



Save the Children



Report

WE WANT SAFE SCHOOLS

A CHILD-LED RESEARCH STUDY IN MALI

September, 2021



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A Child-led Research Report

Compiled by:

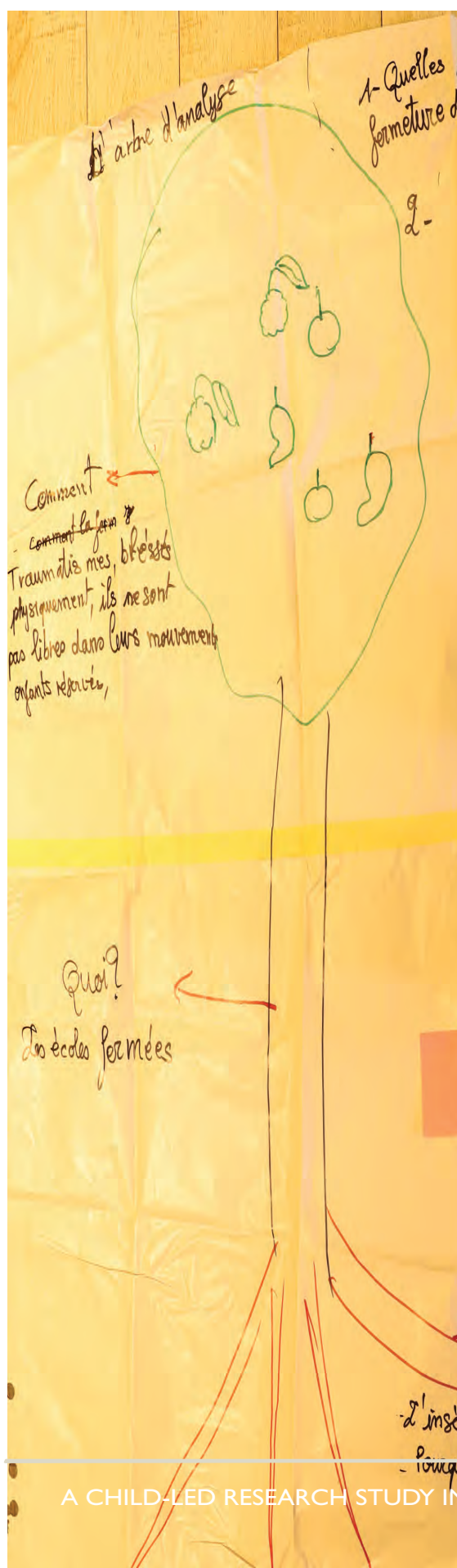
**Development Education Consultancy,
Kampala, Uganda.**

Cover page Photo: Mustafa (not real name) recording other children's responses during a tree analysis, Warlide / Diodiori, Mopti

All drawings in this report are by children.

Photographs were provided courtesy of Eyeris Communications, Nairobi, Kenya.

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali



Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Executive Summary	v
1.0 Introduction and Background	1
2.0 Purpose of Research	2
3.0 Methodology and Approach	3
4.0 Findings and Analysis	5
4.1 Nature of Attacks on Education in Mali	6
4.2 Reasons Behind Attacks on Education in Mali	11
4.3 The Effects of Attacks or Threats of Attacks on Education	17
5.0 Key Messages and Recommendations	21
5.1 Key Messages by Children	21
5.2 Recommendations	21
Appendix 1: Providing a Background to Children's Findings on Education Under Attack in Mali – A Literature Review	23

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Acronyms And Abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter for the Rights and the Welfare of the Child
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MOE	Ministry of Education
NC SSD	National Committee on the Safe Schools Declaration
NSAGs	Non-State Armed Groups
RC SSD	Regional Committee on the Safe Schools Declaration
SCI	Save the Children
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
SSD	Safe Schools Declaration
TMC	Technical Management Committee
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNWG-CAAC	United Nations Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict



We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali



Acknowledgements

We are deeply indebted to all the young researchers (6 girls and 6 boys) in the Mopti Region of Mali, who are also Members of the Children's Parliament, for a job well done in collecting data from their peers. No words can express our heartfelt appreciations. Your hard work stands out in this report — We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all conflict- and violence-affected children (156 girls and 144 boys) from all over Mali but living presently in displacement in and around Mopti Town, who participated in this research. You have left a permanent impression on us through your very courageous and unreserved contributions to this child-led process. You spared time amidst your daily struggles to share personal experiences, opinions and views through group discussions as well as individual guided sharing, drawings, visioning and stories. Thank you, children, for sharing your unique perspectives that have provided deeper contextual insight into the Malian experience!

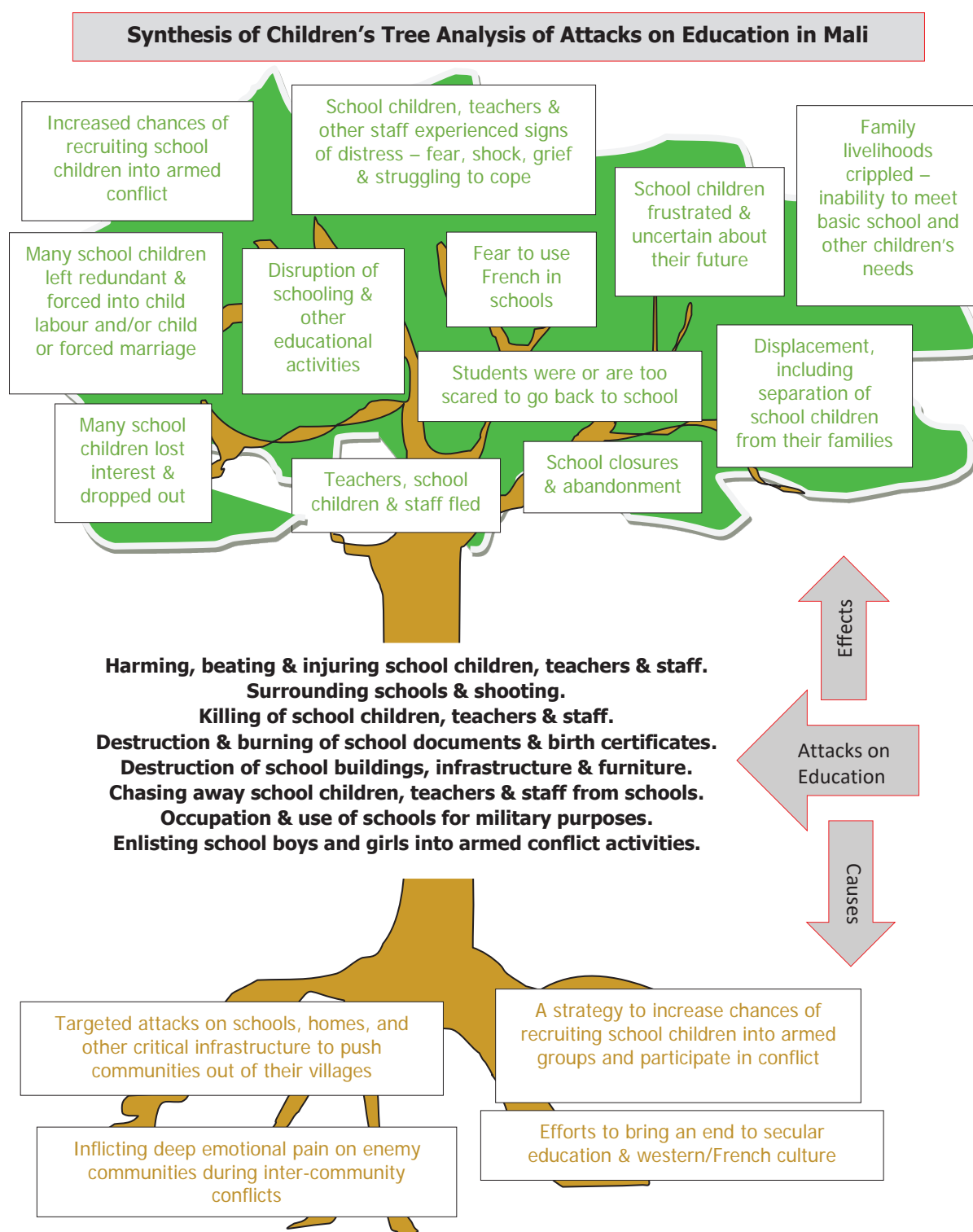
Our special thanks go to the Protecting Children in Conflict team in the Regional Programming Unit in Nairobi and Dakar and Save the Children Mali staff in Bamako and Mopti for all the support you provided to ensure a successful process and experience.

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Executive Summary

1.0 Key Findings

This field research was led by Malian child researchers in Mopti town, Mopti region, in Central Mali. It captures children's views on attacks on their education, why education is deliberately attacked and the impact of these attacks on children and their schooling in Mali. The following is a summary of the findings:



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2.0 Key Messages from Children



We want safe schools

- Make schools safe for all children to learn
- Construct destroyed schools
- Protect our schools from attacks
- Protect school children and teachers from attacks
- Stop abduction and killing of children and teachers



We want safe communities

- We want peace to enable us to go back home
- Secure our villages and roads
- Support our communities to resolve local conflicts between ethnic groups



We want a peaceful & secure Mali

- Stop the war and build a strong and unified Mali
- We want conflict to end so that we can have peace
- Leaders are our parents, they should protect us from attacks

3.0 Children's Recommendations

To school management, community leaders, and local administration

Work together to:

- Provide a safe education for all children.
- Protect children and teachers from attacks.

To state administration, armed forces and groups

- Find lasting solutions to protect schools, teachers and children from attacks.
- Negotiate, talk peace, and reconcile with one another to allow life to become normal again and schools and villages to be safe for children and their families.

4.0 Other Recommendations

To the Government of Mali

- Work closely with the National Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration (NC SSD) through the newly constituted Regional Committees of the Safe Schools Declaration (RC SSD) to strengthen coordination of activities as well as monitor, alert and respond to reported cases of violations as well as to prevent attacks.
- Finalise and adopt all pending legislation to protect education from attack during armed conflict, including ratifying and domesticating any pending international and/or regional treaties to protect and guarantee all children's rights.
- Use context-appropriate, community-based bottom-up approaches for long lasting solutions for peace and reconciliation to address enduring cycles of inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts.

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

- Negotiate with NSAGs to refrain from attacking schools as well as school children, students, teachers, professors and other school personnel drawing on lessons learnt from similar efforts in Mali.
- Urge all parties to the conflict to refrain from any attacks on education; and in collaboration with development/humanitarian partners, build the capacity of conflict parties on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the SSD and accompanying Guidelines, informed by lessons learnt from past trainings that benefited some NSAGs¹.
- In collaboration with development agencies and partners as well as health providers, put strategies and interventions in place to provide adequate and comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services to children, teachers and other school staff who have experienced attacks on education to boost their resilience to cope with distressing emotions.
- Reintegrate birth certificate replacement processes for young and older children who lost their birth certificates to attacks on education as part of protection services in emergencies/humanitarian interventions.

To the African Union

- Together with the Government of Mali, support domestication and implementation of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25)².

To the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant United Nations bodies

- In line with the Public Statement of the UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (UNWG-CAAC) of 8th February 2021, advocate for the implementation of all pending commitments made by the Government of Mali when it endorsed the SSD.
- Compel listed parties to the conflict in Mali to end and prevent the violations and abuses, and restrain from any indiscriminate attack on perceived enemy strongholds that may put innocent school children and other people's lives in danger.
- Strengthen all monitoring and reporting partnerships among the UN-led MRM, Education Cluster, Ministries of Education, and civil society.

¹ See a draft report by Save the Children and Lerddl, "Capitalising the process of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in Mali, June 2021"—now in its final process of completion.

² African Union, Continental Education Strategy for Africa, 2016-2025, CESA 16-25, pp. 8, 22 & 26.
https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

5.0 A Brief About the Methodology

Children led this research study. They were supported by Save the Children staff in Mali and from the East and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa Regional Offices, Eyeris Communications team (photography and videography), and Development Education Consultancy research team (training and guidance during child-led field research).

The training of child researchers and the child-led field research took place from 25th to 29th July 2021, in Mopti. For a wider and in-depth coverage, field research days in Mopti were extended for another three days — from 11th to 13th August, 2021. This was necessitated due to cancellation of the previously arranged research plans in Gao region following security alerts. Child researchers (6 girls and 6 boys) aged between 15 and 17 years

carried out individual interviews and group discussions to gather information from their peers using child-friendly methods and tools such as the tree analysis tool, storytelling including the story of change, visioning and drawing methods.

A total of 300 children (156 girls and 144 boys) from 5 to 16 years of age in different Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) sites in and around Mopti/Sevare were involved in the study as respondents.

Before conducting the research, the 12 child researchers in Mopti were trained on how to use the child-friendly methods and tools, how to conduct inclusive participatory research, how to uphold research ethics, how to offer basic psychological first aid (PFA) to the respondents, and child safety and protection during the process.



Adama (not real name) drawing his experience of attacks on his school, Mopti, Mali.

1.0 Introduction and Background

This report is a product from children's field research in the Mopti region of Mali on the issue of Education Under Attack — the nature of attacks on education, why there is a deliberate attack on education, and how these attacks have affected children's education and schooling as well as their psychological and mental health wellbeing. Children's findings and recommendations become even more significant and valuable as the armed conflict in Mali — and the Liptako-Gourma region (the border region shared by Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) in particular — continues to be a conflict hotspot characterised by evolving cross border dynamics with enduring negative impacts on children's education. Equally, they are worthy of consideration as a variety of stakeholders, including Save the Children, heighten efforts to address the multi-dimensional humanitarian crises, stop escalation of violence and resolve the multiple issues driving the armed conflict (see Appendix 1 for detailed literature review on the Malian context, the attacks on education and what is being done to alleviate the situation including implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, SSD)³.

The child-led research contributes to the objectives of the Protecting Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa Project 2020-2023 under Sweden's strategy for Regional Development Cooperation for Sub-Saharan Africa 2016-2021⁴. This strategy provides the framework of a comprehensive Save the Children programme built around 6 objectives:

- 1) Strengthened capacity for regional actors in Sub-Saharan Africa to prevent, resolve and deal with the effects of armed conflict on children.

³ The Malian literature review attached in Appendix 1 is an extract from a desk review on "Education Under Attack" in Central Sahel

(Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) conducted as part of this research. See Education Under Attack in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso: A Desk Review on How Schools Have Been Affected by Armed Conflict and How This Has Affected Children's Schooling Cycle, Kampala: Development Education Consultancy, July 2021

⁴ Terms of Reference (TOR), Facilitating Child-led Research in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, 2021

- 2) Increased influence and participation by children, youth and CSOs in processes for peace and reconciliation in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- 3) Strengthened capacity and competence for country offices and partners to engage with armed forces and groups in order to prevent, resolve and deal with the effects of armed conflict on children in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- 4) Strengthened humanitarian capacity and capability in Francophone conflict-affected countries in West and Central Africa, in particular local and national actors, to protect children affected by armed conflict.
- 5) Strengthened role of local humanitarian child protection actors in Francophone conflict-affected countries in West and Central Africa in coordinated service delivery, through increased leadership and influence and access to humanitarian funding.
- 6) Strengthened capacity of regional actors and civil society actors in Sub-Saharan Africa to deploy transformative and sustainable policies and actions based on evidence and learning.

Child participation is one of Save the Children's thematic areas in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), as well as Articles 4 and 7 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which recognise that children have a right to have their views heard and considered. This implies that children have a right to be informed and involved in decisions and actions which concern them, and that their points of view are considered. The project was conceptualised with child participation as a key objective and indispensable to the effective delivery of the project.

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Child-led research, on which this field study is anchored, is a participatory process that aims to engage with children and young people to conduct pieces of research on related issues that matter to them. This methodology provides opportunities for Malian children and young people to amplify their voices and contribute their views on attacks on

education. It is hoped that Malian children, supported by adults, will influence decision-making by using their findings to put pressure on stakeholders and decision-makers to prevent and address the consequences of attacks on education and promote safe schools and schooling.

2.0 Purpose of The Research

The purpose of the child-led research was to obtain children's views on "Education Under Attack", and the effect this has had on children and their schooling as well as on children's psychological and mental wellbeing.

This children's study is informed by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's (GCPEA) understanding of attacks on education defined "as any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff (e.g., janitors, bus drivers), or education officials, as well as attacks on education buildings, resources, materials, or facilities (including school buses). These actions may occur for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious reasons. Attacks on education not only kill, maim, and traumatise students and personnel but also disrupt students' right to education. They impede the ability of instructors and educational institutions to offer inclusive, quality education, and they restrict students' access to schools and universities"⁵.

The report therefore captures children's perspectives on the following:

- Attacks or threats of attacks on schools
Harm to students, teachers and other school employees
- Reasons why such attacks and threats happen
- The effects of these attacks and threats on children and their schooling
- The impact of these attacks and threats on children's psychological and mental health wellbeing
- Messages and recommendations to duty bearers and key decision makers

The next sections of this report focus on the field research carried out by Malian children in Mopti. Because they live and witness routinely the situation of unending conflict and attacks on their education and villages, Malian children's life-changing memories of attacks on education were still very fresh and vivid in their minds.



A body map exercise during a training session in Mopti, Mali

⁵ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), (undated). Education Under Attack 2018, p.16.

http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2018_full.pdf.
Site visited 07 July 2019.

3.0 Methodology and Approach

Literature review

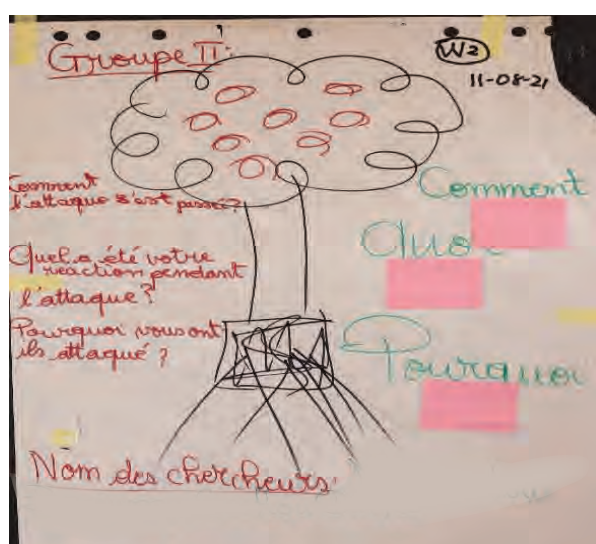
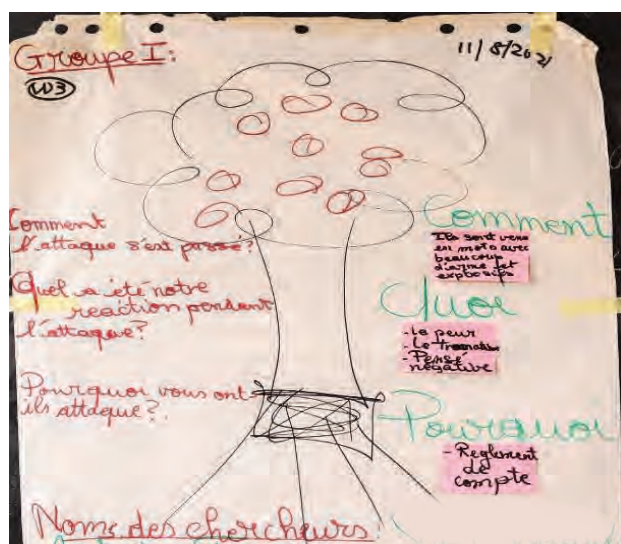
To inform the overall research design and approach, a literature review on the Malian context of conflict, the nature of attacks on education and its effects on children's education as well as efforts by government and other stakeholders to address attacks on education, including implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), was undertaken. This literature review, which provides a background to children's findings, is attached to this report as Appendix 1 and informs the analysis and recommendations.

A child-led process

The research took a qualitative approach and was child-led — involving child researchers, who are members of the Children's Parliament and/or have been involved in other Save the Children programme activities. Child researchers (6 girls and 6 boys) from Mopti, aged 15 to 17 years, were prepared to lead the field data collection process through a two-day training.

A tailor-made training for child researchers was purposefully designed⁶ to facilitate a speedy but quality data collection process with children's safety, protection, and security in mind. Child researchers were equipped through participatory methods to: build a common understanding of the "Education Under Attack" concept; appreciate the importance of child participation in such a process; understand child participation principles; and gain skills in applying child-friendly research methods and tools.

The field research methods, which the child researchers were equipped to use, were specifically tailored to suit the still fragile (albeit calm) context, COVID-19 standard operating procedures and a tight research schedule. These included the child-friendly tree analysis, drawing (picturing research), visioning and storytelling including stories of change tools. Child researchers, with their supporting adults, also conducted a risk mapping assessment of the targeted locations and developed child protection and safeguarding guidelines for the exercise. Given the nature of the subject children were going to research on, they were also equipped to provide basic psychological first-aid support to child respondents who would need it.



Tree Analysis of "attacks on education" causes and effects in Mali, Bankass IDP site

⁶See "Training Guide: Empowering children and young people with skills to carry out a child-led research activity": A training for child-led researchers, 2021; compiled by Development Education Consultancy, July 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

The data collection process

Children took the lead, and with overall guidance from the adult consultant researchers and SCI staff, carried out the data collection as well as learnt lessons, on a daily basis, that helped improve the field research process. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring a conflict-sensitive process and creating “safe spaces” for children to share their experiences and perspectives, including gender considerations such as girls-only and boys-only discussion groups. Save the Children staff in Mali and from the Regional Offices in East and West Africa played a pivotal support role of inclusive sampling and mobilising child respondents, liaising with local leaders, providing logistical support and ensuring that all children (i.e., researchers and respondents) were protected and safe.

The field research was originally planned for 3 days in Barbe, Bankass and Jonjou IDP sites in Mopti.

An extended three-day field research was carried out in Mopti. The extension was made after cancellation of the field research in Gao following security concerns. Children gave their time to recollect and share their experiences of attacks on their education through drawings — as well as by sharing their personal stories and engaging in participatory group tree analyses. Using the visioning exercise, children visioned the future they would like to live in years from now while at the same time reflected quietly on the dire circumstances around their present lives that need to be overcome. These are presented in action-packed advocacy messaging and concrete recommendations. Amidst serious research work, child researchers found time to make the entire field research process lively and fun with dance, games, and play!

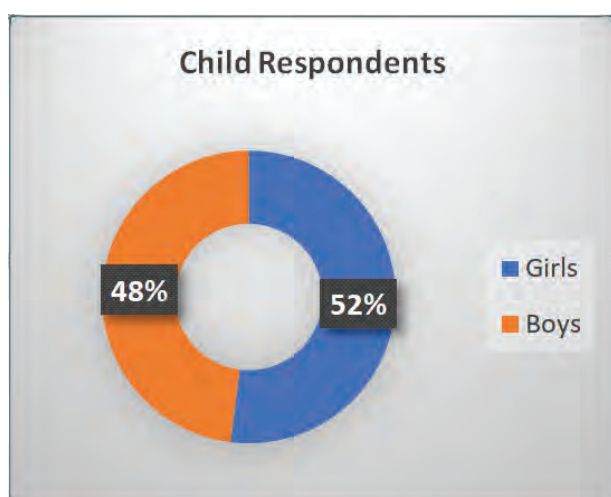


Girls discussing, before they can start drawing

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

The girls and boys who participated

Child researchers gathered data from a total of 300 child respondents (156 girls and 144 boys) between the ages of 5 and 16 as shown in the pie chart⁷. Although, due to context sensitivities, it was not possible to generate descriptive statistics disaggregated along other lines — except for sex/gender, the child respondents included Fulani and Dogon communities, among others.



Analysis of data

Due to the limited time available for the research process, the lead researcher and the co-researcher worked together with child researchers for only three days to carry out the initial analysis of data collected in Mopti. The final analysis was done by the lead researcher supported by the co-researcher — in line with child participation ethical considerations. This was meant to ensure that all children's information, experiences, and views — collected by the child researchers through group discussions, drawings, the tree analysis and one-to-one interviews via storytelling including personal stories of change — were accurately captured with careful documentation and full acknowledgements, without exposing both the child researchers and respondents to any form of harm or risks associated with the sensitivities in this study.

The data analysis process included data sorting and reduction, data display, verification and conclusion drawing. Examination of evidence and meanings as well as the noting of themes, regularities and patterns happened concurrently during the data analysis process at various levels.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

This section discusses findings on and analysis of: the nature of attacks and threats of attack on schools, school children, teachers, and other people working in schools; the reasons why deliberate attacks are carried out; and the impacts of attacks and threats of attack on school children, teachers and other school personnel, including effects on their psychological and mental health wellbeing.

⁷ Due to sensitivity of the research theme, real names of the child researchers and participants are not shared in this report. Only pseudo names are used to identify child researchers and respondents in this report.

4.1 Nature of Attacks on Education in Mali

Children's accounts of attacks on education explicitly link with GCPEA's definition of education under attack as stipulated in section 2.0. As elaborated below, the attacks experienced included: beating and harming children, teachers and other adults working in schools, including killing them; surrounding and shooting at school buildings and their occupants; threatening and chasing away children and teachers from school; burning school furniture, documents and children's birth certificates; destruction of school buildings and other infrastructure; attackers sleeping in schools and/or using schools as military camping sites; and recruitment of school children into armed groups and forces.

Physical attacks or threats of attacks on schools, students, teachers, and other education personnel

These attacks and threats of attack unfolded in the eyes of the child respondents. Incidents of attacks on schools, killing and/or "taking away" the school personnel came up severally during children's field research⁸. For instance, during an inter-ethnic conflict, boys reported that their school was attacked, school staff ran away, some children were beaten, and the attackers later slept in their school⁹. This explanation resonated with the experiences of a number of children involved in this research. A story by a boy, originally from Djirel village in Bankass district and another by Mamadou from Barbe IDP site further provide insight into the nature and the manner in which attacks on education were carried out (see details in Box 1).

Box 1

"It was 4pm, when our school was attacked. We were in class. Upon hearing gunshots, our teacher stepped out. He was shot in the chest and leg. The attackers took the school director with them. Then, they ordered all of us to leave school. They set the school on fire. When we arrived home, the whole village had been burnt down".

Mamadou (not real name), aged 12, Barbe IDP Site, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

"This was an intercommunal conflict. It was 10 o'clock, during breacktime, when the school was attacked. The attackers came, surrounded the school, and began shooting. One adult at school was killed right away. Teachers fled. Some children were harmed, and children's birth certificates were burnt. Children were left scared and traumatised. Some of them climbed and jumped over the school fence to get away. In the village, 3 councilors were killed; and a young man of 18 years was kidnapped".

A boy originally from Djirel village in Bankass district, age not given, Mopti, 27th July 2021

⁸ Child-led research in Mopti, 26th -28th July and 11th -13th August, 2021

⁸ Child-led research in Mopti, 26th -28th July and 11th -13th August, 2021

⁹ Tree analysis with boys, Barbe IDP Site, Mopti, 27th July 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

While deliberate attacks on secular schools have always been (and still are) the norm, there is an emerging trend of attacks on Quranic schools as well. Some of such incidents were elaborated by a 6-year-old girl, Bintou from Barbe IDP site, when explaining her drawing and by a 14-year-old boy, Adam, at Bankass IDP site (see Box 2)¹⁰.

Destroying children's birth certificates at school

While children's accounts highlighted the destruction of school furniture and documents, what was unique was some children's emphasis on burning of children's birth certificates which were in the schools' possession. The issue of setting children's birth certificates on fire came up in two different IDP locations (e.g., as depicted in Boxes 1 and 4)¹¹. To provide children access to education, children in Mali have to present a birth certificate as proof of their Malian identity. It was unclear whether it was a school requirement to keep children's original birth certificates at school. Neither could it be ascertained whether it was the parents' decision to keep their children's certificates at school for safety reasons given the communities' vulnerability to frequent attacks. It was reported that during one of the school attacks, all the school documents and the children's birth certificates were burnt.

As a consequence, children who had their birth certificates destroyed have no legal proof of existence and their age, leaving them exposed to protection risks — such as, “child marriage, child labour, forced recruitment into armed groups and forces (a form of attack on education), and trafficking”¹². Various accounts on attacks on education in children's findings have shown that children — including those in school — have been exposed to all the six grave violations.

As shown below, the UNWG-CAAC in their Statement¹³ condemned the six grave violations committed by all parties to armed conflict in Mali. It urged them, among other measures, to: release all children from their ranks and hand them over to relevant civilian child protection actors; end and prevent further recruitment and use of children; and end and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.



¹⁰ Adam (not real name), Bankass IDP site, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

¹¹ Storytelling by Mahamadou (not real name), 15 years of age, originally from Ansongo, interviewed on 11th August, 2021

¹² UNICEF, Birth registration can accelerate children's access to justice: the African Union and UNICEF launch “No Name Campaign,” 17th June, 2020

<https://www.unicef.org/mali/en/press-releases/birth-registration-can-accelerate-childrens-access-justice-african-union-and-unicef>, site visited on 22nd August, 2021

¹³ UNWG-CAAC Public Statement by Chair on Mali, UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. For a full Public Statement, see <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/public-statement-chair-working-group-children-and-armed-conflict-5-february-2021>, site visited on 29th June, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Box 2

“Attackers came to our school and wanted to kill my father who is a teacher at the Quranic school. That is why we left our village”.

6-year-old girl, Bintou from Barbe IDP site

“It was circumcision day at our Quranic school. The Imam, our parents and the village chairman were present. Suddenly, armed men stormed our village on their motorbikes. I do not recall how many they were. They singled out three men and shot them dead before our very eyes. After killing the men, the armed men left on their motorbikes. Children cried. I have never been so scared in my life”.

Adam, 14-year-old boy, at Bankass IDP site



Girls discussing their experiences during attacks on schools, Mopti, Mali

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Military use of schools

Use of schools as military camping sites and storage was a common practice — summarily, leading to school closures and hence disrupting children's education as Daouda's¹⁴ drawing shows (Drawing 1). A number of children's accounts, as indicated in the above section, confirmed that schools have been occupied, denying children access to education. There was a feeling of frustration among children, after their schools were occupied by a faction of the NSAGs. Some children felt powerless, as they saw their schools becoming military bases. In a sense, the children who were sent away from their schools and villages literally saw their education and future being snatched away

from them by the faction which assumed control over their schools. As shown earlier, this echoes the concern raised in the Public Statement of the UNWG-CAAC about the "... military use of schools and hospitals in violation of applicable international law..."¹⁵ Similarly, the GCPEA 2020 report identified military use of schools and universities in Mali from 2015 to 2019¹⁶. Also, improper or deliberate disposal of ammunition during occupation — such as land-mines, grenades and/or other unexploded ordnances in and around the school premises — presents a threat to the lives of children and the school personnel¹⁷.



Drawing 1

The attackers occupied our school and raised their flag. They chased away our teachers and students. Our school was turned into a camp. The attackers kept their equipment at our school.

Daouda (not real name), 12 years old, Mopti

¹⁴Not real name

¹⁵ UNWG-CAAC Public Statement by Chair on Mali, UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. For a full Public Statement, see <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/public-statement-chair-working-group-children-and-armed-conflict-5-february-2021>, site visited on 29th June, 2021

¹⁶ GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2020, A Global Study of Attacks on Schools, Universities, their Students and Staff, 2017-2019. https://9ehb82bl65d34vylp1jrlfy5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020_Full_Report.pdf

¹⁷ GCPEA report on Mali 2014, https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_eua_2014_country_profiles_mali.pdf, site visited on 20th August, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Child recruitment at or en-route to or from, school

Besides occupation and use of schools for military purposes, child respondents narrated that some school children were either forcefully and/or lured to enlist in military/armed or other illicit activities. As is discussed in the next section, some of the reasons why schools are destroyed is to deny children an education — making it easier for perpetrators to take advantage of children's vulnerability to forcefully enlist or lure them to join military/armed or other illicit activities. During an analysis with the child researchers, it was revealed that both boys and girls (forcefully taken or lured with promises) out of school have been exploited as spies by parties to the conflict. Girls were more likely to be used in espionage activities and in other exploitative roles as 'comforters or wives'. Boys perform roles as 'fighters' and/or equipment/supply carriers. Worse of all, children have been exploited in conflict situations as '*kamikaze*'¹⁸ — in direct reference to the Japanese World War II suicide bombing tactic against enemy targets.

These activities are not only illicit but are also in breach of all the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict under the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1261 of 1999¹⁹. Resolution 1261 condemns the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict and calls on all parties concerned to put an end to (1) killing and maiming of children; (2) recruiting or using children as active combatants; (3) sexual violence against children; (4) abducting children; (5) attacks against schools or hospitals; and (6) denial of humanitarian access for children.

In most cases, children's accounts of attacks on schools and/or school children and personnel showed that schools, homes and other critical infrastructure were simultaneously targeted during an attack on villages. Many children blamed the

school attacks on NSAGs as well as intercommunal conflicts and related reprisal attacks, e.g., between herders and farmers. Though it could not be independently verified, many children were also positively certain that some elements within the armed forces were involved as well²⁰.



Girls telling their stories of most significant change when their schools were attacked

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 1999, Resolution 1261, Adopted by the Security Council at its 4037th meeting, on 25 August 1999, p.1.
[https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1261%20\(1999\)](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1261%20(1999))

²⁰ Tree analysis with girls, Barbe IDP Site, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

4.2 Reasons behind attacks on education in Mali

As noted by the GCPEA, attacks on education in Mali are motivated by a variety of reasons — some political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic or religious in nature — or a combination of these²¹ as children’s perspectives reveal below.

A strategy to increase chances of recruiting school children into armed groups or struggles

One of the reasons children identified for attacking schools in Mali was that schools, if in operation, have great potential to keep children from joining armed groups and forces. Attackers therefore aim to disrupt education to increase their chances of recruiting children. Children who refuse to join are also sometimes punished. The personal story of Aminata²² — a 14-year-old girl and a resident at Barbe IDP site, sheds light on some reasons behind school attacks in her village (see Box 3)²³.

Aminata’s story provides insights that children and young people are viewed — by parties to the conflict — as a vital source of support to their causes. Forceful recruitment of children, including school children, as a *modus operandi* to increase the rank and file of armed groups and forces in conflict affected regions is well documented²⁴. As is often the case, the attackers in this case employed a ‘carrot and stick’ tactic to persuade the young people in Aminata’s village (some of them still in school) to join their cause — skillfully, using a range of contextually relatable arguments, e.g., the common heritage or identity-talk, the deep sense of

discrimination and/or injustices experienced, often hinged on “perceptions of exclusion, grievances, or cultural threats...”²⁵ They have also been known to promise ‘enticing perks for a secure future,’ among other things, to a very needy, vulnerable and unemployed young population. The account shows that young people in Aminata’s village declined and the ultimate price for “refusal to join” was a death penalty. The school was also destroyed to deny children and young people access to education.

Left with no other choice, young people are often forced to join (or collaborate with) the rank and file of (sections of the) parties involved in the conflict. While positive steps are being taken by the government of Mali in the right direction²⁶, there is still deep concern that (sections of the) parties to the conflict in the region continue to commit violations and abuses against children — such as, “recruitment and use of children...” and outright violation of children’s access and right to education (See subsection below on “Abduction and murder of school personnel and forcing children to leave school”)²⁷.



A Researcher, 17 years old, writing participants' details

²¹Education Under Attack 2018 (protectingeducation.org), site visited on 20th August, 2021

²² Not real name

²³ Aminata, 14 years, Barbe IDP, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

²⁴ Kato Nkimba, Uganda Country Report: Thematic Evaluation of Children’s Participation in Armed Conflict, Post Conflict and Peace Building, Kampala: Save the Children Uganda / Norway, 2009

²⁵ Jessica Trisko Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth”, American Enterprise Institute, May 2019, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>, site visited on 20th August, 2021

²⁶ UNWG-CAAC Public Statement by Chair on Mali, UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. For a full Public Statement, see <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/public-statement-chair-working-group-children-and-armed-conflict-5-february-2021>, site visited on 29th June, 2021

²⁷ Ibid

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

It should not be overlooked that for fear of death or other punishment, some communities (including, vulnerable children and young people) reluctantly or are forced to support a cause, not necessarily their own — but one

intended to unleash reprisal attacks against another community (popularly referred to in this context as, *reglement de compte*— see detailed discussion on this in section below). In many situations of conflict and violence, the hands of vulnerable children are literally tied— and are forced to fight “adult wars” not out of their own will.

Efforts to bring an end to secular education and western/French culture

Children mentioned that Islam-leaning NSAGs want to bring an end to the use of French in schools and are opposed to promotion of western values and cultural way of life. Also, children pointed out that these NSAGs are interested in instituting a Sharia system of justice in Mali. Children’s findings in many research locations corroborated this argument. Mahamadou’s (not real name) story illustrates this (see Box 4)²⁸. It was revealed that an Islam-leaning NSAG — operating in Ansongo where some girl respondents fled from —issued a directive requiring girls and women to observe a full hijab dress code “to maintain modesty and privacy from unrelated males”²⁹. All this was aimed to dismantle every aspect of the western-style education and way of life — and replace them with more traditionalist forms that follow Sharia. Bintou’s account vividly paints the picture (see Box 5)³⁰ and is reinforced by Moussa’s (not real name) story which gives further details on how Sharia was imposed in their community (see Box 6)³¹.

²⁸ Storytelling by Mahamadou (not real name), 15 years of age, originally from Ansongo village, interviewed on 11th August, 2021, Mopti Region.

²⁹ Shared during an initial analysis with researchers on the 12th August, 2021, at the training venue, Mopti; filed research carried out with girls on 12th August, 2021 at Jonjou IDP site, Mopti

³⁰ Interview following a tree analysis with Bintou (not real name), a girl of 13 years, at Jonjou IDP site, Mopti

³¹ An interview following a tree analysis with Moussa (not real name), a boy of 13 years, at Jonjou IDP site, Mopti

Box 3

“All was well before the conflict. Our village was green, with lots of trees. It was also calm. Then, the attackers came. At first, they wanted to get our brothers and sisters in the village to take part in their struggle. They refused, and that is why the attackers killed some of them before my eyes. Our school and everything in the school were also destroyed. We had no choice but to leave my village”.

*Aminata, 14 years old, Barbe IDP site, Mopti,
27th July, 2021*



A child drawing attacks on his school and village, Mpoti, Mali

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Box 4

“Our school was attacked by men ‘armed to the teeth’. Our teachers were the only ones at school at the time of the attack. They were in the staffroom. The men ordered them to say, “Children should not study!” As commanded, our teachers repeated after the men. The armed men were opposed to the teaching of French and [the western] culture in the school. Our teacher was harmed. All the school documents and children’s birth certificates [written in the French language] were set on fire. The men said, they wanted to implement Sharia Law in Mali”.

Mahamadou (not real name), 15 years of age, originally from Ansongo village, 11th August 2021, Mopti Region

Box 5

“In Ansongo, Sharia was imposed on everyone. At first, our village was not attacked. Listening to radio or watching television was abolished. People were stopped from communicating on phone. My grandfather was attacked and killed. That is the reason why my parents brought me out of Ansongo to come and live here. My parents are still in Ansongo”.

Bintou (not real name), a 13-year-old girl from Ansongo

Box 6

“It was 10am in the morning and I was at school when an armed group attacked us. The attackers were from [another ethnic group] and they came to settle some score. Our class teacher was ordered to get all the children out of the classroom. All our furniture was set on fire. The attackers then declared, ‘We are here to enforce Sharia. All girls and women must wear a hijab. No more learning’. The attackers used the megaphone in the mosque to communicate their orders to the community. They pulled down the Mali flag and hoisted their black flag. They stole food and animals. After this incident, we came to Mopti”.

Moussa (not real name), a boy, 13 years old, at Jonjou IDP site, Mopti

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali



Children show their experiences and the enormous cost of attacks on their education through drawing, Mopti, Mali

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Targeted attacks on schools, homes and other critical infrastructure to push communities out of their villages

Children's findings from different field research locations revealed that simultaneous and targeted attacks on schools, homes and other critical infrastructure were strategically intended to bring community life or routine (e.g., administration, schools, hospitals) to a grinding halt as a way to drive people out of their villages.

In so doing, attackers gained more control over the local area — in terms of occupancy and land-use³². Box 7 highlights a synthesis of children's views — in their own words — on the reasons behind attacks on schools and communities which they considered to be a 'deliberate and orchestrated plan' to displace them and their other family members from their villages and schools³³.

Box 7

Armed groups attacked and burnt down villages. Schools, homes and hospitals were not spared. They shot and killed people. They wanted to kill my father. My brother was kidnapped. They told us, "Leave the village!" No place was safe — homes, schools, mosques, churches... That is why we left [This statement was said in every location]. They did this because they wanted to occupy our land, territory and region [This was repeated several times]. They looted our food, stole and killed our animals, to deny us means to live. Water points or wells were blocked to deny people water. They chased us from our school, and now they sleep there. [Some of the times] quarrels between communities break out. [One group] grazes their animals on [another group's] crops or garden. But also, [the other group] grows crops beyond their boundary lines. The quarrels grow into conflicts. Then, attacks and counterattacks start. One boy was attacked as a way to get to and hurt his father who was the person the assailants really wanted.

A synthesis of girls' and boys' perspectives derived from their drawings, stories, and tree analyses across all IDP sites / research locations in Mopti on the question: "Why were your schools attacked?" (26th -28th July and 11th -13th, August 2021).

³² Analysis of children's findings to the question: Why were villages and schools attacked?

³³ Analyses from children (girls and boys), drawings, stories and tree analyses on the question: "Why were your villages and schools attacked?", across all IDP sites/ research locations in Mopti, 26th -28th July and 11th -13th, August 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Inflicting deep emotional pain on enemy communities during inter-community/inter-ethnic conflicts

Many children blamed the school attacks on intercommunal conflicts and related reprisal attacks, e.g., between herders and farmers over access and control of natural resources, between ethnic groups, etc. As children's views indicate (see section on nature of attacks and Box 8 for tree analysis by boys at Barbe IDP site), the attacks on schools paint an ethnic or tribal undertone, interlaced with traces of political and religious motives discussed by child researchers in a risk mapping assessment of Mopti and its environs. Because children are the “soft spot” of many communities, schools and school children are deliberately attacked to inflict deep emotional pain on enemy communities and/or identities³⁴ as cycles of violent revenge attacks take rounds.

While inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts have their causes in unresolved issues and grievances between and among communities, they tend in some cases to take on and/or align with ‘other interests’ outside their communities — often through manipulation of local tensions and grievances by ‘outsiders’ (e.g., NSAGs, politicians, etc.) who want to advance their political, economic and ideological interests. These conflict actors exploit such situations to mobilise support from disadvantaged communities to advance their selfish agenda³⁵, and by so doing escalate conflict dynamics into violent cycles of revenge attacks. Characteristically, cycles of revenge attacks in Mali also target a section of

the population or an ethnic community deemed to be sympathetic to an NSAG or some elements within the armed forces viewed ‘negatively’ by the aggrieved community who have suffered perceived or real injustices, exclusion, cultural threat or violations³⁶. Conflicts between the herders and farming communities illustrate these fragilities very well. Also noted by children was that minor skirmishes between families have reportedly been blown into full-scale cycles of community conflicts and reprisal attacks. In the process, certain sections of the population (for example, school children) — with no tie to the conflict whatsoever — have fallen victim as different parties to the conflict tussled it out to settle scores (*reglement de compte*) between themselves³⁷. More often than not, schools as well as the school personnel and the children have borne the brunt of reprisal and revenge attacks between communities. Children's experiences and views through their drawings and personal stories fully attest to this³⁸. Their villages have been destroyed, making them and their families homeless and their education disrupted, to say the least.

Box 8

“It was a conflict between two ethnic communities [The children referred to the parties by their ethnicities]. Our school was attacked, before children could start school that day. The school staff ran away. The attack happened very early in the morning. Some of the children were still in bed. However, some children were beaten by the attackers. The village head was murdered, and homes were burnt down. The attackers slept in our school and turned it into a military camp. That's why we are here in Sevre”.

Tree analysis with boys, Barbe IDP Site, Mopti, 27th July 2021

³⁴Education is both the victim and the best weapon in Central Sahel conflict, <https://theconversation.com/education-is-both-the-victim-and-the-best-weapon-in-central-sahel-conflict-148472>; and Supporting Safe Education in the Central Sahel, Briefing Paper, September 2020, GCPEA, <https://9ehb82bl65d34vylp1jrlfy5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Central-Sahel-Paper-English.pdf>, sites visited on 25th July, 2021

³⁵Mobility and Conflict in Liptako-Gourma, Clingendael Conflict Research Unit and Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, March 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/liptako-gourma_study-march_2019-web.pdf, site visited 24th July, 2021

³⁶ Jessica Trisko Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth, American Enterprise Institute, May 2019, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>, site visited on 20th August, 2021

³⁷ Initial analysis with researchers, training venue in Mopti, 11th August, 2021

³⁸ Analysis of data collected during the child led field research in Mopti, Mali, 26th -28th July and 11th – 13th August, 2021

4.3 The effects of attacks or threats of attack

Children's experiences reveal that the consequences of attacks on schools, school children, teachers and other personnel working at schools are multiple and intertwined. Some of these include: closure of schools; disruption of schooling and general education activities; fear to use French language in schools; fleeing of teachers and other school personnel; psychological and trauma related effects; displacement, including separation of school children from their families; and increased chances of children joining armed groups and forces (willingly, coerced or forced).

Closure or abandonment of schools and disruption of schooling

Children narrated several incidents of attacks on schools that resulted in school closures, e.g., where attackers gave directives that schools be closed or where attackers occupied schools and used them for military purposes (see section 4.1). In some instances where school administrators or directors defied or refused to comply with NSAGs' dictates to close schools, they paid a hefty price with their lives. For instance, in 2015, a leader in Dogo village in Mopti who refused to close secular schools was murdered. The following year in 2016, an NSAG opposed to western education and the government of Mali murdered a school director. Similarly, a threat of attack issued against teachers in 6 communes by NSAGs led to the closure of 93 schools.



Drawing 2

A school set on fire in Ansongo, including vehicles, motor bikes and bicycles.

Mahamadou (not real name), 15 years of age, originally from Ansongo village, Gao, 11th August, 2021, Mopti Region

³⁹ GCPEA, Education Under Attack, 2018 — 11th May, 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5be9430813.html>, site visited on 21st August, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Box 9

“School was like a second home for us. I still remember this very well. We would always hurry to go to school. Our teachers were so loving and caring. When conflict broke out, our village was deserted. Everyone left and even the school could not operate. In the next five years *Insha Allah* [when God wills it], we would like to go back to school to study normally without any fear”.

Fadumata (not real name), 15 years, Barbe IDP site, 27th July, 2021

“Our schools were never attacked. The armed bandits chased everyone from the villages. This led to school closures. Our teachers fled. So, did a large part of the population. But the school infrastructure was never affected. Currently, classes are back in session. Some people have already gone back. But some of us are still here. We are scared. We fear being attacked again”.

A few girls working with girl researchers, Barbe IDP Site, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

However, according to children’s findings, not all schools that experienced “attacks on education” were ordered to close and/or were destroyed. Due to threats of danger or harm, school teachers, staff and children fled to safer places or feared appearing at schools — eventually leading to abandonment and closure. For instance, the incident narrated by the boy from Djirel (see section 4.1, Box 1) led to the closure of 4 schools in the village⁴⁰. With everyone gone, including teachers, other school personnel, children and parents, schools could not operate as narrated by Fadumata⁴¹ and as explained by a group of girls⁴² (see Box 9). The girls’ fears can partly be explained by unpredictable security situations in

communities — often characterised by temporary periods of calm or sudden upsurges in conflict or violence. Even where a truce has been reached, some communities have violated them time and again.

Strategically, attacks or threat of attacks on the school personnel and/or teachers instilled fear in them — ultimately, compelling them to abandon teaching or flee to save their own lives hence forcing schools to close. Closing schools disrupts children’s education and (indeed, the nation’s) future — in the end, serving the purposes of those opposed to the teaching of French and western education and culture.

⁴⁰ A story of change, with a boy, age not given, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

⁴¹ Fadumata (not real name), 15 years, Barbe IDP site, 27th July, 2021

⁴² A few girls working with girl researchers, Barbe IDP Site, Mopti, 27th July, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Psychosocial/psychological effects of attacks on education

Children's findings showed that attacks on schools, school children, teachers and other adults working at schools had psychosocial impacts on children. While interacting with child researchers, a number of child respondents coped well and demonstrated resilience. They shared very heartbreaking stories without breaking down and were amazingly calm and at ease with themselves. Overwhelmed, a few broke down as painful memories sprung up again. Child researchers understood the emotions of children who have suffered loss and traumatic experiences. They did their best to comfort them drawing on skills gained during the research skills training (see methodology section). Amidst their fieldwork, child researchers integrated into the entire field research process lively and fun-filled dance, games and play as part of psychosocial first aid to children.

Because of attacks and threats of attacks on schools, school children, teachers and other personnel, children reported that they experienced vivid memories of the traumatic events, fear, frustration, powerlessness, a sense of loss of control, and other signs of distress. As reported by children, often attacks and threats of attacks instilled great fear in school children, teachers and other school adults working at schools. The experience of Aminata, a girl living in Ougougain IDP site, illustrates how attacks on education impacted children's psychosocial wellbeing (see Box 10)⁴³. Similar effects are laced all through the experiences shared by many children in this research as

highlighted in Diagram 1. Killing of teachers and other adults at schools, physical harm to school children, destruction of schools including burning of school buildings, occupation of schools by attackers, being displaced after school attacks and trying to cope in new schools and being uncertain about their schooling were some of the traumatic events and stressors identified by children. Children's findings ⁴⁴ (in analyses, drawings and stories) show that secondary stress factors causing stress in school children include: loss of family property (including, food, animals, money), homes and schools (education and future); not enough food and inadequate housing/ shelter in (makeshift) IDP sites, children working to raise family income, among other factors.

Box 10

"The day our school was attacked, I was very scared. I was terrified. All I could think about was death. What hurt me the most was — after the attackers chased the children and teachers away from school, they occupied our school and turned it into their camp. What could we do? We were powerless."

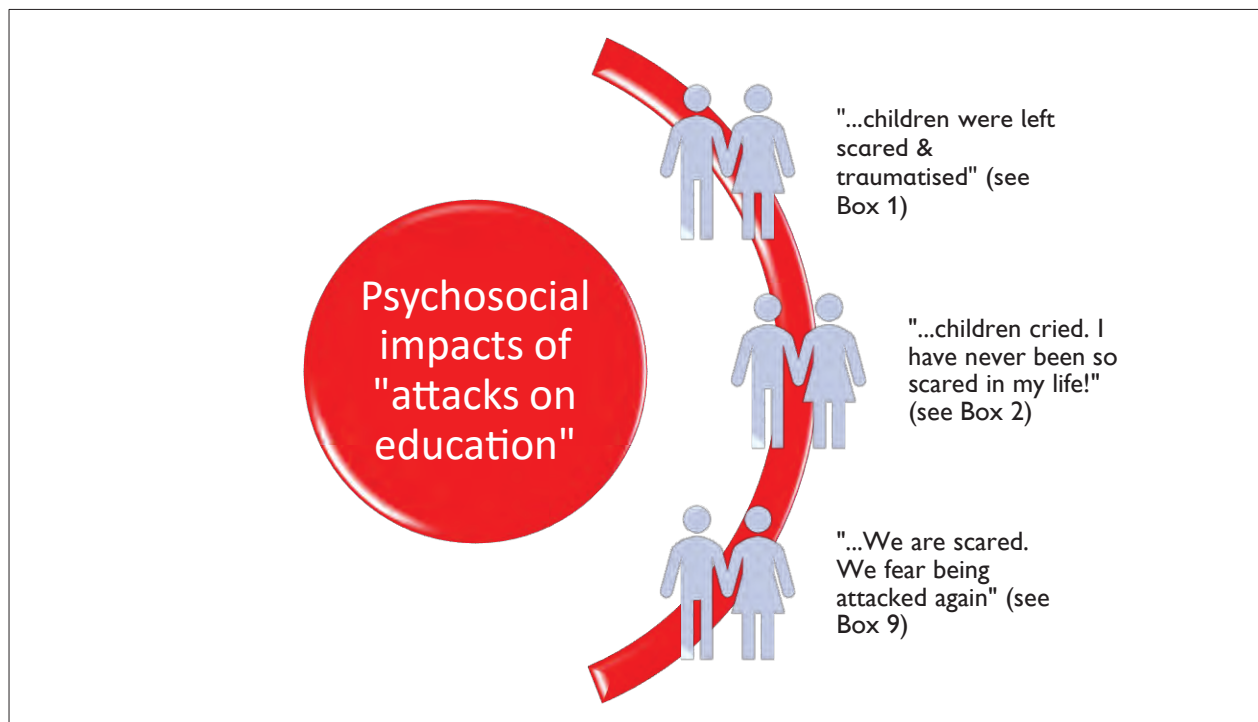
Aminata (not real name), girl living in Ougougain IDP site, 26th July, 2021

⁴³ Story by Aminata (not real name), in Ougougain IDP, 26th July, 2021

⁴⁴ Children's findings by child researchers, Different IDP sites, Mopti, 26th -28th July and 11th -13th August, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Diagram 1: Sample psychosocial impacts of attacks on education in Mali



With regard to support to school children requiring psychosocial support, adults in situations of conflict and displacement are often preoccupied with how to keep their families together or fend for them than worrying about children's feelings in distressful times. Some children reported, "When we arrived here at the IDP site, we were all terrified, but the grown-ups kept their calm to reassure the children"⁴⁵. In other cases, adults may not be in a position to cope with their own loss. Therefore, they may not be able to provide the comfort their children may need in such times nor fully understand their children's emotions or feelings⁴⁶. Some of the children involved in this research however did acknowledge getting support from government and NGOs as well as other well-wishers to meet their material and physical needs.

"We were so relieved to receive basic necessities — like, rice, millet, soap and clothes"⁴⁷. Extending a hand of support to adults in children's lives in such times relieves them of the enormous burden they carry, which in itself impacts the way they support their children. During a group analysis with researchers, it emerged that in traumatic situations such as these, children in rural settings in need of psychosocial support can and have actually been receiving some form of 'traditional and/or spiritual counseling' provided by grandparents⁴⁸. Left unattended to, MHPSS issues may however put children and their other family members at risk of longer-term psychological and/or mental health consequences.

⁴⁵ Discussions with children, Ourgain IDP site, 26th July, 2021

⁴⁶ Alliance International HIV/AIDS, Building Blocks: Africa-wide briefing, United Kingdom: Progression, 2003

⁴⁷ Discussions with children, Ourgain IDP site, 26th July, 2021

⁴⁸ After fieldwork group discussion and analysis with child researchers together with their Mentor— a staff of Save the Children Mali, Training venue, Mopti, 12th August, 2021,

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

5.0 Key Messages and Recommendations

Below are children's key messages and recommendations to duty bearers and key decision makers as well as other recommendation to address issues that emerged from children's field research.

5.1 Key Messages from Children



We want safe schools

- Make schools safe for all children to learn
- Construct destroyed schools
- Protect our schools from attacks
- Protect school children and teachers from attacks
- Stop abduction and killing of children and teachers



We want safe communities

- We want peace to enable us to go back home
- Secure our villages and roads
- Support our communities to resolve local conflicts between ethnic groups



We want a peaceful & secure Mali

- Stop the war and build a strong and unified Mali
- We want conflict to end so that we can have peace
- Leaders are our parents, they should protect us from attacks

5.3 Children's Recommendations

To school management, community leaders, and local administration

Work together to:

- Provide a safe education for all children.
- Protect children and teachers from attacks.

To state administration, armed forces and groups

- Find lasting solutions to protect schools, teachers and children from attacks. Negotiate, talk peace, and reconcile with one another to allow life to become normal again and schools and villages to be safe for children and their families.

Other Recommendations

To the Government of Mali

- Work closely with the National Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration (NC SSD) through the newly constituted Regional Committees of the Safe Schools Declaration (RC SSD) to strengthen coordination of activities as well as monitor, alert and respond to reported cases of violations as well as to prevent attacks.
- Finalise and adopt all pending legislation to protect education from attack during armed conflict, including ratifying and domesticating any pending international and/or regional treaties to protect and guarantee all children's rights.
- Use context-appropriate, community-based bottom-up approaches for long lasting solutions for peace and reconciliation to address enduring cycles of inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts.

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

- Negotiate with NSAGs to refrain from attacking schools as well as school children, students, teachers, professors and other school personnel drawing on lessons learnt from similar efforts in Mali.
- Urge all parties to the conflict to refrain from any attacks on education; and in collaboration with development/humanitarian partners, build the capacity of conflict parties on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the SSD and accompanying Guidelines, informed by lessons learnt from past trainings that benefited some NSAGs¹.
- In collaboration with development agencies and partners as well as health providers, put strategies and interventions in place to provide adequate and comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services to children, teachers and other school staff who have experienced attacks on education to boost their resilience to cope with distressing emotions.
- Reintegrate birth certificate replacement processes for young and older children who lost their birth certificates to attacks on education as part of protection services in emergencies/humanitarian interventions.

To the African Union

- Together with the Government of Mali, support domestication and implementation of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25)².

To the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant United Nations bodies

- In line with the Public Statement of the UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (UNWG-CAAC) of 8th February 2021, advocate for the implementation of all pending commitments made by the Government of Mali when it endorsed the SSD.
- Compel listed parties to the conflict in Mali to end and prevent the violations and abuses, and restrain from any indiscriminate attack on perceived enemy strongholds that may put innocent school children and other people's lives in danger.
- Strengthen all monitoring and reporting partnerships among the UN-led MRM, Education Cluster, Ministries of Education, and civil society.

¹ See a draft report by Save the Children and Lerddl, "Capitalising the process of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in Mali, June 2021"—now in its final process of completion.

² African Union, Continental Education Strategy for Africa, 2016-2025, CESA 16-25, pp. 8, 22 & 26.
https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf

Appendix 1

Providing a Background to Children's Findings on Education Under Attack in Mali

A Literature Review on the Situation in Mali⁵⁵

Contextual Background

Due to the context sensitivity, this literature review presents the situation in Mali for learning purposes — and in no way makes explicit reference to the parties involved in the conflict. Mali has since its transition to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s⁵⁶ had its share of unresolved issues that continue to undermine its stability to date. Since 2012, many parts of the north and later on the central region have become a theatre for armed conflict and violence, including, graphic scenes of massacres and destruction of property — due to incidents of insecurity, intercommunal violent conflicts as well as ethnic violence⁵⁷. Areas that have been affected include towns and villages located in Central Mali (e.g., in Segou and Mopti) and in regions in Northern Mali — such as, in Gao, Kidal, Timbuktu and the northern parts of Mopti. A host of factors, such as, porous borders, illicit human and drug trafficking activities and non-State armed groups (NSAGs) operating in the region have historically been blamed for much of the

insecurity in the north — with spillovers in 2018 into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger⁵⁸.

In the month of July 2021 alone, Mopti witnessed pockets of armed conflict and violence — e.g., intercommunal violence and reprisal attacks that have led to destruction of property, deaths and injury to say the least⁵⁹. Violations against civilians, together with the effects of natural catastrophic events, have caused mass displacements of people to relatively calmer areas within and beyond Mali's borders. This has continued to exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation as people flee their homes to save their lives. To put this into perspective, some 40,000 people in Mali were forced to leave their homes in search of safety in 2020 alone⁶⁰. This has led to disruption of already vulnerable family lives and livelihoods — making it even more difficult for those who have stayed (or on the run) to access life's basic needs and services, such as education, food, healthcare and water.

Education under Attack in Mali

The context of armed conflict and insecurity as described above has created an environment in which attacks on education in Mali are executed. Characteristically, attacks on education between 2013 and 2017 in Mali fit GCPEA's definition — albeit with contextual variations. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) defines Attacks on Education as “any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff (e.g., janitors, bus drivers), or education officials, as well as attacks on education buildings, resources, material, or facilities (including

⁵⁵ This extract, with minor adjustments, is drawn directly from the Literature Review Report on Education Under Attack carried out as part of this research process in July 2021 to inform the child-led research studies in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

⁵⁶ Federal Research Division, Country Profile: Mali, January 2005, Library of Congress — <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Mali-new.pdf>, site visited on 23rd June, 2021.

⁵⁷ MSF, Violence in Central Mali has Reached Unprecedented Levels, <https://www.msf.org/violence-central-mali-reaches-unprecedented-levels>, site visited on 23rd June, 2021

⁵⁸ DRC, Central Sahel is rapidly becoming one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, <https://drc.ngo/it-matters/current-affairs/2020/11/central-sahel-crisis/> site visited on 15th June, 2021

⁵⁹ Analysis of data collected during a child-led research study, Mopti 27th-29th July, 2021 and 4th-6th August, 2021

⁶⁰ DRC, Central Sahel is rapidly becoming one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, <https://drc.ngo/it-matters/current-affairs/2020/11/central-sahel-crisis/> site visited on 15th June, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

school buses)”⁶¹. Like elsewhere though, the motive(s) behind such attacks range from being political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic to reasons that are religious in nature — or a combination of these.

While attacks on education in Mali may have begun somewhat earlier, those that are most noteworthy trace their origin from around 2012 when the conflict began. The period between 2012 and 2013 saw indiscriminate destruction of school infrastructure by non-State armed groups (NSAGs) intensify with much more frequency, causing wanton damage⁶². Based on the Education Cluster Report (2013), elements within the armed forces and NSAGs “occupied, looted, or destroyed some 130 schools” in the north since 2012. The GCPEA 2020 report also identified military use of schools and universities in Mali from 2015 to 2019⁶³. Due to fighting and withdrawal of essential personnel (e.g., teachers) from schools out of fear for their lives or reprisal, many schools were forced to close⁶⁴. As reported, occupation or use of schools for military purposes has had disastrous outcomes as revealed in the second half of 2013 — “explosives, including those left in schools, injured at least 77 children in the towns of Tessalit, Kidal, Timbuktu, and Gao.” Schools were also damaged by explosives⁶⁵. The occupation of Kidal region, and later of Kidal town, by NSAGs led to the closure of seven schools — “preventing 772 children from completing the 2013-2014 academic year”⁶⁶. The volatile security situation in Central and Northern Mali between 2014 and 2017 continued to pose a threat to children’s education and lives, school personnel and infrastructure. This was due to the presence of

NSAGs operating in Gao, Kidal, Timbuktu (in the north) and Segou and Mopti (in the centre).

Because of threat of attacks issued against the teaching personnel, more than 500 schools were forced to close — affecting more than 150,000 school children who had to stay away from school for their own safety⁶⁷. Similar to attacks elsewhere in Central Sahel, one of the reasons commonly cited to justify attacks on education is “opposition to French, western-style education and government institutions”⁶⁸. In Mali, over 60 attacks on education took place in 2019 alone — with over 1,100 schools closed⁶⁹. By early 2020, Mali had 1,261 school closures⁷⁰ — a 13 percent increase. At least 27 attacks on middle schools took place in June 2020, when schools reopened for children to take their exams⁷¹.

Attacks on education in Mali have had numerous devastating effects as described above, such as deaths and physical harm, damaged school infrastructure, school closures and school withdrawals, depriving students from accessing education, risks to children travelling to access new schools that are often further away, increased risk of child labour and child marriage and pregnancy among students, to mention but a few. Besides, the psychosocial and mental wellbeing of a number of students, teachers and other education personnel and support staff has also been affected as a result.

⁶¹Education Under Attack 2018 (protectingeducation.org), site visited on 20th August, 2021

⁶²Refworld, UNHCR, <https://www.refworld.org/publisher/GCPEA/5be9430813.0.html>, Site visited on 29th June, 2021

⁶³ GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2020, A Global Study of Attacks on Schools, Universities, their Students and Staff, 2017-2019. https://9ehb82bl65d34vylp1jrlfy5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_full.pdf

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶Refworld, UNHCR, <https://www.refworld.org/publisher/GCPEA/5be9430813.0.html>, Site visited on 29th June, 2021

⁶⁷ Amnesty International, *Mali: Violations and abuses as instability spreads*: A report by Amnesty International released in October 2017, ahead of Mali’s Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council quoted by Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), <https://protectingeducation.org/news/mali-insecurity-keeps-more-than-150000-children-out-of-school/>, site visited on 28th June, 2021

⁶⁸ HRW, Burkina Faso: Armed Islamic Attack Education, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/burkina-faso-armed-islamists-attack-education>, Site visited on 29th June, 2021

⁶⁹ Education Cannot Wait, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/attacks-on-students-teachers-and-schools-surge-in-africas-sahel-gcpea/>, site visited on 28th June, 2021

⁷⁰ HRW, Burkina Faso: Armed Islamic Attack Education, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/burkina-faso-armed-islamists-attack-education>, Site visited on 29th June, 2021

⁷¹ Education Cannot Wait, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/attacks-on-students-teachers-and-schools-surge-in-africas-sahel-gcpea/>, Site visited on 28th June, 2021

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

According to a mental health and psychosocial support needs assessment conducted in Mali (December 2018 – January 2019), issues around education — e.g., attacks or threats of attacks on schools, dropping out of school due to insecurity, insufficient teachers and school infrastructure, etc., — were identified as some of the most common problems and stressors in 3 out of 4 regions assessed (Segou, Timbuktu and Sikasso)⁷². People (including children) suffered from psychological/psychosocial issues ranging from acute stress, grief, moderate to severe depressive disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. The same report notes limited or lack of support services and treatment for such cases at the health facility or referral hospital levels. The report further recommends, among others, the need to: strengthen national mental health systems, mental health training; provide services at various levels to increase proximity; develop community care networks operating around those affected, including operational referral networks⁷³.

Efforts to Promote Safe Schools in Mali

Despite continued attacks on education by NSAGs, the government of Mali on the 1st of February 2018 exhibited its determination by becoming the 73rd country to commit to safeguarding education during armed conflict⁷⁴. By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), Mali committed herself “to implement [...] plans and policies to better protect education.” Undoubtedly a very significant milestone, Mali boasts as one of the countries that have established a national level committee to

implement the SSD.⁷⁵ Established in 2019, the National Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration (NC SSD) is composed of 9 Ministries, 2 United Nations Agencies, 4 international NGOs and 2 Civil Society Organisations including the Children's Parliament⁷⁶.

Through its ‘Decision No. 2019-0481 of February 22, 2019,’ the Ministry of Education (MoE) formally granted the NC SSD the legal instrument to closely follow-up the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration⁷⁷. Worth noting here is the adult-child partnership model of representation within the NC SSD. As members of the NC SSD, the young representatives from the Children's Parliament have a real-time platform to directly voice their views on matters affecting their education in conflict and/or other situations.

For effective implementation of the NC SSD work, Regional Committees of the Safe Schools Declaration (RC SSD) have since December 2019 been in place in Mopti and Tombouctou⁷⁸. The RC SSD are made up of the regional executive, municipal authorities, judicial authorities, police and partners⁷⁹ — and are charged with monitoring, alerting and responding to reported cases of violations as well as to prevent cases of attack. Other RC SSD have also been established in Gao, Segou, Koulikoro, Menaka and Kidal, Koulikoro and Segou⁸⁰.

⁷² International Medical Corps, Rapid Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Needs Assessment in Mali, December 2018 – January 2019.

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/2019/11/Mali-MHPSS-Assessment-2019_IMC-SANTE-MENTALE.pdf

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ GCPEA Press Release, 5th March 2018, Dominican Republic and Mali Endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, <https://protectingeducation.org/news/dominican-republic-and-mali-endorse-the-safe-schools-declaration/>, Site visited on 29th June, 2021

⁷⁵ GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2020, A Global Study of Attacks on Schools, Universities, their Students and Staff, 2017-2019.

https://9ehb82bl65d34vylp1jrlfy5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_full.pdf

⁷⁶ For details of the composition of the NC SSD, see a draft report by Save the Children and Lerddl, “Capitalising the process of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in Mali, June 2021” — now in its final process of completion.

⁷⁷ Save the Children, National Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration Follow-up in Mali: Action Plan 2020, February 2020

⁷⁸ Save the Children, National Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration Follow-up in Mali: Action Plan 2020, February 2020

⁷⁹ See a draft report by Save the Children and Lerddl, “Capitalising the process of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in Mali, June 2021” — now in its final process of completion.

⁸⁰ Save the Children, National Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration Follow-up in Mali: Action Plan 2020, February 2020

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

Between March and December 2019, the NC SSD met once monthly — a total of 8 meetings in all.⁸¹ Similarly, the NC SSD drew up its annual action plan for 2020 and 2021 and has held monthly meetings to coordinate and monitor the implementation of planned actions⁸² — for example, “coordination of activities at national, regional and local levels; building the capacity of stakeholders to implement the SSD; adopting legislation to protect schools against attack during armed conflict; disseminating of the Declaration and its guidelines; and participating in international meetings on SSD for the sharing of good practices”.

Mali’s National Armed Forces have also embraced the Safe Schools Guidelines by integrating them in their military doctrines and manuals⁸³. In addition, Mali has implemented gender-responsive curricula to address the impacts that conflict and attacks on education have on women and girls — including, disaggregating data by gender in the national information system⁸⁴.

The achievements of the SSD implementation are attributed to the working relations the government of Mali has had with its development and humanitarian partners. As one of Mali government’s partners and a lead Technical Monitoring Commission (TMC) member of the SSD implementation, Save the Children has since 2018 been working closely with other stakeholders focusing on education and protection, e.g., the MoE as the in-charge, UN agencies, International NGOs, CSOs, national and local level key actors/ decision makers, among others⁸⁵.

It is important to mention here that not only have the skills of various actors/ leaders at different political and administrative levels been strengthened on SSD and its implications; but also, “armed

movements, signatories to the peace and reconciliation agreement as well as the other parties to the conflict have benefited from training and awareness sessions on the protection of education and securing learning spaces during armed conflicts”⁸⁶.

Taking stock of progress made by the government of Mali to fulfil its commitments to its national, regional and international obligations, a Public Statement of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict — issued through its Chair on 8th February 2021⁸⁷ — welcomed the positive steps the Government was taking “to implement a national policy on child protection as well as making effort to strengthen its national legal framework to protect children affected by armed conflict”. In particular, the working relations with the United Nations country task force were seen as an important milestone towards strengthening “community-based mechanisms aimed at preventing the six grave violations”⁸⁸. Also, the Statement took note of the Government’s concerted effort “to identify and provide care to children released from armed forces and groups as well as to children at risk of recruitment and re-recruitment”⁸⁹.

That said however, the Working Group singled out the draft national law on child protection as an important legislation that (at the time of compiling this report) still needed to be finalised and adopted “in order to implement its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CRC — with regard to the recruitment and use of children below the age of 18 in armed conflict”⁹⁰. The Working Group also urged all parties to the conflict to take immediate and specific measures to put a complete end to all the six grave violations against children — including, indiscriminate attacks or threats of

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See a draft report by Save the Children and Lerddl, “Capitalising the process of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in Mali, June 2021” — now in its final process of completion.

⁸³ GCPEA, *Education Under Attack 2020, A Global Study of Attacks on Schools, Universities, their Students and Staff*, 2017-2019.

https://9ehb82bl65d34vylp1jrlfy5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_full.pdf

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Save the Children, *Terms of Reference for the Implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration in Mali*, 2018

⁸⁶ See a draft report by Save the Children and Lerddl, “Capitalising the process of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) in Mali, June 2021” — now in its final process of completion.

⁸⁷ UNWGCAC Public Statement by Chair on Mali, UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. For a full Public Statement, see <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/public-statement-chair-working-group-children-and-armed-conflict-5-february-2021>, site visited on 29th June, 2021

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

We Want Safe Schools: A Child-led Research Study in Mali

attacks against those institutions and their personnel as well as the military use of schools and hospitals.



A young boy busy sketching his drawing on his experiences of attacks, Mopti, Mali



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 <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYafJ7mw4EutPvYSkpnuarUQ>