fill the huge gap for education personnel supporting nomadic children.
- *Include relevant topics:* Topics focused on agriculture, herding, the environment might entice nomadic children, adolescents and their families to perceive education as more relevant to their lives.
- *Develop teaching and learning materials in major languages:* Currently, most public and private schools in Mali use French while Madrasas or Koranic schools use Arabic. However, this poses a challenge for those that do not speak either language. As is done with *école passerelle*, French/Arabic could gradually be introduced.
- *Scholarships as interim measures to support families in greatest need:* According to the FGDs and KIs, many families also do not have sufficient money for basic school materials. Many people mentioned the provision of scholarships. While scholarships are not a sustainable long term solution and could create a dependency on others, there are steps that could be taken to support families. Scholarships could be provided as interim measures, but longer term income generating solutions could be sought after by the community to solve this problem.



Solution 3

Expand Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) opportunities near schools

Adolescent girls and particularly those who are mothers have several challenges to accessing educational opportunities due to cultural perspectives, and having to care for their babies or young siblings. Moreover, the youngest children have very little access to early childhood services in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. One solution to support adolescent girls while preparing very young children for primary school is to provide Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) services for young children near schools. The Malian education system includes Centre de developement de la petite enfance (CDPE), which are community based and run and jardins d'enfants which are government managed. However, these are insufficient to meet the needs. Increasing ECCD services for young children would allow adolescent girls to have a safe and developmentally stimulating place for their babies or younger siblings to go while they could study. Plan implemented CDPE and jardins d'enfants in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and recieved positive responses from Malian community members.

Attendance in early childhood education 2005-2012*

10.1% 

10.1% 

Poorest 20%

1.2% 

Richest 20%

39.8% 

Source: UNICEF Statistics for Mali, Updated 27 December 2013



Solution 4

Provide a healthy snack or hot meal during the school day

The majority of study participants mentioned the importance of providing some food at school as that would be one factor that could motivate parents to send their children to school. Many children stay home because they need to work and earn money so their family can eat. However, there are many challenges with the provision of food at schools.

A key informant from a UN agency said that sometimes food takes precedence over attendance and learning. It can also be expensive and logistically difficult to provide hot nutritious meals to all children in school. However, a high energy nutritious snack could be provided to motivate children to attend school. If a community is ready to lead efforts to cook hot meals, this could be supported and paired with school gardens.



Solution 5

Provide security for girls so they can attend secondary school

While fighting has eased in the region, the security situation has not. Parents continue to fear for their children's and especially their daughters' safety and therefore often do not send them to school. This could look different in every context. In Niger, transport in vans was provided by aid agencies.



Solution 6

Grade level testing for children

Many key informants, including someone from UNICEF, mentioned that there should be grade level testing for all children entering a new school – whether it be in a refugee camp or another location. In Niger it was thought that this could reduce the number of drop outs. Key informants mentioned that currently there is no such testing. As a result children and families sometimes overestimate the level their child is at due to their age. It was mentioned that in the refugee camps, older students placed in a grade that matched their age, but not their actual levels of education or understanding, struggled more academically than others and tended to drop out. By ensuring pupils are placed in the most appropriate level, their chance of success will increase, thereby motivating them to want to continue their studies.



Solution 7

Awareness Raising Campaign

A barrier for some children's lack of educational access is due to community members' and parents' lack of knowledge on the importance of education, especially for girls, disabled and nomadic children. Regular awareness raising campaigns, through large scale Back to School advocacy and communications campaigns, street theater, music or small scale community discussions could begin to help parents understand the myriad benefits of educating all of their children. While a Back to School campaign was conducted in Mali, doing it once is not enough. Efforts need to continue in order to change people's perspectives.



Solution 8

Support for Parents

Many FGD and KII participants mentioned that parents need support so they can better assist their children in registering, attending and succeeding in school. Parents' groups or School Management Committees can be established or strengthened and parental education can be provided on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis, based on the interest of each community. Topics for discussion can range from the process of registering their children to needed materials and how they can be assisted at home. Moreover, the parents' groups role would also be to advocate for the importance of education and encourage children to attend the various educational options available – formal and non-formal. Malian parents in Burkina Faso mentioned the need for literacy classes for parents, so they could also learn to read and write. By parents learning how to read and write, they could both better support their children in these areas, but could also better understand education's value.



Solution 9

Support for Teachers

Many of the key informants mentioned the need to increase training programs for teachers, especially for those teaching non-formal programs such as accelerated learning (écoles passerelle). Key informants mentioned the need to include how teachers can integrate children of various ages and curricula modified from the normal government curriculum.

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Malian girl at a refugee camp in Burkina Faso

About Plan

Plan works for and with over 165 million people, over 90,229 communities and 78 million children in 50 low and middle income countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. We focus on inclusion, education and protection of the most marginalized children, working in partnership with communities, local and national government and civil society. We are independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations. In 2013, we responded to 54 disasters and emergencies in three continents, and worked with communities in 35 countries to implement disaster risk reduction plans.

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