

Impacts of Development Aid to Mali 2008–2021

A Systematic Review of Evaluation Reports

Part II

A Synthesis of Country-level Bilateral and Multilateral Evaluation Reports

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The Evidence Base

The following 18 reports (ordered by year) have been included:

Évaluation conjointe 2011. *Évaluation conjointe des opérations d' aide budgétaire au Mali 2003–2009.* Évaluation conjointe pour le compte de la Commission de l'Union européenne, de la Belgique et du Canada comme exercice pilote du Comité d'aide au développement de l'OCDE

Direction Suisse 2011. Direction Suisse 2011 du développement et de la coopération. *Rapport d'évaluation prospective de la stratégie de coopération au Mali 2007–2011.*

FIDA 2013. République du Mali. Évaluation du programme de pays. IOE. Bureau indépendant de l'évaluation.

GAC 2013. *Mali Country Program Evaluation 2006–2007 – 2010–2011– Synthesis Report.* Global Affairs Canada. May 2013.

Ponty and Keita 2015. Ponty, Nicolas and Sikoro Keita. 2015. *Evaluation du fonds national de stabilisation économique et sociale (FNSES).*

IEG 2015. CLR Review Mali. Independent Evaluation Group.

Norad 2018. *Country Evaluation Brief Mali.* Report 6/2018. Oslo, April 2018.

WFP 2018. *Mali: Une évaluation du portefeuille du PAM.* (2013–2017).

Danida 2019. *Mali. Programme pays Danemark – Mali 2017–2022.* Revue à mi-parcours aide-memoire. Version finale. DANIDA, Décembre 2019.

ONU Femmes 2019. *ONE femmes, évaluation du portefeuille Pays. Rapport Final. République du Mali 2014–2019.*

PBF 2019. Evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) Portfolio in Mali 2014–2018. 30 July 2019.

UNICEF 2019. *Évaluation sommative de l'approche de Programmation intégrée dans les régions de Mopti et Sikasso au Mali.* Rapport d'évaluation présenté à UNICEF Mali. 31 janvier 2019.

WFP 2019. Heirman, Jonas, Mica Jenkins, Jennifer Rosenzweig. 2019. *Lessons learned from evaluations of the impact of WFP programmes on moderate acute malnutrition in the Sahel.* Field Exchange issue 60, July 2019.

AfDB 2020. *Mali: Evaluation of the AfDB's Country Strategy and Program (2005–2019)*. Summary Report, September 2020. IDEV, Independent Development Evaluation, African Development Bank.

SDC 2020. *Evaluation de la Stratégie de Coopération Mali 2017–2021*. Département fédéral des affaires étrangères (DFAE / SDC). Berne, Février 2020

GPE 2020. Meysonnat, Aline and Ignacio Torrano. 2020. *Prospective evaluation of GPE's country-level support to education*. Mali – Second Annual Report. January 2020.

UNICEF 2020. *Evaluation formative des stratégies de renforcement des capacités au Mali (2015–2018)*. Rapport final (janvier 2020). Evaluation commanditée par le bureau pays de l'unicef au Mali.

UNDP 2020. *Independent country programme evaluation: Mali* (Independent Evaluation Office).

Introduction

This report provides an overview of findings from 18 country-level bilateral and multilateral evaluation reports on Mali between 2008 and 2021, one of which, Norad (2018), is itself a synthesis of 25 evaluation reports. The 18 reports comprise five bilateral country-level portfolio evaluations, seven multilateral country-level evaluations and six sectoral country-level evaluations. All these evaluations were included by default; no quality threshold was applied.

First, summaries of the seven bilateral country-level portfolio evaluations are presented in chronological order, so that changes in the context are reflected. (Note that after the collapse of the democratic order and the onset of violence in 2012, the evaluation reports suggest that aid effectiveness was dramatically reduced.) Then come summaries of the multilateral and sectoral country-level evaluations, followed by major findings about the ten aid sectors of particular interest to this systematic review: Stabilisation; Good Governance; Rule of Law; Humanitarian Assistance, Refugees and Migration; Women's Rights and Gender Equality; Education; Health; Sustainable Economic Development; Rural Development and Climate; Nutrition. In the final section, the main findings emerging from this synopsis are summarised.

Summaries of Bilateral Country Portfolio Evaluations

Switzerland – SDC (2011)

Direction Suisse (2011) is a forward-looking evaluation. Its main objective is to assist the development of a new country strategy for Mali. As such, it does not provide an assessment of results achieved up to 2011.

What is interesting in this evaluation report is the enthusiasm for Mali's progress over the last decade or so and its optimism about the future of Mali. The evaluation was published in 2011, one year before the outbreak of the civil war which eroded much of what had been achieved and darkened Mali's future for years to come.

The evaluation report notes the stability of the ongoing democratic process. It acknowledges positive factors: the local development dynamics which could make Mali an "agricultural power"; the social capital of Malinese society, which enables ethno-linguistic groups to co-exist peacefully; and the country's progress in terms of basic education and health.

The report also mentions growing instability in the north, but states that "one should not lose sight of the relative stability of the institutions, the national economy and the social body, which have allowed the Swiss Cooperation Programme in Mali to be implemented successfully over the past four years" (Direction Suisse 2011: 29).

Looking to the future, the evaluation suggests that the next country strategy (2012–2015) should focus on three pillars. The first one should be education and vocational training to ensure the

integration of formal and informal education and vocational training with a strong focus on agricultural and rural training. The second pillar should be to strengthen the productivity of farming households and associations and strengthen their linkages with the local agricultural enterprises. The third pillar would be to promote transparent and effective local governance.

In sum, the evaluation report suggests a strategy which seems perfectly adequate for a “normal” low-income country with a large agricultural sector and a relatively stable political system which is willing to support a national development policy. Only one year later, the context for such a strategy was gone, and Mali had become a fragile and conflict-ridden country.

Canada – GAC (2013)

GAC 2013 provides an evaluation of Canada's engagement in Mali between 2007 and 2011. During this period, Canada's aid amounted to approximately USD 370m. The evaluation sought to assess the programme's overall performance in achieving results. It is based on a desk review and stakeholder interviews. In addition, a sample of 24 projects representing 41 percent of the programme's disbursements was analysed, but no primary data was collected on these projects.

Despite the fact that the evaluation was published in 2013, one year after the outbreak of violence and the coup, there is no reference to these events and how they might impact aid effectiveness in a future aid strategy.

Canada supported projects in the sectors of education, health, governance, public management reform, food security, equality between women and men, and strengthening of civil society. Special consideration was given to supporting the government's decentralisation policies, especially in health and education.

The evaluation sees Canada's portfolio as highly relevant and in line with Mali's 2007–2011 growth and poverty reduction strategy, and concludes that “noteworthy contributions” were made, but it does not provide robust evidence for such a positive assessment.

The use of programme-based approaches and budget support is lauded as emerging best practice in aid.

At project level, most projects in health and education scored “satisfactory”, whereas results in microfinance were disappointing: access to microfinance for rural communities remained limited, and the microfinance sector as a whole was poorly regulated.

Despite the overall upbeat tone, the evaluation is cautious regarding sustainability and warns that some of the gain may be undermined by weak central and subnational institutions, weak financial capacity, strong population growth, persisting corruption, a lack of accountability in the public service, low capacity of most stakeholders and growing political instability in the north. It

notes that in the case of governance and public management, sustainability of results largely depends on whether the government of Mali and its ministries will own the results.

The evaluation also calls for more and better monitoring and evaluation and a better risk assessment.

Norway – Norad (2018)

Norad (2018) provides a synthesis of 25 evaluations and reports published between 2010 and 2017. The report emphasises the importance of the outbreak of large-scale violence in Mali in 2012. This was a watershed moment. During the decade prior to 2012, Mali was treated by the donor community as a positive example of democratic governance, and a substantial part of the aid was channelled through the government in the form of budget support.

In 2011, the country was hit by a drought, and in 2012, a coalition of Tuaregs and Islamists in the north rebelled against the central government, triggering a civil war and the reversal and subsequent collapse of the democratic order which had been established during the early 1990s. This led to an international intervention being launched in 2013.

After 2012, donors pivoted and increasingly channelled aid through multilateral organisations and NGOs. Humanitarian aid became much more important. The outbreak of the civil war and the collapse of the democratic order also led donors to look more critically at their engagement; questions were raised about whether aid had neglected to address underlying tensions within Mali and could have more effectively supported long-term stability.

For the decade before 2012, the report notes that a substantial amount of aid was given as budget support. This support is credited with having an overall positive effect on public finances in Mali, with particularly positive impacts in education and health; it is also credited with significantly contributing to achieving goals in the national poverty alleviation and growth strategies, macroeconomic management and public investment in the social sectors. However, the report also notes that applying conditionality led to losses of coherence in implementation and higher transaction costs.

Budget support played a much less prominent role after 2012, and there is no evaluation of budget support published after 2012, hence we know little about the effect of this modality in a less favourable environment.

In general, it appears that between 2000 and 2012, there was progress in Mali's public financial governance. In other governance sectors, however, such as the judiciary sector and a stronger civil society, progress was elusive.

Donor engagement in Mali changed in reaction to the rupture of 2012. Budget support and assistance to the public sector dropped, and a larger share of aid was channelled through multilateral organisations and NGOs. Humanitarian assistance, with food security as the most

important spending line, exploded and became an important sector. Food and in-kind aid as well as income-generating activities in rural areas grew in importance and contributed to the rudimentary social safety net in Mali.

Shifts also occurred in the governance sector, as donors sought to help re-establish democratic order and address perceived root causes of the conflict with the north. The tone of the few evaluation reports on governance changed markedly. Prior to 2012, evaluators had noted some positive trends, but after 2012, there was a widespread perception that the governance sector had gravely deteriorated: evaluators pointed out ineffective institutions, weak capacities, lack of accountability, endemic corruption and entrenched patronage. It is unclear whether the pre-2012 evaluations had painted too rosy a picture, or whether the 2012 crisis very quickly reversed all progress made since the early 2000s.

Two of the three evaluations of gender equality projects which Norad (2018) reviews cover the pre-2012 period. While programmes aimed at increasing school enrolment and retention of female students appeared to have had some positive effects, little was achieved in terms of changed gender relations, or changed attitudes towards family planning. Furthermore, a capacity-building project for women's associations was not effective.

The report concludes with a familiar call for more and better evidence, noting that the reviewed studies too often focused on outputs, with limited attention to impact, and that effectiveness was often assessed mainly on the basis of correlation, rather than by making attempts to identify causal mechanisms in a methodologically sound way.

Finally, the report notes that “a real understanding of how the events of 2012 have impacted on development approaches is largely missing from the evaluations” (Norad 2018: 29).

Denmark – Danida (2019)

Danida (2019) is a mid-term review of Denmark's country-level programmes in Mali. It explains that Denmark's strategy was based on three pillars: the peaceful coexistence programme; the decentralisation programme; and the private sector technical programme. The first two programmes were in their second year when the evaluation took place, and the third one began six months before the evaluation took place. Given these short timeframes, the evaluation cannot assess the programmes' outcome or impacts. The evaluation is nonetheless interesting for its analysis of the country context and the strategic orientation of the aid portfolio that flows from the context.

The first pillar, the peaceful coexistence programme, comprised five interventions: (a) Support for civil society with a focus on youth and women by providing support to FAMOC – Fonds d'Appui aux Moteurs du Changement / Drivers of Change support fund. This fund in turn supported civil society organisations working on youth and democracy, human rights, peace and the media (b) Support for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (c) Support for the UN Women Country Programme (d) Support to MINUSMA Trust Fund carrying out rehabilitation and

stabilisation projects in the north and (e) support to the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) / UNICRI: Mali (Dis-) Engagement and Re-Integration related to Terrorism (MERIT).

The second pillar, the decentralisation programme, supported decentralisation through the ministry in charge of decentralisation and provided support for the regional council of Sikasso and to the civil society organisation Groupe de Suivi Budgétaire – surveillance de la société civile / Civil Society Budget Monitoring Group.

The third pillar, the private sector development programme, included support for financing of the agricultural sector, support for the Youth Business Creation Support Fund, support for the enabling environment for entrepreneurship programme and support for a fund for the financing of agriculture value chains for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The evaluation finds that all three pillars were relevant to the context of Mali and notes that they were intended to support the peace process that was launched with the 2015 peace agreement of Algiers. The assumption was that a strengthened civil society would have a positive impact on peacebuilding and democratisation. Support for the private sector (especially in rural areas) would help to stabilise the country by developing economic opportunities for the population. Decentralisation was seen as one way of addressing political cleavages between regions.

The evaluation highlights the very difficult context in 2018, which was characterised by a rapidly worsening of the security situation, an increase in inter-community conflicts, political tension at the national level, a state in retreat in wide parts of the country and growing discontent of the population relating to the lack of security and protection, as well as a deficit of basic services such as justice, education and health. This deterioration of the security situation in central Mali led to the number of internally displaced persons increasing dramatically to almost 200,000 at the end of 2019. Mali also faced constant threats from a transnational Jihadist movement which has also used Mali as bridgehead to infiltrate Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin and even Nigeria. Intercommunal conflicts worsened, especially in central Mali. Climate change, demographic pressure and competition for scarce land fuelled intercommunal conflict. The human rights situation had been deteriorating continuously since 2012.

The evaluation also notes that Mali's economic growth was largely absorbed by high population growth. Human capital remained low, the literacy rate was around 30 percent and corruption was rampant. Conditions for the private sector were very challenging. Agriculture and livestock were the basic income activities of some 80 percent of the population, Subsistence farming was dominant, but in some zones cotton had become a source of income for small producers.

Although the report states that it is too early to assess the impacts of the three pillars on Denmark's development programme, there are some clear critical overtones. The report suggests that, by and large, the strategy may be too ambitious for the given context. For example, the report notes that UN Women, which is supported by Denmark, may not achieve its objectives because of a lack of government buy-in and leadership.

The report casts doubt on the effectiveness of the MINUSMA trust fund, which focuses on recovery and stabilisation projects. Its objective is to contribute to recovery and stabilisation in northern and central Mali, where insecurity makes it difficult to carry out long-term development projects. However, the report notes that stabilisation can only be achieved if state institutions are gradually redeployed and regain trust. Representatives of the subnational government complained that the government's role was not sufficiently highlighted by the projects of the MINUSMA trust fund, and that the selection of the projects did not reflect the priorities of the population.

With regard to decentralisation, the evaluation notes that little progress had been made in the preceding two years and that the programme may have been too ambitious. A cornerstone of the decentralisation agenda was an increase in the number of subnational units (regions and *cercles*), as promised by the 2015 peace agreement. However, this plan met resistance in the south, where it was seen as unfairly benefitting the north. As a result, there was little tangible progress.

The report also notes that there were difficulties in linking farmers to SMEs to build value chains, since SMEs are usually in the regional capitals and not connected to rural areas. The targets for creating small businesses by youth entrepreneurs are thought to be too ambitious, especially in categories such as “women’s businesses” and “green businesses”.

In general, the evaluation suspects that most programmes will be unable to deploy their full budgets because of low absorption capacities.

The evaluation proposes that Danida conduct a more in-depth analysis of the conflict situation, including transnational and regional aspects of conflict. Such an analysis would enable the development of effective prevention policies and make an important contribution to conflict-sensitive approaches to the entire project cycle (analysis, design, planning, implementation, evaluation, output).

Looking ahead, the report suggests that unused or new funds should be earmarked for contribution to the WFP (World Food Programme) and the humanitarian / development nexus, for strengthening the resilience of internally displaced people.

Switzerland – Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development SDC (2020)

SDC (2020) evaluates Switzerland’s country strategy for Mali between 2017 and 2020. The main objective is to assess the relevance and coherence of the strategy in relation to Mali’s national development priorities. The evaluation also discusses the performance of the portfolio in relation to overall developments in the country. It does so by examining reports provided by the programmes and projects. It is therefore not an independent evaluation of outcomes and impacts. The overall focus of SDC (2020) is on the strategy orientation of the portfolio, not on its impacts.

The main objective of Swiss aid to Mali was to provide support for sustainable economic development and for better participation of the population in political processes, thus contributing to better living conditions, social cohesion and peace. The strategy rested on three pillars. The first pillar was rural development and food security. Agriculture accounts for 39 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs 65 percent of the economically active population. SDC supported farmers' organisations, provided support to value chains for potatoes and milk, and helped to introduce a new agricultural land law which should make secure land ownership easier. The second pillar, education and vocational training, was seen as relevant due to the low adult and youth literacy rate, low training of primary school teachers and the young and growing population in need of labour market qualifications. The third pillar was governance and peace. Here the focus was on regional and local planning processes, elections and, especially, on support for civil society based on facilitating exchanges and networks between existing home-grown groups that demand accountability from the state. Two cross-cutting issues were identified as important for the portfolio: gender and governance.

During the period reviewed, Swiss aid to Mali amounted to USD 37m annually, of which around 20 percent funded humanitarian aid and the rest went towards development projects.

The strategy was based on a context and scenario analysis, which in turn was supported by MERV: an analytical tool for monitoring development-related changes. For the evaluated period, Mali's most likely scenario was assumed to be "Mali in waiting". This scenario denotes a middle ground between a stabilised Mali and a Mali in deep crisis. However, the deterioration of the security situation in 2019 prompted the evaluation team to suggest that a more likely scenario would be "Mali in deep crisis". It was also suggested that development cooperation should acknowledge the possibility of more shocks, that scenarios should be adjusted, that the portfolio should be stress-tested and that options for managing programmes remotely should be explored.

The context analysis pointed out that there was a deep crisis of trust between the government and the population, and that armed groups exploited the grievances of the local population towards a government which often acted as predator towards its own population and lacked the capacity to provide services and security in large parts of the country. Rebuilding this trust was seen as a crucial objective, but it would be a herculean task as long as the government remained part of the problem. Switzerland worked with the government and with civil society and the private sector on the causes of the conflicts, which were seen as mainly linked to a major governance deficit at various levels.

The report stresses that in the context of Mali, a key challenge was to manage the nexus between humanitarian aid and development cooperation pragmatically and creatively, by: maintaining a long-term commitment to the country; systematically involving local actors – including government actors (often from subnational government) – in the planning and implementation of support processes, precisely to strengthen trust between the population and the government; and focusing on initiatives strengthening dialogue and peace.

Swiss aid was mainly implemented by private sector partners and/or by national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Noteworthy is that Switzerland used sectoral and decentralised budget support, in line with Mali's prominent decentralisation agenda. Unfortunately, the report provides very few details on how decentralised budget support was implemented and on whether this aid modality was effective.

As mentioned above, the evaluation is not well placed to assess effectiveness, outcomes and impacts, since its only sources are internal reports from the projects, all of which rated the projects and programmes as satisfactory. However, the evaluation also notes that despite tangible results at the project level, there were no "satisfactory footprints in the achievement of Mali's outcomes" meaning that a "relatively good performance of the Swiss portfolio in 2017 and 2018 was counterbalanced by a worrying erosion of the country context". (SDC 2020: 46 my translation).

Summaries of Multilateral Country Portfolio Evaluations

IFAD (2013)

This International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) country programme evaluation covers the period 2007–2012. During this period, IFAD implemented five projects: (i) Sahelian Zone Development Fund Programme (FODESA); (ii) Northern Mali Regions Investment and Rural Development Programme (PIDRN); (iii) Kidal Region Integrated Rural Development Programme (PIDRK); (iv) Rural Microfinance Programme (PMR); (v) Agricultural Productivity Improvement Project (PAPAM).

IFAD programmes targeted rural development. They strove for impacts on household income and assets, human and social capital, food security and agricultural productivity. Typical activities under the IFAD programmes entailed supporting agricultural production, increasing the productivity of farms in the production of rice, dry cereals, market gardening, fodder and animal production, improving the health coverage of livestock, establishing savings and micro credit banks, helping to build small infrastructure in village through micro-financing, building rural roads, supporting farmers' organisations and strengthening the capacities of actors (for example, by providing training in literacy and farm accounting, and technical training on specific committee activities). In a nutshell, IFAD supported integrated rural development.

The main objective of the evaluation is to assess the performance of the project portfolio in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation is based on a desk review and primary data and information collected through individual interviews, focus group discussions, mini-surveys and case studies.

The evaluation report notes that the resurgence of violence in 2012 had a distinct negative impact, especially on the projects in the north, where security deteriorated rapidly. Despite this unfavourable situation, the evaluation is quite upbeat.

The overall relevance of the portfolio was deemed satisfactory. With regard to efficiency, however, the evaluation notes that performance was rather unsatisfactory. Operating costs were found to be much higher than planned, and only about half of the planned infrastructure was actually built. This was due to physical implementation rates being lower than expected, significant increases in implementation and management costs, and conflict in the northern regions.

Effectiveness was rated as fairly satisfactory for livestock farming: significant results in relation to the objectives were achieved in the areas of grazing land, pasture restoration and animal health. Good results were observed in the training of elected officials and civil servants of local authorities and decentralised governmental technical services in areas such as land planning and budgeting.

The impact is assessed as quite satisfactory: the most significant elements were the reduction in child malnutrition rates and the strengthened capacities of local authorities and decentralised government services, which resulted in better relations between elected officials and villages. However, the evaluation notes that as these conclusions are based on the programme's own data, which only provide a pre-post test but no comparison group, the results should be interpreted with some caution.

The evaluation also notes that cooperation with the government of Mali improved compared to the situation before 2007, and that local government improved its capacities.

In sum, it seems that rural development was reasonably effective. Of interest is the observation that capacity building and training for government officials at the subnational level in technical fields related to rural development was effective.

IEG (2015)

IEG (2015) is a review by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group of two World Bank programmes for Mali: the Mali Country Assistance Strategy 2008–2011 and the Interim Strategy Note for the years 2014–2015.

Activities under both programmes aimed to promote rapid and broadly based growth with an emphasis on the development of the rural sector, to be achieved by improving access to electricity, credit and road quality, and also to strengthen public sector performance, with an emphasis on budgetary practices, basic education and maternal health.

The evaluation report finds that all programmes were relevant and aligned with Mali's priorities.

In terms of overall results, the report finds the achievements of both the Country Assistance Strategy 2008–2011 and the Interim Strategy Note for the years 2014–2015 were unsatisfactory, and that most objectives were not achieved.

For the period 2008–2011, the report sees relatively positive results in terms of the quality of the road network (the percentage of roads of good quality increased from 35 percent in 2007 to 64.8 percent in 2011), and in better access to electricity, including in rural areas. The report also notes improved access to and quality of HIV/AIDS-related services. Additionally, some progress was achieved in aid harmonisation.

By contrast, objectives were not achieved in the important fields of higher productivity in rural development and poverty reduction, one of the pillars of the Bank's development strategy for Mali. Also not achieved were objectives relating to improved public financial management and reform of the budgetary process, including decentralisation and procurement.

For the period 2014–2015, some objectives were met in maternal health, quality of roads and access to electricity. The report also notes that the introduction of cash vouchers in rural development was a useful innovation and increased efficiency.

By contrast, objectives were not achieved in governance reforms, management of public resources and fiscal decentralisation.

The report notes that the strategy for the period under review was overambitious, too broad and lacked focus. It was unrealistic in its objective to “target the long-term drivers of the crisis” in the context of a two-year programme.

The report also notes that the World Bank overestimated the government of Mali's capacity and political will for institutional reform, which were necessary prerequisites for meeting the objectives laid out in the country strategy.

The report suggests that instead of trying to achieve an overly broad set of objectives, the country strategy should have focused on very few, carefully selected priorities. As its capacities were very limited, the government of Mali was overwhelmed by the broad and unrealistic reform agenda pursued by the World Bank group.

WFP Mali Country Portfolio (2018)

WFP (2018) is an evaluation of the World Food Programme's portfolio in Mali between 2013 and 2017. Mali had been classified as requiring a WFP Level 2 regional emergency response since January 2012 because of drought; after March 2012, was classified as experiencing an emergency resulting from political unrest. With the start of the 2012 emergency, WFP activities increased dramatically, peaking in 2014 when expenditures were almost seven times higher than in the previous year. Between 2013 and 2018, the annual WFP portfolio had an average value of about USD 60m. WFP assisted an average of approximately 1.3 million beneficiaries

per year through in-kind food and cash-based assistance, school feeding, nutrition activities and food assistance.

The evaluation is based on a desk review and on 115 interviews with stakeholders, including representatives of WFP, the government, donors, beneficiaries and implementation partners. The main limitation to the evaluation mission was insecurity in the field, which limited access to regions beyond the urban centres.

The report finds that WFP provided a coherent response to country needs, initially through an emergency operation and from 2015 through a protracted relief and recovery operation that integrated the ongoing emergency response. Stakeholders perceived WFP's comparative advantages as its capacity to manage supply chains and distribute cash-based transfers at scale.

With regard to results, the report is rather upbeat but refers mainly to outputs and notes that robust assessment of impacts was impossible.

The report notes that despite being underfunded, WFP was able to assist more than 80 percent of intended beneficiaries. Thanks to increased local purchases and a move towards cash-based transfers, the overall efficiency of WFP's operations appears to have increased.

Some of the positive results were:

- WFP's school feeding programme had positive effects on net enrolment and on continued school attendance.
- In conflict areas in the north, prevention of malnutrition was relatively successful.
- WFP successfully provided support to farmers through direct purchases of their produce and support for their marketing activities.
- The increased use of cash-based transfers (for example, for school feeding and for nutrition support) increased overall efficiency.
- Food assistance for assets (FFA) was seen as effective and as a promising way to address root causes of needs. FFA combines initiatives addressing immediate food needs (such as cash, voucher or food transfers) by means of initiatives aimed at increasing resilience over time (for example, by providing assets such as irrigation channels, flood protection or home gardens). The report notes that focus group discussions with beneficiaries highlighted a preference for FFA over food distributions and a high level of appreciation of a mix of in-kind food assistance and cash transfers. However, the report also states that no robust evaluation of the long-term outcomes of FFA activities was carried out.

Capacity development was less effective. WFP supported the government of Mali through the collection of data, work on core policies and technical guidance, and the implementation of government policies, including those for social protection. However, 90 percent of the planned

activities did not take place and the national capacity indexes for both school feeding and the food security programme were below target.

The report recommends that WFP identify more cost-effective methods of gathering and analysing information on food-insecure and vulnerable households, using recent developments in mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping. Also, WFP should assess the potential for using vouchers in remote areas and e-transfers via mobile phone in urban areas that are usually assisted with vouchers.

WFP Lessons Learned Sahel (2019)

WFP (2019) is a synthesis of evaluations of four World Food Programmes in the Sahel, designed to reduce moderate acute malnutrition in the Sahel. All the evaluations were conducted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE). Here, only the results from the evaluation which took place in Mali are reported.

The Mali evaluation investigated the impacts of general food distribution and school feeding on populations in conflict-affected areas. It relied on a longitudinal study of a population in the Mopti region. The population was subdivided according to i) the extent of humanitarian assistance received since conflict; and ii) the extent to which areas were affected by conflict. Data was collected through two household surveys in 2012 and 2017. The evaluation found no significant effects of food assistance on the prevalence of malnutrition in the population surveyed. However, all forms of assistance were found to have increased vitamin A consumption and monthly expenditure on food and non-food.

UN Women (2019)

ONU Femmes (2019) is UN Women's country portfolio evaluation for the 2014–2017 period. During that period, the allocated budget was USD 10.53m, and the executed budget was USD 7.17m.

UN Women Mali had five focus areas: women's political participation, gender-responsive budgeting, women's economic empowerment, elimination of gender-based violence (GBV), and women's involvement in peace and security processes. The last three items accounted for 96 percent of the allocated budget. During the assessed period, the main funders for UN Women were UNDP and Sweden.

The evaluation is based on a desk review and on 71 interviews and 14 focus groups. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess relevance, review the strategic positioning, assess the efficiency and effectiveness of UN Women's efforts for gender equality and assess to what extent the work plan for 2014–2018 had been executed.

This long, upbeat report is very light on robust insight into outcomes and impacts. The evaluation also notes that although internal data collection for monitoring and evaluation was mostly “acceptable”, there were no baseline studies and no indicators for several flagship programmes, which made it impossible to assess outcomes.

According to UN Women's own reporting, most of the planned activities were not implemented. The achievement rates per impact area (*taux des réalisations des domaines d'impact*) range between 11 and 38 percent.

The evaluation also notes that the context in which UN Women operated was not conducive for success: “religious, cultural, security and administrative factors have not been favourable” (ONU Femme 2019: 14, my translation). Effectiveness was also hampered by high staff turnover, short-term contracts, the government’s limited capacity, a lack of ownership among politicians and citizens, and socio-cultural constraints that restrict women's roles to the private sphere.

The evaluation reports that the work of the UN Women (Mali) Office was most significant in relation to its normative and coordination mandates, i.e. in building all stakeholders’ capacity to ensure a gender dimension in national laws and policies, advocating for gender mainstreaming in national development strategies, and fostering strategic linkages with implementing partners, including key ministerial departments involved in implementing a national gender policy. The evaluation points to the adoption of a law providing for a 30 percent quota as the minimum representation of women in elected or appointed positions.¹

UN Women also helped establish a toll-free number to report cases of GBV, but usage and impact of this project is not reported.

In 2015, the activities of the Budget Monitoring Group supported by UN Women (Mali) played a catalytic role in ensuring that women’s needs were taken into account in the government's budget.

UN Women also lobbied for more meaningful participation of women in peace and security. At the 2015 Algiers peace talks, women's participation was extremely low (around 4 percent). UN Women launched training programmes for some 40 women peace builders, but representation of women in various peace mechanisms – DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration), SSR (security sector reform) and others – remained extremely low, at around 3 percent.

UN Women pushed for the creation of gender focal points in ministries involved in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Women, Peace and Security), but there appeared to have been little buy-in from the ministries.

In sum, while this evaluation cannot provide insights into effectiveness, outcome and impacts, it appears that the overall context has made it difficult to make tangible progress, with the possible

¹ In 2021, 29 percent of MPs were women, which indicates that the law has been implemented.

exception of more gender-equal legislation which may help to foster transformational change in the future.

AfDB (2020)

AfDB (2020) is an evaluation of the strategy and programmes of the African Development Bank (AfDB) in Mali over the period 2005–2019. During that period, the Bank allocated approximately USD 728m (of which 15 percent as grants). Agricultural and multi-sector operations (mostly related to services such as water, irrigation, and energy) accounted for 58.7 percent of the above amounts, on average.

The portfolio was assembled to address drivers of fragility, and the Bank's strategy was to focus on supporting the country's economic growth by establishing an enabling business environment, building the capacity of the rural communities and developing basic socio-economic infrastructure (hydro-agricultural schemes, energy, roads, schools, water and sanitation facilities, etc.).

The evaluation is mainly based on a desk review and on 44 interviews. The report notes that no reliable monitoring and evaluation data was available, which made it difficult to assess efficiency and impacts. Owing to insecurity and travel restrictions, the evaluation team did not have access to project sites to collect primary data from beneficiaries.

The evaluation finds that the portfolio was relevant and in line with the people's needs and the government's expectations. However, it also notes that the Bank did not pay enough attention to supporting the private sector, which is seen as a missed opportunity. The evaluation notes that in a context where the state is fragile, lacks capacity and is confronted with high levels of corruption, non-state actors provide a strategic opportunity to achieve sustainable economic growth.

In general, the programmes' effectiveness was assessed to be low. Most performance indicators were not met. Effectiveness was seen as especially low in the water and sanitation and social sectors.

The evaluation also notes that "fifteen years of State capacity-building prevented its collapse, but this did not bring about inclusive growth" (AfDB 2020: 22). The Bank's interventions helped to alleviate the humanitarian emergency in 2013 and provided important support to livelihoods through agricultural operations and credits. Its budget support helped to restore fragile state capacity, but "building State capacity (...) is inadequate to create inclusive growth in Mali. Although over 30 years of Bank assistance in this option prevented the collapse of the State, the results of development operations are not significant". (AfDB 2020: 24).

The evaluation notes that some positive results were achieved in building local capacity in the sectors of agricultural, energy, and water and sanitation, but also notes that capacity at the level of the central government remains weak. Weak state capacities are also seen as one important

barrier preventing better results. The evaluation also notes that the Bank needs to improve its monitoring and evaluation capacities.

Regrettably, despite the unusually long evaluation period (2005–2019), the evaluation report does not investigate how changes in the context (for example, before and after the outbreak of violence) affected aid effectiveness.

UNDP (2020)

UNDP (2020) is an evaluation of the first three years of UNDP's country programme 2015–2019. During the period covered, 2015 to early 2018, UNDP spent on average around USD 40.5m a year.

UNDP's programme in Mali was intended to contribute to the following four outcomes: 1) strengthening security, peace and national reconciliation, 2) inclusive growth and sustainable development, 3) the promotion of good governance, and 4) access to quality basic social services.

Actual expenditures between 2015 and 2017 were USD 46.5m for health services, USD 32m for poverty reduction, USD 31.3m for governance and USD 9.5 for peace and social cohesion.

The evaluation is based on a desk review, some field visits and approximately 80 interviews conducted with staff of the UNDP Mali country office, representatives and staff of the authorities and government institutions at central and local levels, officials and staff of other United Nations organisations, as well as development partners, civil society organisations and beneficiaries.

The report notes that the UNDP country programme and its implementing agencies suffer from a lack of data, and that the evaluation team therefore had to analyse some aspects of UNDP performance on the basis of incomplete data.

Generally, the evaluation report expresses concerns about the quality of UNDPs programmes in Mali. It notes that UNDP's programme in Mali was thematically and geographically scattered, which suggests a lack of coherent strategy and raises concerns about effective implementation and monitoring of results.

UNDP's position in Mali was unclear to many, which affected its ability to collaborate with development partners. Coordination and joint activities with UN and other development partners were deemed to be largely insufficient. Weaknesses in programme monitoring and project data collection negatively affected UNDP's capacity to address bottlenecks and implementation risks in time. Furthermore, the security context in northern and central Mali constituted an important obstacle for development projects, but risk-mitigation strategies and responses were insufficient to effectively manage the risks. The report also notes that UNDP was limited in its capacity to implement and monitor projects at the local level. Finally, the report notes that activities linked to reintegration and rehabilitation of displaced persons were not implemented.

The evaluation report is also quite critical of the results achieved. Under the “strengthening security, peace and social cohesion” label, UNDP mainly supported the work of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR). The report is fairly critical of the effectiveness of the CVJR, noting that its results remain limited and that the prevalence of inter- and intra-community conflicts remains high. It concludes that the results were insufficient to address deeply rooted causes of conflict at the community level. In addition, the commission's work remained relatively unknown among the wider population.

Other activities under this label were directed at creating awareness and providing training focused on conflict prevention and resolution at community level. The report finds that it is questionable whether the interventions implemented by UNDP were sufficient to achieve the goal of promoting social cohesion and a culture of peace.

Under the label of “inclusive and sustainable growth”, UNDP supported agricultural capacities and economic resilience, including the development of value chains (production and transformation of mango, shea and gum arabic). While some results were achieved, the report doubts the sustainability of the results. Given the programme's stated objective of contributing to resilience of the most vulnerable people in rural areas and to reducing inequalities, the report doubts that the interventions were adequate to achieve the desired results.

At the central level, UNDP supported the government's efforts to better coordinate and manage development aid. It did so through the establishment of the country's new development framework, by supporting economic policy formulation and planning, and by assisting business climate reform efforts. However, poverty rates remained high despite several years of economic growth, and the report questions whether economic policies were effectively implemented and whether economic growth in Mali was inclusive.

Under the label “governance”, UNDP implemented projects aimed at the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure for the government in the north of Mali, which had been largely destroyed during the violence after 2013. But not all the built or rehabilitated infrastructure was functional, and because the security situation remained critical in some localities, the public servants assigned to them had rarely occupied the reconstructed buildings. UNDP was also active in providing support to the elections of 2013 and 2016, and the report assesses UNDP's contributions to the elections as effective and essential.

Other activities under the label of “governance” were support to the country's justice sector, the training of police forces on human rights, and rehabilitation efforts in justice sector infrastructure, including several prisons. The evaluation report does not provide an assessment of results of these activities.

Under the label of “health”, UNDP played an important role in mobilising significant resources for the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, the pace at which treatment of HIV infections progressed is assessed to be not sufficient.

Gender equality was a cross-cutting issue. The evaluation notes that some results were achieved (for example, improved access to health for women), but cautions that these results

did not constitute real transformational change and were not yet adequate to address the socio-economic and cultural barrier to gender equality in Mali. The report states that “the country still lacks (...) a willingness to (...) ensure that gender dialogue takes place at all levels of society. These are issues of a magnitude too important to hope for results through limited and fragmented interventions” (UNDP 2020: 22).

Summaries of Sectoral Programme Evaluations

Budget Support 2003–2009 (2011)

Évaluation conjointe (2011) is a joint evaluation by the European Commission, Belgium and Canada of budget aid to Mali between 2003 and 2009. During that period, budget support amounted to USD 1.18 bn. At its peak in 2009, the share of budget support of total Official Development Assistance (ODA) was 42 percent. The main question that the evaluation seeks to answer is to what extent budget support succeeded in providing the government with the means necessary to implement its national and sectoral development strategies and, as a consequence, to attain sustainable development outcomes and impacts.

The evaluation is generally very positive. It notes that budget support permitted a substantial increase in discretionary spending. Budget support was used to strengthen macroeconomic stability and increase spending in the priority sectors. Although it was not possible to attribute observed trends directly to budget support, the evaluation notes that during the evaluation period, GDP grew by about 5 percent per annum, poverty incidence fell, enrolment rates in basic education increased and outcome indicators in the health sector showed significant improvement. The report suggests that the observed level of progress in health and education would not have been possible without budget support.

Budget support also proved to be a modality which ensured alignment between donors and the priorities of the government and offered an opportunity for donor coordination and policy dialogue. The modality was also seen as having very low transaction costs. Budget support also offered opportunities to apply conditionality. However, the evaluation identified no clear-cut examples of policy changes or of accelerated implementation of policies resulting from budget support conditionality. By contrast, several examples were identified of policy inconsistencies and increased transaction costs generated by conditionality.

The evaluation concludes that

“Budget support – sectoral or general – is effective when its primary objective is to finance and monitor the implementation of a given policy. It is much less effective when its primary objective is to change a given policy or to adapt its contents, through the means of conditionality. Thus, budget support functions best as a means of supporting a well-established national policy, for which there is a clear and coherent political commitment and for which implementation structures are in place, or can easily be

established. When these essential elements are not in place, it is difficult, if not impossible, to create them through budget support” (Évaluation conjointe 2011: 11).

Multi-Donor Trust Fund FNSES (2015)

The *Fonds National de stabilisation économique et sociale* (national economic and social stabilisation fund FNSES) was created in February 2013. It was intended to be a stop-gap measure for mitigating the effects of the donors' decisions to end direct budget support in reaction to the political and security crisis in March 2012. The fund was planned to have a lifespan of only two years, but in the end was decommissioned after only five years, in 2018.

The evaluation by Ponty and Keita (2015) assesses the relevance, efficiency and early results of the fund, which had existed for only two years when their evaluation took place. During these first two years, the main contributors to the fund were Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark. One of the fund's main objectives was to rapidly mobilise resources. During the assessed period, the fund attracted USD 43.4m, which is a relatively modest amount, given the crisis in Mali. The FNSES portfolio was concentrated in three sectors: health (44.4 percent), education (34.4 percent) and rural development / agriculture (14.1 percent). Its main activities were the distribution of goods such as school supplies and equipment in the education sector, drugs, vaccines, medical consumables and equipment in the health sector, and seeds and fertilisers in the rural development sector.

The FNSE's financial execution rate was 85.8 percent. Despite this high execution rate, only about 60 percent of the planned activities were carried out, mainly because a lack of security impeded implementation in some regions, but also because buy-in from ministries in sectors such as “justice” and “security” was low.

The report notes that the fund had met its primary objectives by quickly mobilising funds from donors. The fund was set up for financing goods and services at the central and regional levels, and donors could decide which activities they wanted to fund.

With regard to impacts, the evaluation notes that the fund helped displaced farmers to return to their villages and to increase agricultural production. The fund was also credited with improving access and quality of education, strengthening the health system and reducing maternal, infant and neonatal morbidity and mortality.

Since most activities of the fund consisted of providing goods, the impact was assumed to be short-term.

Child Health: UNICEF (2019)

UNICEF (2019) is an evaluation of UNICEF's integrated approach to child health in the two regions of Mopti and Sikasso in Mali, implemented between 2015 and 2019.

UNICEFs "integrated approach" consisted of seven integrated fields: health, nutrition, child protection, education, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), social inclusion and intersectoral support. Despite this broad approach, the main focus was on health and nutrition. Chronic malnutrition, prevalent in the two target regions of Mopti and Sikasso, was used as an entry point. Nutrition activities were combined with interventions in health, water and sanitation, education and food security in order to promote a preventive, multisectoral and integrated approach to contribute to reducing morbidity and mortality of children under five and strengthening their physical and cognitive development. Important immediate goals of this intervention package were reducing risk factors for maternal and neonatal mortality, preventing diseases through immunisation, supporting community-based approaches to school readiness, increasing drinking water and sanitation coverage, strengthening education systems at community level, and improving the governance framework for child protection at community level.

The evaluation is based on a desk review as well as interviews and focus groups. Unfortunately, it does not provide insights into effectiveness, outcomes and impacts. According to the evaluation, the main reasons for this is that "the system for monitoring the implemented activities and the data collected to provide information on the evaluation of the results obtained is inadequate. Furthermore, the baseline studies (...) did not always inform the interventions (...). Some parts of the analysis were therefore difficult, such as the effectiveness of the interventions, while others were not possible, such as efficiency" (UNICEF 2019:iv). Furthermore, the evaluation notes that UNICEF apparently did not "include an exhaustive mapping of activities carried out per intervention site as well as a detailed list of stakeholders. (...) Key people and actors who had been involved in the design and implementation of the integrated approach could not be consulted". (UNICEF 2019:iv).

It is somewhat surprising to see that such a massive programme did not collect usable data from the purpose of monitoring and evaluation; it is also surprising that the evaluation team did not find a way to conduct at least a rudimentary assessment of outcomes and impacts.

Capacity Building in Child Health, Education and Protection: UNICEF (2019)

UNICEF (2020) is an evaluation of UNICEFs programming for capacity building in sectors related to health, education and protection of children. This was a crucial component of UNICEFs country strategy in Mali. The programme's beneficiaries were boys and girls aged 0-59 months, children aged 3-18 years, pregnant and lactating women, families and communities

living in rural and disadvantaged areas, and implementing organisations, including national and subnational governments.

The programme was implemented between 2015 and 2019, and its total budget was USD 334.8m. It focused on five fields relevant to child welfare: immunisation of children; combating chronic malnutrition; learning outcomes of children in school; combating forced child marriage; and eliminating open defecation.

Among the aspects the evaluation set out to assess were the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme and its impact on the partners' achievements in relation to training and capacity building. It focuses on f Sikasso and Gao regions and the capital district of Bamako.

The evaluation is based on a desk review, 89 stakeholder interviews, 17 focus groups and a survey among beneficiaries.

The programme provided financial support and, especially, capacity building and training for individuals, communities, organisations and institutions. Among the target groups were representatives from national and subnational governments as well as civil society organisations and community-level organisations.

The programme was implemented via a plethora of implementing partners, including the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family, the Ministry of Energy and Water, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of the Environment, Sanitation and Sustainable Development, and very many international and national NGOs and UN agencies such as WHO, WFP and UNAIDS.

Efficiency is mainly assessed by budget execution rates, which range between 85 percent in the field of malnutrition to 47 percent in the field of child protection and forced marriage.

Effectiveness is mainly assessed by the extent to which output targets for one year (2018 to 2019) were met: for example, how many health facilities were operational, how many health facilities provided paediatric antivirals, how many children were admitted to a health facility, etc. These statistics tell us little about immediate outcomes or even impacts. Despite this, the evaluation report states that “the training, financial support, logistics, awareness raising assistance, advocacy and capacity development activities had an impact in terms of improved knowledge, skills and performance of direct beneficiaries” (UNICEF 2019: 45, my translation).

The report also notes that among the obstacles which reduced effectiveness were persistent instability and insecurity in the north and rising food insecurity, which increased the number of malnourished children.

Finally, the report finds that the level of ownership of partners in national and subnational administration is high, but it warns that continued financial support of UNICEF remains necessary.

Stabilisation: Peacebuilding Fund Mali (2019)

PBF (2019) is an evaluation of the UN's Peacebuilding Fund activities in Mali between 2014 and 2019. The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is the United Nations Secretary-General's fund designed to meet immediate needs in conflict and post-conflict countries. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess PBF's results and analyse the portfolio's overall added value to peacebuilding in the country. The evaluation is based on a desk review and remote data collection which included interviewing around 140 stakeholders in Bamako and Gao. In addition, a sample of five projects was analysed, using supplementary qualitative and quantitative data.

The evaluation encountered several obstacles which limited its findings. For security reasons, only the urban centre of Gao was accessible. Rural areas were out of reach. Furthermore, there was no data available at portfolio level, such as strategic results frameworks with relevant base and endline data.

Between 2014 and 2019, the PBF disbursed USD 35.7m through 20 projects implemented by UN agencies, funds and programmes, and civil society organisations, in close collaboration with MINUSMA. The focus was predominantly on the northern regions of Gao and Tombouctou, as these two regions appeared to be the hardest hit of the accessible regions. According to the report, the rationale was to provide tangible results for populations having suffered from armed conflict and occupation. PBF projects thus aimed at restoring basic services such as education, water and sanitation, and health services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Other focus areas were access to economic opportunities, durable solutions for displaced people and returnees, and increased security through the cantonment of ex-combatants. All projects were accompanied by fostering dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms.

The report notes the lack of data for analysing the overall outcomes of the portfolio. In order to compensate for this, the report draws on an analysis of five selected projects. The criteria of effectiveness, impact and sustainability are assessed on the basis of these five projects, which were implemented in northern Mali, in Gao and Tombouctou regions. Most of these projects had strong youth and/or gender components and promoted community dialogue to foster social cohesion across the communities affected by the conflict.

The sampled projects were (1) a project on cantonment for former combatants (2) a peace education project, (3) a project on sustainable reintegration, (4) a project on women and gender-based violence, and (5) a project on capacities and conflict resilience of women and youth. These projects were evaluated using quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection tools included document review, a small online survey, qualitative semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions and observations in project areas.

The report notes that most projects in the portfolio followed a "peace dividend approach", meaning that they focused on re-establishing services which were not accessible during the war. The report finds that such an approach appears justified for the first phase of the Peacebuilding Fund's engagement in Mali following the 2013 Ouagadougou Preliminary Accord and the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord. However, it also notes that for a second phase, it would

have been more relevant to strategically use interventions that explicitly address root causes of conflict. The report does not say what interventions would have been best suited to this end. However, it provides a list of key drivers of conflict, among them: a cumulative deficit of governance in the socio-political, economic and security realms; the frustrations of the northern and central population regarding the failure of the government, of public administration and of the security forces; the inability of the state to establish and enforce rules uniformly, which perpetuates favouritism, corruption and abuses of all kinds; and an increased radicalisation of segments of the society.

Overall, the evaluation finds that overarching outcomes of the portfolio were mostly not achieved, and that the portfolio did little to contribute to more conflict resolution and dialogue capacities.

With regard to the five projects that were selected for a more in-depth analysis, the report finds the following.

Cantonment

This project built three cantonment sites for members of armed groups in line with the Ouagadougou Preliminary Peace Agreement of 2013, for a total cost of just under USD 3m. The cantonment sites were finished – after substantial delay – in 2016, but up to the publication date of the evaluation report in 2019 they had not been used, due to overall delays in the DDR process. The report rightly notes that this raises serious questions about value for money. Even more worrisome, the report states that the overall DDR process might have produced unintended negative consequences. It appears that the DDR process contributed to the assumption that there were potential benefits associated with being a member of an armed group. This would explain the drastic increase in people to be covered by the process. The report states that while initial estimates put the number of fighters at 10,000 for each of the two armed movements, both groups later announced a need to include 17,000 former fighters in the process, which suggests that a substantial number of young people had subsequently joined the armed groups in the hope of receiving benefits.

Peace education

Under the peace education project (Projet de l'éducation pour la consolidation de la paix au Nord du Mali) USD 2.5m was given to UNICEF Mali. Under this programme, some 4000 children and youth who had never attended school or had to interrupt schooling were trained, with the expectation they would be reintegrated into the school system. The report notes that “the long-term impact of this component on conflict prevention is difficult to ascertain, the short-term benefit, however, signalling a return to normalcy after the end of the occupation in these areas is evident” (PBF 2019:25). Furthermore, the capacities of 1700 teachers in the Gao and Tombouctou regions relating to conflict resolution were strengthened and 93,000 children participated in peace education activities. It is not clear what the outcomes or impacts of this project were. Finally, the programme supported school boards consisting of representatives of teachers, students and parents that served as an entry point to strengthen governance and

conflict resolution mechanisms in the education sector. Here too it is unclear what the outcomes or impacts of this project were.

Reintegration of displaced persons

This programme provided UNHCR and IOM each with USD 1.25m, with the objective of providing support for the reintegration of returnees (internally displaced persons and refugees) in the regions of Gao and Tombouctou. There were several activities under this programme. One component provided training in conflict management for 240 people (78 women), sensitisation campaigns through radio and workshops, and cultural and sports activities that brought together diverse communities. However, the report notes that little effort was made to sustain these individual level attitudinal changes and transform them into institutional practices.

Another component consisted in material support (computers, printers, solar panels, motor bikes, office furniture etc.) and capacity development for local authorities in dealing with displaced people. The report notes that it was difficult to ascertain the project's impact.

A third component provided income-generating activities for 615 people, and a fourth component provided 15 water access points, built 30 troughs for livestock, supported five water management committees and rebuilt a secondary school in the urban community of Gao. The report provides no information on this programme's outcomes or impacts.

Resilience of women and youth

This project provided a total of USD 2.6m to UNDP and UNIDO. 84 percent of the budget was dedicated to economic recovery. As is apparent from the outcome formulation, women and youth were the main target groups for this project. In this way, it rested on the assumption that women and youth, as the primary victims of conflict, should be treated with priority for socio-economic recovery activities. According to the final report, a total of 49 income-generating activities were financed, benefitting 421 women; 15 women's groups benefitted from equipment and 80 business plans were financed. In addition, almost 200 young people received basic vocational training (electricity, masonry, plumbing, etc.) and 200 young people were engaged in labour-intensive projects. According to the end of project report, only 30 percent of the beneficiaries of these projects could increase their revenue. Besides this, it is unclear what were the outcome and impacts of these projects.

Gender-based violence

Under this project, USD 1.85m was given to UN Women and UNFPA. According to the report, the project achieved some institutional and normative changes. A draft law on GBV was supported through capacity development and advocacy. In addition, the project strengthened the penal chain (police, paralegals, magistrates etc.) in regard to the prosecution of SGBV, resulting in an increase in cases that were brought to justice: 329 SGBV cases, including 157 cases of sexual violence were filed in courts during the project, compared to seven at the start date of the project. Also supported was the drafting of a National Police Action Plan to combat

GBV. Furthermore, the project supported capacity building of institutions and organisations which come in contact with GBV survivors, among them 30 state services, 76 midwives, 120 members of *Cases de paix*, 11 victim organisations, 80 religious and traditional leaders, as well as media representatives. In addition, 289 emergency kits to treat GBV survivors were distributed to hospitals and health centres. Finally, the project provided support for the drafting of a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325. This led to the creation of a subcommission on gender in the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) in 2014.

While the evaluation notes that these contributions to institutional and normative changes were clearly positive, there is no further information on these initiatives' tangible outcomes or impacts. For example, it is unclear to what extent capacities were indeed strengthened (as opposed to merely providing training), whether the subcommission on gender in the TCVJR was effective, or to what extent the national action plan led to a more meaningful inclusion of women in issues of security.

As noted above, most of these projects had a dialogue and conflict resolution component. In order to assess the overall effectiveness of this component, the programme commissioned a survey among 800 respondents. The report provides little information on the methods of the survey, but notes that it did not include a control group made up of respondents from areas where PBF projects were not implemented. The survey thus captures general trends rather than the project's impact or lack thereof. The main results of the survey were as follows. While a substantial percentage of people engaged in a conflict did use dialogue or conflict resolution mechanisms (Timbuktu: 79 percent and Gao: 72 percent), only about a quarter were satisfied with the work of these mechanisms. Worse, the level of satisfaction fell between 2014 and 2016.

Confidence in the capacities of the communities to deal with conflict also decreased, and local administrators and informal community leaders reported low confidence in the capacity of conflict resolution mechanisms (Timbuktu: 20 percent, Gao: 14 percent in 2016).

Finally, according to these interviews, 10 percent of beneficiaries of a DDR project rejoined armed groups. This is partly attributed to the DDR process and widespread expectations regarding potential benefits.

In sum, this report offers little evidence on the effectiveness of various peacebuilding interventions. It notes that most projects in the portfolio focused more on alleviating socio-economic consequences of conflict rather than addressing socio-political root causes of the conflict which may, according to the report, limit the possibility for preventing future conflicts. The report notes that

“a deeper analysis of the security and political elements of these (radical) groups is needed (...). For example, in some villages, jihadists are perceived as the guarantors of security and even stability, which the state seems unable to provide. Their control has gained ground and their management methods have given them a certain degree of credibility with local populations. In such a context, holistic approaches combining

military action with social, political and economic measures are necessary if one hopes to address root causes and make a lasting contribution to peacebuilding” (PBF 2019: 8).

The report also notes that in 2019, the overall prospect for peace in Mali looked even less promising than in 2014. The report notes that “there is significant delay in implementing the 2015 Peace Agreement. Meanwhile, we witness the continuing deterioration of inter-community relations as well as the security and humanitarian situation in central Mali” (PBF 2019, 7).

The evaluation report does not provide solid evidence on outcomes and impacts of the five sampled projects, but mostly lists outputs. It remains unclear to what extent, if at all, these projects achieved their primary objective (increasing access to services and providing economic opportunities). It is also unclear to what extent, if at all, the projects contributed to more stability. With regard to projects focusing on GBV and on objectives of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, the report notes positive institutional and norm developments, but provides little evidence or tangible outcomes.

Finally, three of the evaluation report’s recommendations are noteworthy. First, the report urges donors to request and support localised conflict analyses at all stages, with regular updates. Second, the report urges donors to wait for the end of projects and for evaluation findings before investing in similar types of projects. And third, the report cautions donors that there is a greater risk of doing harm in a context like Mali, because

“the selection of beneficiaries will inevitably result in frustrations because the number of potential beneficiaries, who fulfil all selection criteria, will inevitably far exceed available resources. Focus group discussions in Gao provided examples of frustration, resignation and feelings of injustice experienced by youth not having benefitted from PBF support. It is thus crucial to invest in transparent mechanisms for the selection of program participants as well as adequate communication strategies to manage expectations” (PBF 2019: 13).

These recommendations resonate with recommendations from similar evaluations from other fragile contexts.

Education: Global Partnership for Education (2020)

GPE (2020) is an evaluation of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Mali programme. Although it is mainly prospective, its conclusions are based on an evaluation of the period 2017–2019. It follows on from a baseline report on Mali that was submitted in 2018 and a first annual report of December 2018. The objective of the prospective evaluations was to assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of GPE inputs at the country level. The evaluation is a theory-based analysis. It is based on a desk review and interviews with key informants.

GPE has been active in Mali since 2006. In 2013, following the coup, GPE launched the so-called Mali Education for All Emergency Project, which is the main GPE programme in Mali.

This emergency project is intended to support the implementation of policy measures related to improving access to, equity of and expansion of basic education. During the evaluated period, the Mali Education for All Emergency Project had three components: 1) increase access to quality basic education services (USD 29.8m), 2) strengthen the technical and pedagogical capacity of the education system (USD 7.75m), and 3) strengthen the administrative and monitoring capacity of the education system (USD 4.1m). The GPE ESPIG 2013–2018 fund provided 11.4 percent of sector funding over the 2013–2017 period.

The evaluation report notes that the GPE ESPIG programme was a significant driver of improvements in sector planning in Mali. GPE also helped to mobilise more international aid resources for the education sector, but there was little movement towards a more harmonised approach to financing the education sector.

The report notes that access to basic education improved, but there was “very little data indicating that good quality learning takes place in schools, (...) and it is unlikely that the system is producing impact in the areas of learning” (GPE 2020: 25). Furthermore, the report notes that there was little observable change in terms of equity, gender equality and inclusion in the educational sector.

The report also finds that the government of Mali’s commitment to the education sector was strong. Similarly, at the local level, there was buy-in from local communities for school feeding programmes and for improving local school management committees, which in turn strengthened overall programme implementation. The strong adoption of projects by local communities and school management committees increased the likelihood of project sustainability.

Findings per Sector

Stabilisation

In evaluation reports predating the outbreak of violence in 2013, stabilisation is not addressed. The first report with a dedicated section on stabilisation is Norad (2018). It notes that the outbreak of the civil war and the collapse of the democratic order also led donors to look at their engagement more critically, and that questions were raised about whether aid had previously neglected to address underlying tensions within Mali. The report also states that real engagement with how the events of 2012 impacted on development approaches was largely missing from the evaluations of major donors (Norad 2018: 29). It is critical of the effectiveness of the MINUSMA trust fund's focus on short-term recovery and stabilisation projects, which appear to not always reflect the priorities of the population. The report posits that stabilisation can only be achieved through a gradual redeployment and a regaining of trust in state institutions – something which short-term aid projects may not be able to achieve.

Danida (2019) urges donors to invest more in in-depth conflict analysis that would enable effective prevention policies to be developed. The report reiterates the main assumptions which were guiding “stabilisation interventions”, namely a strengthened civil society, support for the private sector (especially in rural areas), and decentralisation as one way of addressing political cleavages between regions. The report itself provides no evidence of the effectiveness of interventions in these sectors, but we know from other evaluations that their effectiveness was very low.

SDC (2020) mentions that the Swiss strategy for stabilisation focused on elections, support for civil society and on facilitating exchanges and networking between existing grassroots groups that demand accountability from the state. The report does not provide information about the effectiveness of interventions in these sectors. It states that one of the main causes of instability was a deep crisis of trust between the government and the population, which armed groups exploited. Rebuilding this trust was seen as a crucial objective but would be evasive as long as the government remained part of the problem.

For the African Bank for Development, the lever to address instability entailed supporting the country's economic growth by establishing an enabling business environment, building the capacity of the rural communities and developing basic socio-economic infrastructure (hydro-agricultural schemes, energy, roads, schools, water and sanitation facilities, etc.). Interventions in these sectors were not very effective (AfDB 2020).

UNDP's programme in Mali intended to contribute to stabilisation by supporting the work of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR). According to UNDP's own evaluation (UNDP 2020), results were limited and insufficient to address deeply rooted causes of conflict. Other stabilisation activities were directed at creating awareness and providing training focused on conflict prevention and resolution at community level. The report finds that it is questionable

whether these interventions achieved much in terms of promoting social cohesion and a culture of peace.

The Peacebuilding Fund Mali (2019) sought to promote stabilisation by following a “peace dividend approach”, meaning that interventions focused on re-establishing services such as education, water, sanitation and health services which were not accessible during the war. Other focus areas were access to economic opportunities, durable solutions for displaced people and returnees, and increased security through the cantonment of ex-combatants. All these interventions were accompanied by fostering dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms. The Peacebuilding Fund’s evaluation (PBF 2019) finds that planned outcomes of the portfolio were mostly not achieved, and that the portfolio did little to contribute to more conflict resolution and dialogue capacities. The evaluation also notes that such a “peace dividend approach” was justified for the first phase following the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord. However, it also notes that for the second phase, it would have been more relevant to strategically use interventions that explicitly address root causes of conflict.

Good Governance and Rule of Law

Norad (2018) reports that prior to 2012, many donors had noted some positive trends in the governance sector, but after 2012 there was a widespread perception that the governance sector had gravely deteriorated, with ineffective institutions, weak capacities, lack of accountability, endemic corruption and entrenched patronage.

The World Bank stated in 2015 that in the fields of governance reforms, management of public resources and fiscal decentralisation, most objectives were not achieved (IEG 2015). The same report notes that the World Bank overestimated the government of Mali’s capacity and political will for institutional reform.

The African Bank for Development noted in 2020 that 15 years of support for capacity building for the government may have prevented its collapse but was not enough to foster inclusive economic growth (AfDB 2020: 45).

UNDP provided support for elections in 2013 and 2016, which was seen as effective. But UNDP’s support for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure for the government in the north of Mali had little impact, since the public servants assigned to the reconstructed buildings rarely occupied them. UNDP was also active in providing support to the elections of 2013 and 2016; these contributions to the elections are assessed as effective and essential (UNDP 2020).

After the 2015 peace agreement, administrative decentralisation was seen as one way to promote stability and better governance. As a result, many donors supported the process of decentralisation. However, little was achieved (Danida 2019, IEG 2015), mainly because there was no political buy-in from the central government for decentralisation plans, which were seen as strengthening the political position of the north.

The evaluation reports reviewed do not provide evidence on the rule of law sector.

Humanitarian Assistance, Refugees and Migration

After the collapse of the democratic order and the onset of war in 2012, most donors dramatically increased their humanitarian aid, much of which was channelled through multilateral organisations. Humanitarian assistance with food and in-kind aid as well as income-generating activities in rural areas grew in importance and contributed to the rudimentary social safety net in Mali. The WFP was one of the biggest donors in the field. In its one evaluation (WFP 2019) it is noted that its interventions helped to prevent malnutrition in the conflict areas in the north, the school feeding programme had positive effects on enrolment and attendance, and the increased use of cash-based transfers (for example, for school feeding and for nutrition support) increased overall efficiency. Especially promising were programmes which combined food aid (such as cash, vouchers or food transfers) with providing assets such as irrigation channels, flood protection or home gardens. However, WFP (2019) also notes that no robust evaluation of the long-term outcomes of such activities has been carried out.

The evaluation reports scrutinised do not provide evidence on interventions in relating to migration.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Norad (2018) discusses three evaluations of gender projects. While programmes aimed at increasing school enrolment and retention of female students appeared to have had some positive effects, little was achieved in terms of changed gender relations or changed attitudes towards family planning. Furthermore, a capacity-building project for women's associations was not effective.

UN Women (2019), in its own rather enthusiastic evaluation, notes that the most significant aspect of its war was its normative and coordination mandates. The evaluation points to the adoption of a law providing for a 30 percent quota of women in elected or appointed positions, which appears to have been implemented. UN Women also lobbied for more meaningful participation of women in peace and security and launched training programmes for some 40 women peace builders, but representation of women in various peace mechanisms (DDR, SSR and others) remained extremely low, at around 3 percent. UN Women also pushed for the creation of gender focal points in ministries involved in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Women, Peace and Security), but it appears that there was little buy-in from the ministries.

In sum, it appears that the overall context in Mali made it difficult to make tangible progress on gender equality.

In 2019, an evaluation report by Denmark (Danida 2019) noted that UN Women, which was supported by Denmark, might not achieve its objectives because of a lack of buy-in and leadership from the government.

In its 2019 evaluation, the Peacebuilding Fund assessed a project aimed at reducing GBV and found that some institutional and normative changes were successfully promoted. A draft law on GBV was supported through capacity development and advocacy, and the penal chain (police, paralegals, magistrates etc.) relating to the prosecution of SGBV was enforced. Finally, the project provided support for the drafting of a national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This led to the creation of a subcommission on gender in the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) which was created in 2014. However, as we know from other evaluations the CVJR itself was not effective, and it is unclear whether the creation of this subcommission led to a more meaningful inclusion of women in issues of security.

Education

Already back in 2011, an evaluation found that widespread budget support helped to increase enrolment rates in basic education (Évaluation conjointe 2011).

A Canadian country-level evaluation of 2013 noted that progress was achieved in the field of education, without giving more details (GAC 2013). Similarly, a 2015 evaluation of a multi-donor emergency aid fund noted that access and quality of education was improved (Ponty and Keita 2015, also Norad 2018).

An evaluation by the WFP found that school feeding increased enrolment (WFP (2018), and a 2020 evaluation of Global Partnership for Education (2020) noted that access to basic education improved, but also warned that there was “very little data indicating that good quality learning takes place in schools, (...) (GPE 2020: 25).

It is noteworthy that even after the events of 2012, donors noted the government of Mali’s strong commitment to the education sector. Similarly, there was high buy-in for the educational sector from local administration as well from the communities (GPE 2020, UNICEF 2019).

Health

A 2011 evaluation of Swiss aid noted the country’s impressive progress in basic health over the preceding decade (SDC 2011). This is echoed by the 2013 Canadian evaluation (GAC 2013). An evaluation of budget support finds that this aid modality contributed to better access to health care (Évaluation conjointe 2011). None of these evaluations clearly attribute this progress to the interventions, but they all strongly suggest that international aid played a role in improving the health sector.

The positive assessment of effectiveness in the health sector continues beyond the 2012 watershed. The World Bank notes in 2015 that progress has been achieved in maternal health (IEG 2015).

An evaluation of the FNSES multi-donor trust fund states that the fund helped to strengthen the health system and reduce maternal, infant and neonatal morbidity and mortality. (Ponty and Keita 2015).

Finally, UNDP (2020) notes that progress was made in access to health for women and in mobilising resources for the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Sustainable Economic Development

The 18 evaluation reports reviewed provide relatively little information on interventions relating to sustainable economic development. Most emphasis is placed on the agricultural sector, which is seen as the most promising area for achieving economic growth.

For example, a 2011 evaluation of Swiss aid suggested that economic development could be best fostered by training and capacity building in agricultural and rural sectors, strengthening the productivity of farming households and associations and strengthening their linkages with the local agricultural enterprises.

A 2011 evaluation of budget support (Évaluation conjointe 2011) credits budget support with the strengthening of macroeconomic stability and increased spending in priority sectors. Although it is not possible to attribute observed trends directly to budget support, the evaluation notes that during the evaluation period, GDP grew by around 5 percent per annum, and poverty levels fell. Two more evaluations (GAC 2013, and Norad 2018) also note the positive impact of budget support on macroeconomic development. That said, budget support, which was widely used before the 2012 watershed events, almost completely disappeared after 2012.

All optimism with regard to economic development vanished after 2012. A World Bank evaluation of 2015 (IEG 2015) found that little was achieved in terms of higher productivity in rural development and poverty reduction, one of the pillars of the Bank's development strategy for Mali. Also not achieved were objectives relating to improved public financial management and reform of the budgetary process, including decentralisation and procurement. The only slightly positive results were found in providing relatively simple technical outputs, such as increasing the quality of the road network and improving access to electricity, including in rural areas.

A Danish evaluation of 2018 (Danida 2018) noted that Mali's economic growth was largely absorbed by high population growth. Human capital remained low, and conditions for the private sector were very challenging.

A 2020 evaluation of Swiss aid (SDC 2020) suggested that the main lever for economic development should be investment in rural development, specifically by providing support to farmers' organisations, by advocating for better land tenure laws, and by providing support to value chains for potatoes and milk. It should be noted that a 2019 Danish evaluation (Danida 2019) assessed investment in agricultural value chains as not very effective.

The African Development Bank reported that its efforts to promote the private sector as the main source for economic development were not effective. Around 60 percent of the Bank's aid was allocated to agricultural and multi-sector operations (mostly related to services, such as water, irrigation and energy).

The Peacebuilding Fund supported a project aimed at increasing the resilience of women and youth (PBF 2019). The project funded income-generating activities and provided vocational training. According to the end of project report, only 30 percent of the beneficiaries of these projects were able to increase their revenue. Besides this, it is unclear what the outcome and impacts of these projects were.

Denmark ran a private sector development programme which included financing the agricultural sector, support for the Youth Business Creation Support Fund and support for the enabling environment for entrepreneurship programme. The underlying logic was that support for the private sector (especially in rural areas) would help to stabilise the country by developing economic opportunities for the population. The evaluation found that the targets for creating small businesses by youth entrepreneurs were likely too ambitious, especially in categories such as "women's businesses" and "green businesses". In general, the evaluation suspects that most programmes would be unable to use all their budget because of low absorption capacities (Danida 2019)

Rural Development and Climate

For most donors, rural development was an important aspect of their aid portfolios. Back in 2011, one evaluation even expressed the hope that Mali would become an important "agricultural power" and recommended increased investments in the productivity of farming households (SDC 2011).

A 2013 evaluation by IFAD (IFAD 2013) concluded that, by and large, IFAD's multifaceted investment in rural development produced satisfactory results. IFAD supported agricultural production, helped improve the health of livestock, established savings and micro credit banks, built small infrastructure, supported farmers' organisations and strengthened the capacities of rural actors, for example by providing training in literacy, farm accounting and technical training.

Interestingly, this evaluation also found that the cooperation with the government of Mali improved compared to the situation before 2007, and that capacity building and training for government officials at the subnational level in technical fields related to rural development was effective.

By contrast, a World Bank report published only two years later found that interventions aimed at increasing productivity in rural development and poverty reduction were not successful (IEG 2015).

A 2018 WFP report found that food assistance combined with providing small assets such as irrigation channels, flood protection or home gardens showed promise and was well received by beneficiaries (WFP 2018)

A 2019 report by Danida (Danida 2019) found support for agriculture value chains for SMEs was not effective and that it was difficult to link farmers to SMEs since SMEs were usually in the capital regions and were not connected to rural areas.

The African Bank for Development found that programmes in agricultural and multi-sector operations (mostly related to services, such as water, irrigation and energy) were not very effective. However, the evaluation notes that some positive results were achieved in building local capacity in the agricultural sectors (AfDB 2020.)

UNDP (2020) reports that its support for value chains (production and transformation of mango, shea and gum arabic) was not effective and the results are likely not sustainable.

Finally, a 2020 Swiss evaluation found that projects aimed at supporting value chains for potatoes and milk were satisfactory.

The evaluation reports do not provide evidence on interventions relating to migration.

Capacity Building as a Cross-Cutting Issue

While none of the included evaluation reports specifically focused on capacity building, about half of them provide some information on the effectiveness of various capacity-building measures. There is a clear pattern: whereas capacity building at the level of the central government was not effective, there were pockets of success for capacity building elsewhere, but these were mainly in very technical, apolitical fields at the subnational level: for example, in education, rural development and health. Thus a 2013 IFAD evaluation (IFAD 2013) found that capacity building and training for government officials at the subnational level in technical fields related to rural development was effective. Similarly, a 2019 UNICEF evaluation (UNICEF 2019) found that capacity development activities at the subnational level in the health sectors had an impact in terms of improved knowledge, skills and performance.

By contrast, a WFP evaluation (WFP 2018) found that capacity development for the national government was not very effective. WFP supported the government of Mali with technical guidance for the implementation of government policies, including those for social protection. However, 90 percent of the planned activities did not take place and the national capacity indexes for both school feeding and the food security programme remained below target.

The African Bank for Development (AfDB 2000) noted that some positive results were achieved in building local capacity in the sectors of agriculture, energy, and water and sanitation, but also noted that capacity at the level of the central government remained weak.

Two more findings with regard to capacity building were reported. An evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund's activities noted that investments in capacity for conflict resolution mechanisms at community level were not effective (PBF 2019). And a capacity-building project benefitting women's associations was also found to be not effective (Norad 2018).

Summary of Main Findings

The breakdown of the democratic order and the outbreak of violence was a watershed moment in Mali. Before, donors noted impressive gains in health and education. They saw great potential for the agricultural sector. Moreover, budget support was widely used and seen as a very effective aid modality, credited with gains in macro/economic stability and sound government development policies, especially in the fields of education and health. Donors did not doubt the political will of the government to support development policies and serve the public good, even if government capacities were still seen as weak. In short, Mali was seen as a normal developing country with a clear positive trajectory.

After 2012, the picture changed completely. The government was no longer seen as a reliable partner serving the public good. Donors pivoted away from budget support, emergency and humanitarian aid became much more important, and interventions in stabilisation became more important. Rural development was still seen as the most important sector, but attention shifted towards food security and resilience. Importantly, effectiveness across all sectors was rated very low after 2012, with some differences between sectors.

After 2012, most donors dramatically increased their humanitarian aid. Humanitarian assistance, with food and in-kind aid as well as income-generating activities in rural areas grew in importance and contributed to the rudimentary social safety net in Mali, thus helping to prevent malnutrition. It appears that donors' response to the threat of a humanitarian crisis was adequate. However, the evaluation reports very rarely discuss to what extent, if at all, humanitarian aid strengthened resilience. There is no discussion about "do no harm", and no information is supplied on interventions relating to refugees or protection of civilians.

Some gains were made **in education**, leading to improved enrolment and retention. Already back in 2011, an evaluation found that widespread budget support helped to increase enrolment rates in basic education. After 2012, school feeding programmes had a positive impact on both nutrition and retention. Also noteworthy is that donors noted the strong commitment of the government of Mali to the education sector, even after 2012. Similarly, there was high buy-in for the educational sector from local administration as well from the communities. However, while access to education was increased, it appears that the quality of learning did not improve.

The evaluation reports also agree that there were **some positive outcomes in the health sector**, especially with regard to maternal, newborn and child health, access to health for women, and in mobilising resources for the fight against HIV/AIDS. The positive assessment of effectiveness in the health sector continues beyond the 2012 watershed.

There is broad consensus that **very little was achieved in good governance and rule of law**. Prior to 2012, some donors had noted some positive trends in the governance sector, but after 2012, there was a widespread perception that the governance sector had gravely deteriorated, with ineffective institutions, weak capacities, lack of accountability, endemic corruption and entrenched patronage. Nevertheless, donors still generally overestimated Mali's state capacity and its political will to actually improve governance, leading to programmes that were overambitious and poorly effective. Specifically, the evaluation reports note that there was no progress in management of public resources, fiscal decentralisation and regulatory policies of inclusive growth. Moreover, no progress was made in political decentralisation. After the 2015 peace agreement, administrative decentralisation was seen as one way to promote stability and better governance. As a result, many donors supported the process of decentralisation. However, little was achieved, mainly because there was no political buy-in from the central government for decentralisation plans, which were seen as strengthening the political position of the north.

The one field where donors saw some results was election support. Donors effectively helped to conduct elections in 2013 and 2016. However, **the conduct of elections did not prevent the overall decline of democracy in Mali**.

The evaluation reports reviewed do not provide evidence on the rule of law sector.

The political and cultural context in Mali made it difficult for tangible progress to be achieved **in women's rights and gender equality**. **Some results were achieved with regard to legislation**. For example, donors pushed for the adoption of a law providing for a 30 percent quota of women in the parliament, a draft law on GBV was supported, and the penal chain (police, paralegals, magistrates etc.) in regard to the prosecution of SGBV was strengthened through capacity building. Furthermore, programmes aimed at increasing school enrolment and retention of female students appeared to have had some positive effects.

However, donors also agree that **little was achieved in terms of changed gender relations or changed attitudes towards family planning**. And a capacity-building project for women's associations was not effective. Despite efforts to promote the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Women, Peace and Security), there was little buy-in from the government, and representation of women in various peace mechanisms (DDR, SSR and others) remained extremely low. In sum, interventions in this field led to some results at the level of legislation and at the local level, when projects were aimed at providing tangible results, such as better access to education or health for women and girls. They were not effective in transforming gender relations.

Donors did not begin to evaluate **stabilisation measures** until 2015. It is important to note that interventions in many different fields were lumped together under the label of stabilisation. Some donors referred to stabilisation as re-establishing access to basic services, such as water,

education and health (the so-called “peace dividend approach”). Other donors pursued stabilisation by investing in income-generating activities or by promoting economic growth. Another avenue was to provide support for civil society, facilitating exchanges and networking between existing grassroots groups that demanded accountability from the state. At the institutional level, providing support for the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) was also seen as stabilisation. Other avenues for stabilisation were to build infrastructure for the demobilisation of fighters and to restore government buildings in the north. Donors also tried to build conflict resolution capacities by providing training for conflict prevention and resolution at community level. Finally, providing support for the process of political/administrative decentralisation was seen as another way of rebuilding political stability in the country.

Unfortunately, the evaluation reports strongly suggest that initiatives in most of these stabilisation interventions were not effective: decentralisation stalled because of lack of political will; the DDR process was not successful, and evidence suggests that some DDR initiatives actually led to an increase in armed men, since belonging to an armed group was seen as a way to access benefits; interventions aimed at income-generating activities, promoting economic growth and fostering the private sector were not effective. The CVJR had little impact; capacity building in conflict resolution at the community level was not very effective either. In sum, there is nothing to suggest that any of these various stabilisation initiatives were effective.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the reports perused provide no information about initiatives in the field of political dialogue and peace negotiations.

Regarding **sustainable economic development**, a 2011 evaluation of budget support credits such support with strengthening macroeconomic stability and increasing spending in priority sectors. However, after 2012, optimism about economic development vanished. A World Bank evaluation of 2015 found that little was achieved in terms of higher productivity in rural development and poverty reduction; the African Development Bank reported that its efforts to promote the private sector as the main source for economic development were not effective. Other reports suggest that interventions for an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and for income-generating activities were not effective. By 2018, Mali's economic growth was being largely absorbed by high population growth. Human capital remained low, and conditions for the private sector were very challenging.

For most donors, **rural development** was an important aspect of their aid portfolios. Back in 2011, one evaluation even expressed the hope that Mali would become an “important agricultural power” and recommended increased investments in the productivity of farming households. However, the tone of evaluation reports changed after 2012. Interventions in the rural sector increasingly focused on **food security and coping mechanisms**. Results appeared to have been satisfactory, However, the available evaluation reports by and large agree that interventions aimed at increasing productivity in rural development were not successful. **Support for agricultural value chains or for small agribusinesses was not effective.**

Noteworthy is that some evaluations point out that the cooperation with the government of Mali in this sector was satisfactory, and that that **capacity building and training for government officials at the subnational level in technical fields related to rural development was effective.**

The evaluation reports do not provide information on interventions relating to climate change

Budget support was widely used in the decade before 2012 and is credited with having an overall positive effect on overall public finances in Mali, and specifically with positive impacts in education and health, but also as having significantly contributed to achieving goals in the national poverty and growth strategy, macroeconomic management and public investment in the social sectors. However, the report also notes that applying conditionality led to losses of coherence in implementation and higher transaction costs. After 2012, budget support ceased. It appears that budget support can be an effective tool in consolidated countries with high will for political reform. Since budget support ceased in 2012, the case of Mali does not provide lessons about budget support in an unstable, unconsolidated country,

Regarding **capacity-building measures**, there is a clear pattern: whereas capacity building was not effective at the level of the central government, there were pockets of success for capacity building elsewhere, almost exclusively in very technical, apolitical fields at the subnational level: for example, in education, rural development and health.

The reviewed evaluations imply that every programme across every sector was seen as **relevant**. This is in stark contrast to the fact that the evaluations also point out that many programmes were not effective and were guided by wrong assumptions. This paradox highlights that “relevance” is assessed by donors according to needs. In a country like Mali, where the needs of the population are boundless, every development programme seems relevant. This begs the question of whether the criterion of “relevance” should be based solely on needs. **We believe “relevance” should be assessed by considering needs and the probability of having a positive impact**, given the conditions under which a programme is being or has been implemented. Adopting such a definition would result in programmes based on wrong assumptions being qualified as not relevant.

The reviewed evaluations **provide insufficient information for assessing the prospects for sustainability** in the reviewed sectors.

Many of the evaluations highlight that a lack of security often made it very difficult to implement projects, and **effectiveness suffered from instability.**

Surprisingly, **do no harm** is rarely mentioned in the evaluation reports.

Many evaluations stressed that **monitoring and evaluation should be improved**. Evaluators noted that it was difficult to assess to what extent results had been achieved, since baseline and endline data was often not available.

Some of the evaluations also point to the **importance of better conflict analysis** and to the need for a more thorough analysis of how the increasing deterioration of the political and security situation in Mali affected aid effectiveness.

Surprisingly, the available evaluations rarely **discuss the political economy** of Mali and how it affects aid effectiveness and aid strategies.