



Ornella Moderan

**Mainstreaming of Women's Needs
and Participation in Security Sector
Reform Processes in Burkina Faso,
Mali, and Niger**



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About the Author

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	05
Acronyms and Abbreviations	06
Foreword	07
Executive Summary	08
1. INTRODUCTION	09
2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CRISIS AND OVERVIEW OF THE SECURITY CONTEXT: A SEVERELY DEGRADED ENVIRONMENT	11
3. REFORMING THE SECURITY SECTOR IN A CRISIS-RIDDEN SAHEL, AND ENSURING THAT WOMEN ARE INVOLVED	15
3.1. What Does Security Sector Reform Mean?	15
3.2. What Major Challenges Does Security Sector Reform Pose in the Current Context?	15
3.3. SSR Experience in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger	16
3.4. Why Is Women's Involvement in the Security Sector Important?	19
3.5. Legal and Policy Frameworks to Promote Women's Rights and Gender Equality	22
4. INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCES AND OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECURITY SECTOR	25
4.1. What is the Status of the 'Feminization of the Forces'?	25
4.2. Policies and Institutional Mechanisms Designed to Stimulate Women's Involvement in the Security Sector	28
4.2.1. Advances and Challenges in Human Resources Management Frameworks	29
4.2.2. Institutional Mechanisms to Combat Sexual Harassment, Sexist and Discriminatory Treatment, and Other Gender-Related Abuses	31
4.3. Institutional Cultures Dominated by Norms Built Around Exclusive Masculinity and Influenced by Sexist Beliefs	32

5. SOCIETAL OBSTACLES TO WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND SECURITY MATTERS IN PARTICULAR	35
5.1. The Status of Women in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger	35
5.2. Structural Gaps in Women’s Participation in Public and Political Affairs	36
5.3. Deficits in Women’s Formal Participation in the Peace Processes	38
5.4. The Impact of Gender Stereotypes and Prejudice	39
5.5. Gendered Roles and the Weight of Social Expectations	40
5.6. Despite the Rhetoric, Gender Issues Remain a Low Priority	40
6. RESPONSE TO WOMEN’S SECURITY NEEDS BY THE SECURITY SECTOR: A STATUS REPORT ON RESPONSES TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE	41
6.1. Gender-based Violence in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger	41
6.2. Analysis of the Security Sector’s Institutional Response to Gender-Based Violence	42
7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	45
Bibliographical References	49

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
AES	Alliance of Sahel States
AfDB	African Development Bank
APDF	Association pour le progrès et la défense des femmes maliennes (association for the advancement and defence of Malian women)
APM	Association des policières du Mali (female police officers' association of Mali)
APR	Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali
ATGs	Armed terrorist groups
AU	African Union
CAFO	Coordination des associations féminines au Mali (coordination of women's associations in Mali)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CNT	National Transition Council (Mali)
CSA	Algiers Peace Agreement monitoring committee (Mali)
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DDR	Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration
DGESS	Directorate-General for Sectoral Studies and Statistics
DSFs	Defence and Security Forces
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ENSOA	École Nationale des Sous-officiers d'Active (national active non-commissioned officers school – Burkina Faso)
GBV	Gender-based violence
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
GPRS	Multidisciplinary Focus Group on Security Sector Reform
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
GTIA	Special joint task forces
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISSP	Islamic State – Sahel Province
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Support Group for Islam and Muslims)
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MPSR	Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration (Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration – Burkina Faso)
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONPG	National Observatory for Gender Promotion (Niger)
PFAT	Women's Branch of the Army (Mali)
PKO	Peacekeeping Operations
PMK	Military Academy of Kati
PNG	National Gender Policy (Burkina Faso)
PNPF	National Policy for the Advancement of Women (Burkina Faso)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNG	National Gender Strategy (Burkina Faso)
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VDP	Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland
WILDAF Mali	Women in Law and Development in Africa – Mali

FOREWORD

This study was drawn up as part of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's (FES) internal reflection process on how to enhance its contribution to peace and security around the world, in Africa and more specifically in the Sahel region.

After several rounds of activities using a variety of different formats, the FES decided to include the concept of 'political economy' in its approach to conflict and security analysis. This means embracing an interdisciplinary approach which, due to the numerous interdependencies involved, combines the political dimension (and its institutional aspects) with the socio-economic dimension (including its security, economic and social, cultural, gender, ethnic, and religious aspects, *inter alia*). The aim of this inclusive analysis is to draw up proposals for lasting peace and stability.

The Dakar-based Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa (FES PSCC) was created with a view to implementing the vision of the FES. A review of past research themes has directed the centre towards a thematic 'decompartmentalization' aligned with both national and regional realities.

In this context, the study focuses on mainstreaming women's needs within the security sector reform processes in the central Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger). This is no easy task, considering the highly sensitive nature of the issue, combined with the complexity of the socio-political environment and security dynamics in the region.

Since security sector reform (SSR) is concerned with the overall governance of security institutions to increase their effectiveness and

accountability to both internal and external control, it requires that gender inequalities be recognized and addressed so that security institutions can capitalize on the knowledge and skills that both their female and male members have to offer or are able to develop.

In addition to these political dimensions, which are essential for its successful implementation, SSR also requires technical proficiency that goes far beyond that required for combat or military strategy, or that would be the preserve of uniformed personnel. It requires expertise in such diverse areas as law, legislative drafting, the development of legal frameworks, strategic and operational planning, human resources administration and management, and gender relations management, to name but a few.

For all these reasons, and because SSR cuts across the regalian sphere of defence and security, it can only be achieved if it is underpinned by strong political commitment at the highest level, and at all levels of responsibility along the decision-making and command chain.

This study explores the nature of progress achieved with regard to women's participation in the security sector in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as well as institutional responses to the specific security needs of girls and women. To this end, the study draws on a methodology based on a literature review, followed by the collection of updated primary data through interviews with representatives of state institutions, members of civil society, and specialists selected for their specific knowledge and experience in relation to SSR and women's participation in the security sector in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over a decade, the central Sahel region has been beset by a multitude of violent crises and conflicts buffeting the Liptako Gourma states of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. These crises and conflicts threaten the overall stability of the region.

In **Mali**, the birthplace of the crisis, the political and security context is defined by a combination of distinct but interconnected conflict systems. **Burkina Faso**, which had previously been spared, began to experience large-scale terrorist attacks in 2015, shortly after the fall of the Blaise Compaoré regime in 2014. The dynamics of conflict and armed violence in **Niger** unfold mainly in the eastern part of the country, in the Diffa region, with attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram; in the west of the country, in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, which have been facing growing insecurity since 2017; and finally, on Niger's south-central border with Nigeria, especially Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states, which are facing an upsurge in criminal incursions that have weakened the security situation in the Maradi region.

The deployment of an ultra-militarized state response has so far failed to reverse the trend and restore stability and security, much to the detriment of civilian populations in these various countries.

Security sector reform is therefore imperative, to improve governance and make the sector more accountable in protecting not only states but also individuals and, more importantly, to

make it more responsive to current needs, while upholding the rule of law and including women in the process.

Since SSR is concerned with the overall governance of security institutions to increase their effectiveness and accountability to both internal and external control, it requires that gender inequalities be recognized and addressed so that security institutions are able to capitalize on the knowledge and competencies that both their female and male members have to offer or are able to develop.

While significant progress has been seen, especially with security institutions gradually opening up to female membership – a process sometimes referred to as the 'feminization of the forces', the achievements are still limited, and much remains to be done. Similarly, security institutions in all three countries have gradually put in place mechanisms to respond to gender-based violence but, here again, much remains to be done.

This study provides a brief overview of the status of SSR in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It then discusses advancements in terms of women's representation in these institutions, and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the services offered by these institutions. The study also describes the obstacles that continue to hold back progress in this area and concludes with some practical recommendations for addressing the challenge posed by persistent barriers.

1. INTRODUCTION

For several years now, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have been facing a profound multidimensional crisis, which has severely strained not only their security infrastructure, but also the national governance system underpinning it. The persistence of major security threats – including militancy by violent extremist groups and an upsurge in community conflicts – has highlighted the need to implement appropriate measures and processes to improve governance within the security sector, and thereby enable a more effective response to current challenges. With this in mind, considerable emphasis has been placed on resizing, reorganizing, training and equipping defence and security forces (DSFs).

Significant as they may be, these steps alone fall short of what is needed to recalibrate the relationship between security institutions and society, and to revitalize their human potential to face multi-faceted threats. To fully meet the challenges of violence and insecurity, it is important that nations can draw on the full range of human resources at their disposal. In the case of the Sahel countries, which are characterized by significant structural gender disparities, the limited involvement of women in peace and security matters is a missed opportunity to leverage the full spectrum of human talent. Security sector reform (SSR) must address this situation, by creating the conditions that enable women – who make up approximately half of the population – to play a more substantial role in addressing the security issues that impact them as profoundly as they do men.

Settling for limited involvement of women in security matters means, first and foremost, depriving ourselves of the contribution of a

large segment of the population. National data show that women made up 51.7% of the population in Burkina Faso in 2018 (National Statistics Council of Burkina Faso), and 50.11% in Niger (National Statistics Institute of Niger). In Mali, women accounted for 49.7% of the population in 2022, according to the Fifth General Population and Housing Census (Ministry of Economy and Finance, Mali). Despite this, women's demographic weight is not reflected in the staffing mix of security institutions, where female personnel are still largely in the minority; neither is it reflected in the definition of national security priorities, which pay little attention to the specific security concerns of girls and women.¹

There have certainly been significant advances since the time of independence, notably with security institutions gradually opening up to women personnel in their ranks – a process sometimes referred to as the 'feminization of the forces'. However, progress has been limited and much remains to be done. Similarly, security institutions in all three countries have gradually put in place mechanisms to respond to gender-based violence, but here again much remains to be done.

This study explores the nature of progress made firstly towards women's participation in the security sector in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and, secondly, institutional responses to the specific security needs of girls and women.

1 For example, national security paradigms are facing challenges in meaningfully mainstreaming the issue of gender-based violence (GBV), which mainly affects girls and women. In Mali, for example, 97% of GBV victims recorded in 2021 were female. It is therefore essential to address this issue if we are to effectively safeguard the safety of girls and women.

To this end, the study provides a brief overview of the security context prevailing in the Central Sahel region, followed by a summary of the current status of SSR in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It then reviews progress made with respect to women's participation in these institutions, and gender mainstreaming in the services offered by these institutions. The study also describes obstacles that persistently impede progress in this area and concludes by putting forward practical recommendations to meet the challenges posed by these enduring obstacles.

The study methodology was made up of two successive phases, beginning with a comprehensive literature review, followed by the gathering of up-to-date primary data through thirty-seven interviews with individuals, including representatives of state institutions, members of civil society, and specialists selected on the basis of their specific knowledge and experience related to SSR and women's participation in the security sector in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Ten of the thirty-seven interviews conducted involved male participants while the remaining twenty-seven featured women.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CRISIS AND OVERVIEW OF THE SECURITY CONTEXT: A SEVERELY DEGRADED ENVIRONMENT

For more than a decade, the central Sahel region has been grappling with a multiplicity of violent crises and conflicts that have shaken the Liptako-Gourma countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger). These crises and conflicts pose a serious challenge to the overall stability of the region.

In **Mali**, where the crisis originated, the political and security environment is characterized by a combination of various conflict systems, each with its own actors and rationales, yet interconnected with links and mutual influences. The combination of these crises and conflicts has generated a serious humanitarian crisis, with 412,000 internally displaced people listed in April 2023 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and 8.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance – nearly 40% of the national population.

In the north and east of the country, deep-seated disputes continue to pit the armed groups that spearheaded the 2012 rebellion against each other and against the central government in Bamako. While the signing of an Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali in 2015, coming out of the Algiers Process, halted fighting between the signatory armed groups and government forces for several years, clashes resumed in mid-2023 against a backdrop of heightened tensions. In addition, the ceasefire aside, little progress has been made in implementing the other provisions of the Agreement over the eight years from 2015

to 2023, and they appear to be trapped in a persistent stalemate. These provisions include key reforms affecting security issues, such as the implementation of a demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process for former fighters belonging to armed groups that signed the Agreement (Articles 18 to 20 of the Agreement), the redeployment of reconstituted armed and security forces (Articles 21 and 22), the reform and reorganization of the armed and security forces (Articles 23 to 28), and counter-terrorism efforts (Articles 29 and 30). In addition, Article 17 of the Agreement stipulates, among the 'guiding principles' on 'security and defence issues', the principle of 'inclusiveness and significant representation of all the populations of Mali within the armed and security forces'. In June 2023, Mali requested the withdrawal of the UN Mission (MINUSMA) that had been stationed on its territory since 2013 with a mandate that included supporting the implementation of the Agreement, so the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (APR) appears more fragile than ever, and its future uncertain.

The second major conflict affecting Mali is related to the issue of terrorism and violent extremism whose main perpetrators are united within two independent but interconnected coalitions. Firstly, the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM in Arabic for *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin*), led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, is affiliated with Al Qaeda. In many ways, it also has close ties to the Algerian terrorist groups of the past decades, such as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA, which was active in the 1990s) and its successor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The entities and *katibat* (fighting units) making up the JNIM operate in both northern Mali (Kidal, Taoudéni, Gao, Ménaka and Timbuktu regions) and central Mali (Mopti, Douentza, Bandiagara, Ségou and San regions).

On the other hand, fighting units united under the banner of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), or the Islamic State – Sahel Province (ISSP), are still active in northern, eastern and parts of central Mali. They are particularly prevalent in the Gao and Ménaka regions, bordering Niger, and regularly clash with the JNIM over the control of vast territories. This fighting not only results in numerous human fatalities, but also in forced population displacements, serious breaches in the protection of civilians and massive human rights violations, including kidnappings, cattle rustling and property grabbing and destruction. Recent data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project focusing on the tracking and geolocation of incidents of politically motivated violence, suggests a continued expansion of violent extremist groups in Mali towards the southern and western regions of the country² along with their infiltration into neighbouring countries.

The threat of extremism in central Mali has reignited latent inter-community conflicts, sparking the revival or creation of community-based armed groups (sometimes claiming self-defence status) and giving rise to several episodes of mass violence perpetrated on identitarian grounds.³

This violence has significantly contributed to exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, impacting the displacement crisis and protection efforts, in addition to exacerbating the food crisis.

Burkina Faso, which had been spared up until then, started experiencing large-scale terrorist attacks in 2015, shortly after Blaise Compaoré's 27-year rule ended in 2014. While the attacks were initially aimed at strategic targets in the heart of the capital city of Ouagadougou, they spread to most of the northern half of the country over the ensuing years, taking aim first at military objectives and then increasingly focusing on civilian targets.

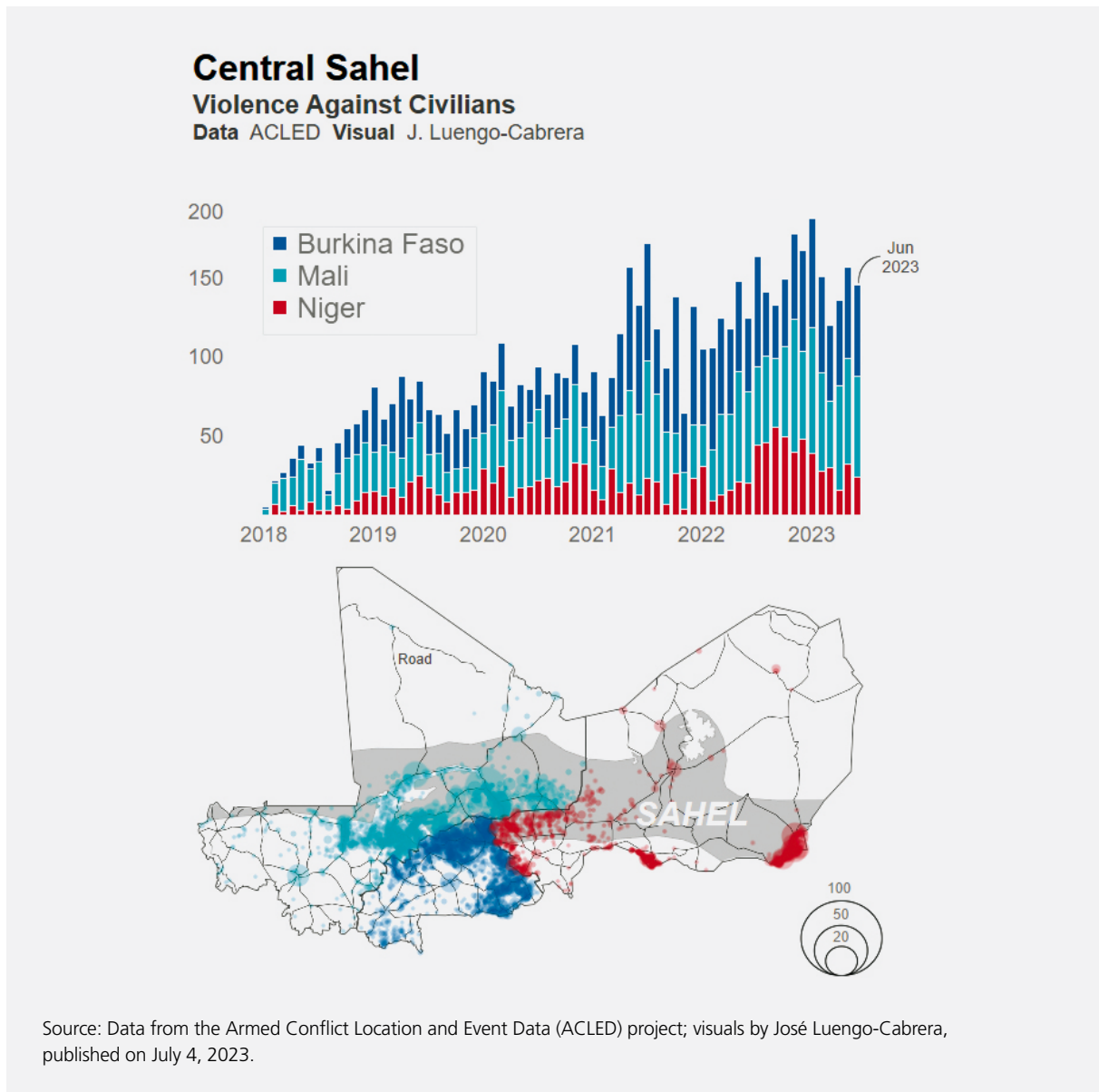
The proliferation of attacks and outbreaks of violence in recent years has led to an unprecedented and unparalleled humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso, forcing more than two million Burkinabe to flee their homes.⁴ Violent extremist groups entrenched in huge swathes of the western, northern, and eastern regions of the country deploy harassment and isolation tactics leading to blockades around at least 26 towns as at mid-2023. Their targeting of teachers led to over 5,700 schools being closed by October 31, 2022, affecting over a million students. Medical personnel have also been targeted, leading to numerous health centres being closed or reduced to operating at minimum capacity, which is inadequate to meet the needs of the population.

At the same time, these armed terrorist groups (ATGs) continue to expand their presence both in Burkina Faso and towards neighbouring countries, notably Benin and Togo. A highly militarized state response has so far failed to reverse the trend and restore the peace of mind of Burkina Faso's rural populations.

In **Niger**, the dynamics of conflict and armed violence primarily unfold on three fronts. The Diffa region, in the east of the country, has long suffered the attacks of the Boko Haram group, amid the security crisis that has been raging in the Lake Chad Basin since 2009.

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- 2 In the south and west of Mali, their influence is evidenced by the incursion of preachers urging the population to sever ties with government forces, and by attacks both on government forces and on villages holding out against them. As is the case in other areas, more and more schools and health centers are being closed.
 - 3 The deadliest cases to date include the double attack on the Fulani village of Ogossagou, in March 2019 and again in February 2020, and the attack perpetrated in Sobane-Da in June 2020.
 - 4 Official figures from Burkina Faso's Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (SP/CONASUR) as at March 31, 2023.

Box 1. Trends in Violence against Civilians in the Central Sahel Region (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger), January 2018 - June 2023



This network of conflicts also involves Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon, all of which, like Niger, lie adjacent to Lake Chad. The western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua have faced growing insecurity since 2017, affecting the civilian population and traditional authorities as well as representatives of the national authorities including the DSFs and local administrations.

The presence of armed groups with varying motivations in this part of the Niger territory, and also in the regions along the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, creates a precarious security context that has considerably destabilized local communities, who are forced to resort, in droves, to forced and preventive displacements for protection.

An upsurge in criminal incursions into Niger's territory on the south-central border with Nigeria, notably in the states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara, has weakened the security situation in the Maradi region. This phenomenon, should it persist, is likely to lead to the emergence of a third security front, which will test the ability of Nigerien forces to deploy simultaneously in several parts of the country's vast territory.

The conflict and violence have a multifaceted impact on women, girls, men, and boys in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Beyond the risks they all face (attacks on villages, closure of health centres, burning of granaries, physical and psychological violence, death threats and executions, etc.), people living in the same local area may also be exposed to additional risks associated with their distinctive identity markers, such as ethnicity, religion, biological sex or gender-imposed social obligations.

For example, socio-cultural norms that associate violence and the use of force with maleness put men and young men at greater risk of being enlisted into violent extremist groups, but also of execution by these groups, which see men as more of a threat than women.⁵ The social distribution of gendered roles within the family, which assigns men the responsibility of providing financially for the needs and protection of their family members, may lead some to join armed groups voluntarily, or become involved in organized crime in order to generate substantial income. Gender stereotypes also mean that women are less often suspected of involvement in armed groups, even when they are members or associates. Research nevertheless reveals the presence of women within non-state armed groups, whether as fighters (especially in the Lake Chad Basin) or in non-combat functions, such as supply, intelligence or caring for the wounded.

Violence and insecurity also impact on children, in particular by hindering their access to school education. However, this phenomenon differs somewhat between girls and boys. Again, owing to gender structures, school drop-out among boys increases their risk of recruitment. Among girls, on the other hand, it increases the risk of early marriage. Women and children are over-represented among internally displaced persons in all three countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger). Based on annual humanitarian needs assessments carried out by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), women and children will account for 51% and 54% respectively of the 8.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Mali in 2023. For Burkina Faso, the figures are 53% for women and 55% for children. In Niger, the figure is 50.3% for women and 6.2% for children.⁶

5 Conflict-related sexual violence, which is a reflection of sexual violence outside the conflict and a form of objectification of women, affects girls and women more than men and boys. In this respect, it is an extension of other socially normalized forms of violence against girls and women: domestic violence, early and forced marriage with the imposition of non-consensual sexual relations, etc.

6 These figures can add up to more than 100% for each country, as the 'women' category refers to females of all ages, while the 'children' category refers to people under 18 of all genders. Thus, girls under 18 are counted in both categories.

3. REFORMING THE SECURITY SECTOR IN A CRISIS-RIDDEN SAHEL, AND ENSURING THAT WOMEN ARE INVOLVED

3.1. What Does Security Sector Reform Mean?

Security sector reform (SSR) is a process aiming to change or transform the organization, management, framework (including political and legal), supervision and control (internal and external) of security stakeholders, in order to improve the governance of this sector and make it more effective and accountable in terms of protecting not only governments, but also individuals. It also aims to make the national security system more responsive to current needs, more observant of the rule of law, and more efficient in the use of the limited resources allocated to it to fulfil its mandate and accomplish its goals.

SSR is a complex process, typically spread over several years, which can be applied to one or more security institutions (referred to as sector-based reform) or to a country's entire security apparatus (referred to as holistic reform). In all cases, SSR requires judicious sequencing of interventions and skilled management, if it is to deliver the expected results while limiting negative externalities. This is a particularly sensitive reform process, which can generate a great deal of resistance because it throws existing balances, habits and certain privileges into question. For all these reasons, and because SSR touches on regalian issues of defence and security, it can only be implemented if it is underpinned by a strong political will at the highest level, and at all levels of responsibility along the decision-making and command chain.

In addition to these political dimensions, which are vital for its successful implementation, SSR also requires technical competencies that far exceed those required for combat or military strategy, or skills that would be the preserve of uniformed personnel. It requires expertise in fields as wide-ranging as law and legal drafting, for the revision or development of legal frameworks; needs assessment and strategic and operational planning; administration and human resources management; finance, accounting and auditing; planning and management of institutional change processes (change management); management of disciplinary, ethics and professional conduct policies and procedures; complaints management; institutional communication; and gender relations management and recognition of account gender inequalities with a view to rectifying them so that security institutions can make the most of the knowledge and skills that both their female and male members are capable of offering and developing. Since SSR is concerned with the overall governance of security institutions to increase their effectiveness and accountability to both internal and external control, its requirements are much more stringent than the routine practices of training and equipping troops, which may be part of an SSR rationale, but which SSR cannot be reduced to.

3.2. What Major Challenges Does Security Sector Reform Pose in the Current Context?

Considering the circumstances currently prevailing in the Sahel (2023), these characteristics make security sector reform a highly challenging and potentially double-edged exercise. Firstly, the countries of the Central Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) are facing serious security crises, which are

Box 2. The African Union's Definition of SSR

'In this policy, SSR refers to the process by which countries formulate or re-orient the policies, structures, and capacities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector, in order to make them more effective, efficient, and responsive to democratic control, and to the security and justice needs of the people. [...] "Security Sector Reform" is sometimes expressed as security sector governance, security sector transformation, security sector development, security sector review as well as security and justice reform'.

Source: Article 5 of the AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform (SSR), 2013

forcing them to redefine their national security systems in order to respond more effectively to the threats facing them. This situation creates, at least in theory, a compelling case for reform that would better adapt the shape, operation and values of the security sector to present-day challenges.

At the same time, however, resolutely embarking on such far-reaching and structural reforms entails the risk of disrupting security institutions, at a time when their stability and reliability are crucial if we are to meet the multifaceted challenges posed by armed terrorist groups, intercommunity conflicts and organized crime.

Added to this are the sensitivities associated with the prospect of reforming the security sector in a context of political transition following military coups in all three countries. While the principles of SSR intersect with the tenets of the sector's democratic governance, such as the fact that the defence and security forces have no political affiliations, and are subordinate to democratically elected political authorities, these principles contrast with the reality of the military transitions following the disruption of the constitutional order. How can these principles be reconciled against the backdrop of a military coup in Mali in August

2020, which ousted the elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, and an institutional coup in May 2021, which consolidated the political clout of a small military elite, not to mention the successive coups d'état staged in Burkina Faso in January and October 2022, which deposed the elected President Roc Marc Christian Kaboré and Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba respectively, and the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023, which toppled President Mohamed Bazoum.

Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that SSR processes are hardly a novelty in the Sahel region. The following paragraphs provide a review of the SSR experiences of the region's countries.

3.3. SSR Experience in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

In **Burkina Faso**, the 2011 mutinies, followed by toppling of the Blaise Compaoré regime in 2014, exposed the need to reform the country's inequitable and politicized security apparatus. Despite the window of opportunity presented by the popular uprising of 2014, the in-depth reforms needed to rebuild the security sector along democratic lines have yet to take place. The reforms that were announced in the af-

termath of the insurrection were essentially limited to dissolving the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP) – an elite squad that had long served as Compaoré's Praetorian Guard – and failed to thoroughly rethink the conditions for ensuring the efficiency and accountability of the security sector as a whole. Nearly a decade later, the consequences of the lack of adequate reforms are still perceptible, especially considering the persistent and sometimes corporatist internal discord and strategic, operational and management grievances within the forces. The successive coups d'état of January and October 2022 are a symptom of these profound rifts, both between the military and political elites, and within the military itself, between different divisions and seniority levels.

Before its fall in January 2022, the government formed after the November 2020 elections had revitalized the security sector reform process in Burkina Faso. The adoption of a much-anticipated national security policy in October 2021 marked an important milestone and rekindled hopes for a revitalized reform process. This policy notably drew on the conclusions of the October 2017 National Security Forum, which called for a broader perspective on security, along with the development of a national security policy, broken down into sector-specific policies and a national strategy. However, the sluggish execution of these recommendations and the persistent mutual distrust between the military and the political establishment have been an obstacle to the timely resolution of governance and management issues, which could have bolstered the effectiveness of the DSFs in the field. The National Security Policy was adopted in June 2021, four years after the Forum, and has been implemented only to a limited extent.

In addition, the establishment by a January 2020 law of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP) – a mechanism calling on

citizens to join the armed struggle against terrorism and insecurity – and their reinforcement in 2022 with the recruitment of over 50,000 volunteers, has further blurred the lines separating civilians from fighters. This further complicates the prospects for security sector reform, while also making it more of a necessity than ever. Prior to the introduction of the VDP, Act 032 governing local security initiatives, which became effective through Decree 1052 of 2016 on the operationalization of community policing, established a framework for intervention by people's security initiatives, such as the *koglweogos* and *dozos*. However, the failure of the DSFs to keep these groups in check highlighted major problems (human rights violations, and sometimes even confrontations with government forces), which the VDP initiative was intended to remedy.

In November 2005, long before the onset of the multi-dimensional crisis that has beset the country since 2012, **Mali** organized its National Security Conference (*États généraux de la sécurité*), as part of the process of developing a national security and civil protection policy. These conferences provided an important opportunity to reflect on the governance and performance of the security sector. Building on this foundation, the government, with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), subsequently set up a program for shared security and peace governance (PGPSP, 2008-2010), to support the implementation of the 'shared governance' concept.

Following the outbreak of the 2012 political and security crisis, which was partly due to severe dysfunctions in the national security architecture (see Box 3), the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection set up a Multidisciplinary Group for Security Sector Reform (GPRS, formed in 2013), which in turn proposed the creation of a National Security Sector Reform Council. The Council, which was instituted by

presidential decree in 2014, subsequently underwent a number of changes, including its inclusion, from 2016, in a broader institutional framework reflecting the provisions of Mali's Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, signed in 2015.

The 2016 decree repealing the 2014 decree also modified the institutional affiliation of the National Security Sector Reform Council, added a technical wing to it, the Security Sector Reform Commissariat, and established grassroots bodies known as consultative security committees. However, the first consultative security committees were not actually established until 2019/2020, as the conditions for their establishment were defined by a decree in 2019. More recently, the decision by Mali's transitional authorities, announced in 2022, to switch back to a militarized police format – already experimented with by the country in the 1970s and 1980s – was a major reform, albeit one whose relationship with the formal SSR process has not been clearly explained. At the same time, a national security sector reform strategy and action plan for 2022-2024 were approved by decree in April 2022.

In **Niger**, the national authorities do not tend to evoke security sector reform, but focus instead on security sector governance, while recognizing the need for ongoing improvements to the sector's bodies, management modes and professional practices and frameworks, and avoiding the 'reform' terminology that some still associate with an admission of dysfunction.

Efforts deployed to bolster Niger's security governance framework include the adoption, in 2017, of the country's first National Internal Security Strategy which, in 2022, was upgraded, leading to the adoption of a second version spanning the 2022-2026 period. A community policing strategy was also launched in 2022,

also covering 2022-2026. A national security policy, designed to serve as the overarching instrument for all these strategies, is currently being drafted by the National Centre for Strategic and Security Studies, but has yet to be finalized.

Simultaneously, several security institutions, including the police and gendarmerie, have initiated changes to their human resources systems to foster more transparent, efficient, and skills-based management, and equip themselves with tools enabling them to attract new talent.

However, major governance challenges remain. In 2020, a Ministry of Defence audit report revealed the staggering scale of the misappropriations that eroded the defence budget between 2014 and 2019, highlighting a general trend towards poor financial governance. The audit revealed that, over a 5-year period, 76 billion CFA francs (around 116 million euros) were misappropriated, including 48.3 billion CFA francs (around 66 million euros) in over-billing and 27.8 billion CFA francs (around 42 million euros) in fictitious equipment (paid for but never delivered).

The issue of human rights observance by the DSFs **in the three countries** under study remains a major point of contention between human rights organizations and the governments in power, and an area of potential progress that should not be overlooked in security sector reform initiatives. In Niger, a report by the National Human Rights Commission published in 2020 documents the involvement of sections of the Nigerien armed forces in human rights violations perpetrated against civilians in Inates in 2019. In Burkina Faso, numerous organizations are concerned about the trivialization of abuses committed by members of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland, and the involvement of 'men in uniform' in serious human rights

violations has been revealed through witness accounts and journalistic investigations. The report produced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Moura events is undoubtedly the most telling example of this type of dispute in Mali. The report, which was published in May 2023, points to the involvement of members of the Malian armed forces (FAMA) in the massacre of hundreds of civilians in March 2022. While the national authorities of all three countries almost systematically reject such allegations, their persistence suggests that current and future security sector reform initiatives need to devote more substantial and detailed attention to human rights issues.

3.4. Why Is Women's Involvement in the Security Sector Important?

One of the main objectives of SSR is to ensure that security institutions respond as effectively as possible to the protection and security needs not only of the state and its institutions, but also those of individuals, irrespective of their gender, age, or other identity markers. An effective security sector must be capable of meeting the security needs of both men and women, girls and boys, in an efficient and responsive manner.

This implies creating the conditions for women's active and meaningful participation in discus-

Box 3. Security Sector Reform and Coups d'état in the Central Sahel region

Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger all experienced unconstitutional changes of government between 2020 and 2023. These events were not unprecedented, since Mali had experienced 3 coups between 1960 and 2019 (in 1968, 1991 and 2012 respectively); Burkina Faso 5 coups over the same period (in 1966, 1980, 1982, 1983 and 1987 respectively, not counting the popular uprising in 2014 and the aborted coup attempt of 2015); and Niger 4 coups (in 1974, 1983, 1996 and 2010).

The recurrent nature of these coups reflects the political instability of these countries, combined with challenges in terms of security sector governance and reform. The incursions of armed forces into the political arena certainly reveal a lack of democratic culture within the security sector. However, it is also important to reiterate that the coup leaders who have taken power in the region over the last ten years have often justified their actions by citing exasperation with dysfunctions in the security sector that could have been avoided or remedied through better governance.

- In March 2012, in Mali, Captain (his rank at the time) Amadou Haya Sanogo justified his coup against President Amadou Toumani Touré by citing the unpreparedness and disorganization of the Malian armed forces to deal with the Tuareg rebellion, and what he considered to be the responsibility of the political authorities in the painful defeat at Aguelhok (January 2012), which he ascribed to poor management and poor governance of the security sector.

- In January 2022, in Burkina Faso, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba deposed President Roc Marc Christian Kabore, justifying his actions by what he saw as the elected civilian government's inability to implement appropriate measures to enable the defense and security forces to effectively stem the terrorist threat. To illustrate his point, he cited the tragic events in Inata in November 2021, in which 54 Burkinabe gendarmes lost their lives in a jihadist attack, while serious malfunctions in the supply chain, perhaps linked to a mixture of negligence and corruption, had deprived them of appropriate equipment and food rations. Despite the promise of an audit of the armed forces' governance under Lieutenant-Colonel Damiba, the dysfunctions persisted.
- Nine months later, at the end of September and the beginning of October 2022, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was in turn overthrown by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who essentially levelled the same reproaches at him. Several analysts have linked Captain Traoré's actions to the deadly attack, perpetrated in late September 2021, on a supply convoy en route to the town of Djibo, which had been under blockade by armed terrorist groups for months. Once again, serious dysfunctions associated with flawed security-sector governance were identified as the cause.
- In July 2023, General Abdourahmane Tiani justified his coup against President Mohamed Bazoum by citing what he perceived as weaknesses in the country's counter-terrorism strategy. While empirical data show that attacks were in fact on the decline in Niger (see ACLED, for example), the lack of follow-up on sensitive dossiers, such as the Ministry of Defense's 2021 audit, which revealed major misappropriations, contributed to national security governance practices being called into question.

sions, decision-making, and action on security issues. At the institutional level, this means ensuring that uniformed women have access to positions of responsibility, enabling them to make their voices heard on the decisions that count. At the nexus between security institutions and society, this means consulting the population when defining security priorities, and ensuring that girls and women can speak for themselves and be heard.

It also implies putting in place institutional mechanisms geared towards meeting the specific security needs of girls and women, such as specialized units or brigades designed to address

gender-based violence, which predominantly affects women.

In addition, experts agree that a security sector that reflects the makeup of society – whether in terms of gender, ethnic identity, or other identity factors – is better equipped to effectively serve a population that is itself diverse; and that this population, in turn, is more likely to recognize itself in these security institutions and to place its trust in them. This argument is based on the idea that the more closely the security sector reflects, in its composition, the population it serves, the healthier the relationship and the rarer the abuses.

A further argument relates to the feminization of violence and crime. In the Sahel, as in other parts of the world, women are more often involved in acts of violence and crime than they appear to be. Several studies have analysed the ways in which women participate in violent extremist groups, whether as fighters or suicide bombers (in the Lake Chad Basin, for example), as logisticians and players in the groups' supply chains or as mothers, sisters or wives providing care and doing domestic chores for fighters.

Equally well-documented is the involvement of women in criminal networks, both as bait and as ringleaders, and at all intermediate levels. Security institutions with professional, well-trained female human resources are better equipped to meet some of the challenges associated with this feminization of violence, for example when it comes to undercover operations requiring female profiles, searching certain women suspected of criminal acts, or gathering intelligence in certain circles.

Box 4. Advantages of Women's Participation in the Defence and Security Forces Cited During Interviews

- **Representativeness:** the more the forces are representative of the population they serve, the better they can understand that population's needs and constraints and provide appropriate responses. It is thus a matter of efficiency.
- **Trust and quality of the relationship between civilians and armed forces:** more diverse forces have a wider range of personality styles with which the population can more easily identify, which can help establish bonds of trust. The presence of both men and women in the forces also makes it easier to engage in dialogue with diverse population groups, in a social context where gender diversity is not always the norm.
- **Operational needs:** searches were widely cited as a case in point. Intelligence-gathering was also mentioned, although that may be based on the gender-based stereotype that women are better at coaxing people into talking. One interviewee also pointed out that the presence of both men and women in these units makes them more accessible to bereaved families, who can choose to speak to the person with whom they feel most comfortable.
- **Optimal use of national resources:** One interviewee, clearly a football fan, spun a metaphor around the sport: 'To win against Barça, you can't send half your team just because the other half has to cook. You need the whole team on the pitch, and it's the same in this conflict. The Burkina Faso team is made up of as many women as men, so cutting out half the team won't do us any good.' (Ouagadougou, March 2023)

Source: *Research interviews conducted in Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou, from February to April 2023*
For further details, see also: Bastick, Megan and Tobie Whitman, *A Woman's Guide to Security Sector*

It is important, however, not to confine uniformed women to tasks that reflect and perpetuate gender stereotypes. For example, the idea that women are 'by nature' kind and gentle, rather than strong and capable of coercion, is often used to justify their assignment to non-combat roles; the idea that they necessarily have a 'maternal instinct' can lead to them being directed towards child protection services; the transposition of gender roles learned within the family to the workplace may partly explain their over-representation in administrative support or care functions, rather than in combat or leadership roles, which are assumed to be more 'masculine'. A security sector reform that is sensitive to gender inequalities should set out to create the conditions that will enable uniformed women to rise above these stereotypes and deploy their talents in all fields, including command, planning and strategy, artillery, combat, piloting, and the management of sensitive information, among other roles.

Last but not least, women's full and active participation in the security sector is also a legal and equity issue. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the Constitution recognizes, at least in principle, that people are equal regardless of their gender or other discriminatory factors. Each of these three countries also has national policies and strategies dedicated to gender issues, stating that they promote the empowerment of women and their full contribution to civic affairs; national action plans for the implementation of UN resolutions concerning women, peace and security; and national laws and policies designed to guarantee a minimum level of participation by women in public affairs, notably through quota mechanisms.

3.5. Legal and Policy Frameworks to Promote Women's Rights and Gender Equality

A wide range of national, international and regional instruments underscore the importance of women's participation in security issues. In his 2008 report entitled 'Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform', the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) emphasized that 'Security sector reform must be gender-sensitive throughout its planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. It must also include the reform of recruitment processes and improvement in the delivery of security services to address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence.'

This view is echoed by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose regional policy frameworks on security sector reform date back to 2013 and 2017 respectively, and prioritize the principle of gender equality, the promotion of women's effective participation in security issues, and the consideration by security institutions of the gender-specific needs of public service recipients. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, as Member States of these organizations, are parties to these instruments.

At the international and regional levels, all three countries have ratified numerous conventions guaranteeing women's rights and promoting gender equality. However, the implementation of these commitments is no easy task. The supra-national instruments and frameworks shared by these three countries include:

- The Beijing Platform for Action (1995), point 5 of which provides for the protection of women against sexual abuse during armed conflict.

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Mali in 1985, Burkina Faso in 1987, and Niger in 1999. It should be noted, however, that Niger ratified the Convention with reservations, the number, nature and scope of which can be construed as calling into question the very spirit of the Convention, thereby underlining the profound tensions between declarative positioning on the one hand, and social realities on the other. Niger has also failed to adopt the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.
 - The Women, Peace and Security Agenda, launched by the unanimous adoption, in October 2000, of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and supplemented over the years by 9 other resolutions emphasizing – among other things – the importance of women's participation in crisis-resolution, stabilization and reconstruction mechanisms [Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1889 (2009), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2493 (2019)], and also on the importance of working to prevent and protect women from conflict-related sexual violence, especially when used as a weapon of war, and to combat impunity for these crimes [Resolutions 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), and 2467 (2019)]. Box 5 below provides the background to the national action plans developed and implemented in the three countries to guide the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, with due consideration to the national context.
 - The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, or Agenda 2030), and in particular SDG 5, which aims to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', and SDG 16, which aims to 'promote peaceful inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'.
 - The Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003). As mentioned above, however, Niger has not adopted this protocol.
 - The AU SSR Policy Framework (2013), in particular section (E) dedicated to 'mainstreaming gender in the security sector'.
 - The ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance, adopted in 2016, whose core principles (Section F) include the importance of women's participation and gender mainstreaming in SSR.
- In addition, at national level:
- Burkina Faso has a National Policy for the Advancement of Women (PNPF 2004-2010) and a National Gender Policy (PNG 2009-2019), whose evaluation gave rise to a third framework document, the National Gender Strategy (SNG 2020-2024).
 - In Mali, there is a National Gender Policy dating from 2011 (not updated since, despite the onset of the crisis in 2012); and Act No. 2015-052/ of December 18, 2015, setting a quota of 30% representation of either sex in all elected and appointed functions; and a three-year gender action plan for the Malian police (2018-2020).
 - In Niger, Act No. 2000-008 of June 7, 2000, institutes a quota system in elected offices, government, and state administration. Decree No. 2001-56/PRN/MDSP/PF/PE of February 28, 2001, sets out the specific means for the implementation of this law. There is also a National Gender Policy (2008) and a National Strategy on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence (2017).

Box 5. The National Action Plans (NAPs) of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger for the Implementation of Resolutions 1325 et seq. Forming the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

In 2012, **Burkina Faso** adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, followed, in 2020, by a second-generation NAP covering the 2020-2022 period, and the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820 and 2242. Also adopted in 2012, **Mali's** first NAP has subsequently been renewed twice. In 2019, the country adopted its third NAP, covering the 2019-2023 period. **Niger** currently has its second NAP, covering the 2020-2024 period.

Resolution 1325 (2000) aims to increase women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in peacebuilding. Resolution 1820 (2008) recognizes the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and calls for action to be taken against the practice, while Resolution 2242 (2015) calls for the participation and leadership of women and women's organizations to be strengthened in development strategies to combat violent extremism and terrorism. Action plans define each country's strategy for implementing these resolutions over a given period in all relevant areas of national life and taking into account contextual specificities.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCES AND OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

4.1. What is the Status of the 'Feminization of the Forces'?

Advances in the legal and political framework have resulted in noteworthy progress. Women's increased participation in the security sector can be seen in the so-called feminization of the forces, although this term may seem exaggerated considering the persistence of a male majority among uniformed personnel. However, despite their vital role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at community level in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, women remain under-represented in peace processes and security mechanisms. These constraints are even more obvious in respect of the proportion and distribution of female personnel within security institutions.

On the whole, the feminization of the DSFs tended to begin with administrative and support positions, with women's access to combat and command functions only coming later. In **Mali**, for example, the Army Health Service was the first to open its doors to women, recruiting two female doctors, Kani Diabaté and Fanta Konipo, in 1974. Following in these pioneers' footsteps, more women joined the Malian armed forces in the 1980s. Nevertheless, this progress needs to be put into perspective.

For example, there are no women in any of the 19 special joint task forces (GTIA, averaging 500-600 personnel each) deployed in operations and combat units throughout Mali against terrorist groups. The interviews con-

ducted for the purposes of our study suggest that this underutilization of women's skills is attributable to a combination of factors, including the persistence of gender roles according to which femininity is at odds with battlefield duties, the weight of social and family obligations that lead some women to prefer urban positions, and the inadequacy of infrastructure in the field to accommodate female personnel in suitable conditions.

Another general trend shared by all three countries is that their police forces have had a tendency to open their doors to women earlier than the armed forces. In Mali, the national police force began recruiting women as early as 1965, just 5 years after independence, and well before the other corps. The same was true of Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta, where women were allowed to join the national police force in 1976, well before the armed forces. In the Sahel, as elsewhere, women have historically been associated with community policing roles, such as peacekeepers, nurses and carers. This has contributed to their earlier acceptance into police forces, often perceived as local policing agencies, than into the armed forces, which are more associated with an exclusive image of masculinity.

Despite the progress made, the number of women in the defence and security forces in all three countries remains very limited. Their scarcity is increasingly obvious as one moves up the ladder of responsibility. There are more women in clerical functions (secretarial, administrative, and office jobs) than in management or command roles (commanding officer or higher ranks). They are also more present in healthcare functions (army doctors, nurses) than in combat functions (fighter pilots, artillery specialists, etc.).

According to figures from Mali's Armed Forces Human Resources Department, women ac-

Box 6. Feminization of the Malian Armed Forces

As mentioned in a 2022 report by researchers Ibrahim Siratigui Diarra and Kalilou Sidibé, 'retired General Kani Diabaté is currently the highest-ranking woman in the history of Mali's Defense and Security Forces'. She is, in fact, the first – and so far, the only – Malian woman to have attained the rank of Brigadier General.

Following in the footsteps of these pioneers, more women joined the Malian armed forces in the 1980s. Thus, according to the abovementioned report (p.9), 'In 1985, 19 young women formed the first contingent of female personnel, then in 1986, a second cohort of 21 female personnel led to the creation of the women's branch of the Malian army (PFAT). These pioneering women received the same military training as the men, albeit in a less extensive form due to differences in physical strength and endurance. Thus, they are instructed on the behaviours and values they need to acquire as soldiers'.

The report nevertheless puts this progress into perspective, pointing to an under-utilization of women's skills when they conflict with traditional gender norms. 'Today, female personnel account for 6.7% of the workforce, but very few PFATs are engaged in combat. So, even if some women operate tanks, heavy machinery and military equipment transport, or as mechanics, most of them are relegated to subordinate and support tasks, including secretarial, clerical, nursing, management, and journalism work.'

counted for just 6.7% of the combined national defence and security forces at the end of 2021. Broken down by corps, this figure reveals that, at that time, women accounted for around 12% of the police force, which was then a civilian force – it will be interesting to see whether or not the decision taken in 2022 to militarize the police will lead to a lower figure. Women made up 7.9% of police personnel sent on peace-keeping missions; 22% in customs; and around 15% in the prison service, where they made up 12% of guards. Figures from the Human Resources Department of Mali's Ministry of Security and Civil Protection show that women also account for 9% of civil protection personnel. The presence of women also remains low in the judiciary, with only 56 women judges in Mali, 4 of whom are presiding judges. All of the country's public prosecutors are men.

In **Burkina Faso**, the promotion of women's participation in the security sector is nothing new. During the Sankarist revolution (1984-1987), women motorcycle officers were the pride of a regime that advocated the empowerment of Burkinabe women in all areas. Women motorcyclists served as police escorts for high-ranking officials and took part in revolutionary parades, giving them visibility and a social aura. However, after the assassination of Captain Thomas Sankara, the practice of promoting women's participation in the security sector came to a halt.

Under Sankara, the air force also opened up recruitment of women for pilot positions – reputedly the most technically demanding and prestigious jobs – as early as 1985, but these efforts were initially thwarted by Algeria's expe-

rience in this field. At the time, some Burkinabe pilots were trained in Algeria as part of a co-operative arrangement (others were trained in France or Morocco). However, the Algerian partner, having previously had an unsuccessful experience with an attempt to feminize its own forces, was reluctant to accept the 5 candidates proposed by Burkina Faso. In the end, it was not until 2013 that Burkina Faso was able to send its first woman to pilot training.

The figures are slightly more positive when it comes to the judiciary. In 2018, 115 of Burkina Faso's 559 judges were women, representing 20.6%, while the percentage of women peaked at 3% for all internal security forces, all bodies combined.

At the end of 2022, women accounted for just 4% of the gendarmerie and around 8% of the police force. Interviews in Ouagadougou also revealed the presence of women among the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), especially following mass recruitment at the end of 2022, although no figures were given. On the other hand, testimonials reported in the media suggest the presence of women

– albeit as a very small minority – among the VDP in several areas of Burkina Faso. However, women's involvement as VDPs varies from one community to another, notably due to cultural constraints that can be more or less restrictive from one area to another.

In Niger, women's participation in security institutions is equally limited. In 2017, the national guard included just 4.4% women, with only 2 women in senior positions, as officers, out of a total staff of around 9,000 for the corps as a whole. The gendarmerie, for its part, had 7% female personnel, and the civil protection service just 0.5%. In 2017, 9.51% of Niger's national police force were women, and only 2% of the armed forces were women – confirming the general trend towards greater feminization of the police force than the armed forces.

Beyond the national forces, women also remain very poorly represented in Sahel-wide regional security institutions, such as the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. Data from 2020 (before Mali's withdrawal in 2022) show that women accounted for just 6% of personnel in the police component of the G-5 Sahel Program, and 0% in its military

Box 7. The Example of the Malian Police Force

Malian women police officers make up 12% of the total force, with 86.22% in positions of lower responsibility (lowest ranks), which is slightly higher than the figure for men (81.82%). At the end of 2021, only 35 women held the rank of Police Commissioner, out of a total of 426 (8.22%); women also represented 9.67% of inspectors (50 women out of 517); and 12.11% of non-commissioned officers (532 women out of 4,393).

Even if the overall proportion of women remains fairly low, the national police force reports that 6 of Bamako's 17 police stations are headed by women, which is a major step forward in terms of female leadership within local security services. Much remains to be done, however, to achieve similar ratios in the highest command positions, and throughout the country outside of the capital.

component. With the three countries entering into a new AES (Alliance of Sahel States), in August 2023, it will be important to assess the level of women's participation in the forces of the alliance, once it is operational.

The proportion of women in the peacekeeping forces deployed by Sahel countries also remains low for now. According to the data collected, the Badenya 3 battalion deployed by Burkina Faso under the MINUSMA peacekeeping force comprised just 17 women out of a total of 850 personnel in 2016, i.e., barely 2% of the total. Nevertheless, when deployed in peacekeeping operations (PKOs), Sahelian women security professionals often stand out for their skills. Several, including peacekeepers from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, have been decorated by the United Nations during their missions.

4.2. Policies and Institutional Mechanisms Designed to Stimulate Women's Involvement in the Security Sector

While progress has been made in increasing female participation in the DSFs in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the figures presented in the previous section show that there is still significant room for improvement. For the most part, security institutions in all three countries have yet to put in place the full range of policies, procedures and practices needed to attract and retain female talent in a healthy and suitable working environment. This applies equally to human resources management arrangements and the policies and tools to combat harassment and gender-based abuse.

Box 8. Opening up Military Academies and Schools to Female Students

Military schools in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are renowned for their excellent training. Entry to these schools is highly competitive. Although they are now open to girls – since 1997, for example, in the case of the Prytanée Militaire de Kati in Mali – the percentage of women graduates remains low. A former deputy director of the school, interviewed in Bamako, blamed the situation on the existence of a 'highly masculine military culture, with hazing practices and living conditions that are not always pleasant for children, because we want to toughen them up and teach them endurance'. In his opinion, these practices could discourage some girls from joining military educational institutions. However, he observed that parents were the ones who entertained the most fears for their daughters and were therefore reluctant.

Nevertheless, when they do have access to these educational establishments, it is not uncommon for girls to distinguish themselves. The former heads of military academies and schools interviewed for the purposes of this study emphasized the skills and abilities possessed by female students. In Mali, a former member of the management of the Prytanée Militaire de Kati (PMK) cited the example of a Cameroonian student who came to do most of her schooling there and stood out for her excellence. He also cited the examples of two Malian students, who had become officers, who showed 'exceptional intelligence, fighting

spirit and leadership from the time of their studies at the Prytanée. One of them is Major Evelyne Konaté, who was part of the first female cohort at the PMK,' he added.

Similarly, in Burkina Faso, a former training center director mentioned the case of the first woman in the country to train as a helicopter pilot. She was a graduate of a military school. He also pointed out that in 2021, a young woman graduated as valedictorian from the renowned Georges Namoano military academy in Pô.

In theory, promoting greater involvement of girls in military education could help spark a vocation in some, or reinforce it in others. In practice, however, the officer interviewed in Burkina stated that 'the majority of girls who graduate from the Prytanée Militaire de Kadiogo go back to civilian life, never to return'. He attributed this to a large extent to the statutory break in military training after students graduate from secondary school, most of whom are required to take an undergraduate degree in a civilian field before returning. However, during this period, some young girls plan to get married and give up the prospect of a non-traditional career in the armed forces.

It should also be pointed out that admitting more girls to military schools will entail the mobilization of more female supervisory staff, bringing us back to the question of the feminization of the forces in the broader sense.

Source: Interviews in Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou, February to May 2023.

4.2.1. Advances and Challenges in Human Resources Management Frameworks

Security institutions not only fail to prioritize gender balance in their recruitment policies, but when they do, they still have difficulty meeting their quantitative and qualitative targets in terms of female recruitment. Prevailing social norms limit the ambitions of many women to take up security-related positions, which are still widely perceived as the preserve of men. Power imbalances within the couple and the family also mean that women are not always alone in making decisions about their career direction, especially when this may lead to assignments far from home, with a predominantly male professional entourage.

A growing number of security institutions in all three countries are aware of this imbalance

and regularly set quotas to encourage the selection of women during recruitment campaigns. However, these quotas are rarely met, due to the insufficient number and quality of applications received, which highlights the need to address the social and cultural roots of the problem, upstream of the institutional level. A major societal investment seems necessary to make careers in security institutions more attractive to women, and to make this choice more acceptable to families and society as a whole.

In Burkina Faso for example, the current policy calls for a quota of at least 150 women out of every 1,000 police officers recruited (i.e., 15%). However, this target remains elusive, pointing to the need for accompanying measures to bring certain female candidates up to standard.

Measures such as providing preparatory training for female candidates and special training on certain points upon hiring, or setting up mentoring programs for young women admitted to the competitive examination, can help increase female recruitment while maintaining appropriate qualification standards. It is also possible to revise admissions criteria in line with the actual requirements of the positions rather than past habits, by asking what is really needed to do the job properly rather than mechanically renewing the same criteria as in previous years on the pretext that 'we've always done it this way'.

Institutional measures of this kind can certainly be put in place to facilitate access for female candidates. However, it is still necessary to receive sufficient female applications in the first place. As one Nigerien officer explained *'it is often difficult to get enough female candidates during our recruitment processes. Like men, women grow up with the idea that carrying a gun and inflicting physical violence on others is not a woman's role. They internalize those ideas. They also get discouraged by family attitudes and the desire to get married and start a family as soon as possible, whereas if they join the forces, they will have to wait a while.'* (Niamey, March 2023). The officer added: *'Most of those who do join prefer to work in an office. There is nothing wrong with that, except that they have little chance of earning stripes that way. As a result, even if we manage to recruit a few more women at the bottom of the ladder, gender imbalances persist at the top.'* (Niamey, March 2023).

Barring a few exceptions, career advancement for uniformed women in Sahelian countries is generally slower than for their male counterparts. The lack of proactiveness on the part of some women is sometimes invoked to explain their delayed career development. For example, a commissioner from Burkina Faso, who was

deployed to a remote site, complained: *'I have 50 police officers, and quite a few of them are women. But they refuse to participate in field operations, which means we are at a disadvantage. Not everyone can be a secretary.'* (Comments reported by a contributor to this study.)

Blaming women's drive, or lack thereof, alone is to overlook the more structural factors influencing women's career choices. When questioned on the issue of women's delayed access to promotions, a policewoman from Burkina Faso referred to the nature of promotion criteria, which do not take into account women's family and societal obligations. *'We talk about promoting women, but at what cost to the woman? She has to give up certain aspects of her personal life, while men do not. We want one thing and its opposite'* (Interviewee, Ouagadougou).

For example, existing policies provide for a 14-week maternity leave, compared with a paternity leave of just 72 hours. While this disparity reflects the usual distribution of gender roles within most families, it nevertheless implies that parenthood impacts differently on the career prospects of men and women within the administration in general, and within the forces in particular. Interruptions in service for maternity-related reasons are not excepted from the criterion of continuity of service for promotion. The result is a skewed situation, where men can become parents while pursuing their career path, and women cannot. Maternity leave, often presented as a privilege granted to women, thus penalizes them in their career advancement, even though motherhood remains a social injunction.

However, progress has been made with regard to the acceptance of maternity in the career paths of uniformed women. For example, young mothers' daily working hours are also

reduced for a period of 15 months to allow them to breastfeed. The Burkinabe police force also launched a project to build a day-care centre, which has now been inaugurated and should provide a childcare solution for policewomen with young children. In addition, a provision in the internal regulations of the Burkina Faso national police force, which used to require the disbarment of any policewoman who became pregnant during her initial training, has been cancelled, thereby correcting a discriminatory bias that penalized women in comparison with men, who are not disbarred in the event of paternity. However, such restrictions on pregnancy continue to apply in other sectors of the administration, making it difficult for some women to balance family life with a professional career.

4.2.2. Institutional Mechanisms to Combat Sexual Harassment, Sexist and Discriminatory Treatment, and Other Gender-Related Abuses

Experience shows that, to attract and retain women in their ranks, security institutions must be able to offer effective guarantees of protection against the risks of harassment and abuse to which they may be subjected on account of their gender. In this respect, much remains to be done. The absence of dedicated policies in these areas is a major barrier, which institutional managers can begin to address by adopting policies and procedures to ban sexist, discriminatory and harassing behaviour. Where such policies do exist, the absence of an appropriate redress mechanism to identify and punish those who violate them represents another significant barrier. Resolute leadership is needed to enforce them and thus change the institutional culture towards zero tolerance for sexual harassment, sexist and discriminatory treatment, and other gender-related abuses.

The research carried out for the purposes of this study was unsuccessful in identifying an

institutional policy dedicated to gender issues within Burkina Faso's security institutions. However, the National Gender Policy includes a section specifically dedicated to the security forces. Both the Ministry of Security and the Ministry of Defence have a gender focal point within the Directorate-General for Sectoral Studies and Statistics (DGESS), responsible for monitoring gender-related issues.

The analysis did not identify any internal control mechanisms dedicated to the prevention of gender discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and abuse within Burkina Faso's security institutions. Based on her personal experience, a senior police officer felt that *'cases of harassment are rare. In any case, I have never experienced or seen any'*, and that there was therefore no need for a specific policy according to her, as *'if a case did occur, it could be dealt with using standard disciplinary procedures'*.

Unfortunately, the trivialization or even denial of the phenomenon by members of the hierarchy is generally indicative of an unprotective environment, where victims are reluctant to report acts of harassment due to insufficient guarantees that they will be taken seriously. The absence of a clear institutional policy, and the tendency of senior officers – including female officers – to deny the reality of harassment, hardly creates a protective environment and does not encourage victims to report the facts. Under such circumstances, they have every reason to fear that they will not be believed, that they will be subjected to reprisals by their aggressor, who is often in a superior hierarchical position, and that they will be stigmatized within the institution due to a lack of guarantees that their complaint will be treated confidentially. Experience shows that internal complaints mechanisms are rarely adapted to the specificities of sexual harassment cases.

Despite the adoption of Act 052, which promotes the increased participation of women in public life by instituting a quota for appointed and elected positions, Mali does not yet have a specific policy for the recruitment of female personnel for all defence and security forces. Some recruitment campaigns are accompanied by pre-determined quotas designed to encourage female applicants, but these female recruitment targets are one-off occurrences and are rarely met.

Based on our research, no legal or regulatory instrument – not even the criminal code (which is currently being revised) – specifically sanctions sexual harassment or exploitation involving DSFs in Mali. Such acts, if proven, fall under general law provisions, which do not take into account the intrinsic power imbalance that exists between a uniform wearer and a civilian victim, for example.

On the other hand, Article 30 of the regulations governing police officers prohibits sexual discrimination, stipulating that *'for the application of the present regulations, no distinction may be made between the two sexes, subject to the requirements demanded by the exercise of certain functions'*. The code of ethics of the national police force reiterates the requirement for equal treatment of people regardless of various identity markers, including gender.

In theory, the character reference and criminal record checks required of all new recruits should be sufficient to ensure that perpetrators of violence against girls and women are not included in the forces. In reality, however, the interviewees unanimously indicated that investigations were not always conducted with the necessary degree of care, often being treated as a mere formality. In addition, criminal record checks fail to reveal facts not reported to the courts, as is often the case for domestic and intra-family violence, due to the social pressure

exerted on victims and the tendency of some magistrates to favour out-of-court settlements.

In **Niger**, the National Police and Continuing Education School (École Nationale de Police et de la Formation Permanente), with the support of external partners, has drawn up a school-wide policy to combat sexual harassment. Elsewhere, in the security sector, our research found no gender-sensitive codes of conduct, nor any dedicated procedures for receiving and handling complaints relating to this dimension.

Internal control services – such as the General Inspectorate of Security Services and the General Inspectorate of the National Gendarmerie – are theoretically competent to hear cases of gender-related misconduct, such as discrimination or sexual harassment. But their activity reports do not specify whether such cases have been dealt with. Only the 2020 annual report of the Ombudsman of the Republic provides a breakdown of gender-disaggregated complaints and provides information on the contribution of the defence and security forces to the pursuit of national gender equality objectives.

4.3. Institutional Cultures Dominated by Norms Built Around Exclusive Masculinity and Influenced by Sexist Beliefs

Unlike institutional frameworks (policies, procedures, regulations, directives, etc.), which are formal and generally codified, institutional culture refers to a set of unwritten rules governing the mindset, values, and relationships within a group or institution. As a result, formal commitments and declarations of intent in favour of women's participation often clash with the reality of security institutions marked by an ultra-masculine traditions and makeup,

Box 9. Professional Associations of Women in the Security Sector

Women's professional networks and associations are an important, if generally informal, mechanism for solidarity and joint action, which can encourage uniformed women to practice their profession. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, there are women's associations for members of the security sector:

- In Burkina Faso, a Female Police Officers' Association was set up to provide a framework for dialogue, collaboration, and mutual support for female members of the police force. All female police officers in the country are ex officio members. In recognition of their high-quality contributions on a regional scale, the Female Police Officers' Association and the Police Academy of Burkina Faso were awarded the G-5 Sahel's top prize for gender advancement in 2022.
- The Female Police Officers' Association of Mali (APM) was established in March 2016. However, similar associations are not authorized in other corps, due to the risk of assimilation with union structures in the eyes of the authorities. From this point of view, we will have to monitor the impact that the re-militarization of the Malian national police force decreed in October 2022 could have on the existence and operation of the APM.
- In Niger, a 'Réseau des femmes DSF' (Network of DSF women) was set up in May 2022, pursuant to a recommendation of the first women DSF conference in Niger, organized with the support of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL). The network is open to female personnel from six corps: the National Guard, the National Police, the National Gendarmerie, Civil Protection, Water and Forestry, and National Customs. The network was created by decree of the Ministry of the Interior. It has its own statutes, rules of procedure and action plan, with the following objectives:
 - to build the capacity of the members of the network's executive in terms of technical and financial resources, including adequate logistics to enable them to carry out their activities; and
 - to conduct the activities themselves, in particular those aimed at young girls, whom the network wishes to sensitize and train on the importance of a female presence in the DSF corps, as well as the importance of actions focusing on peacekeeping and security, gender-based violence, health, and the environment.

It should be noted that none of these networks or associations is intended as a trade union, a point on which the founders had to convince their hierarchy before they authorized the setting up of the networks and associations.

Source: Interviews and documents from networks and associations collected in Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou, April to May 2023.

which leave little room for the effective and substantial participation of women at all levels of responsibility, including the highest. This is due to several factors.

Firstly, security institutions are traditionally steeped in a strong culture of masculinity, which values attributes viewed as masculine such as physical strength – and sometimes even brutality – while showing itself hostile to attributes traditionally considered feminine, such as patience or gentleness, which are nonetheless useful for improving the discipline and public image of security institutions. One interviewee in Mali summed up the paradox of integrating women into the defence and security forces without really taking their needs and specificities into account: *'To succeed with us, a woman has to be a man like any other'*.

This idea of assimilating women to male norms may be a survival necessity for women, considering the institutional culture's prevailing bias. However, it does not allow security institutions to capitalize on the true qualities of women themselves. By allowing women to express their full personalities, a more inclusive institutional culture could help broaden the list of qualities valued within security institutions and useful for their work.

On the other hand, certain popular beliefs within the DSFs negatively affect women's ability to integrate effectively. For example, in an interview held in Ouagadougou, in March 2023, a senior Burkinabe army officer explained that one of the obstacles to sending more female troops into combat zones is linked to persistent esoteric beliefs that the presence of a menstruating woman in a troop vehicle would nullify the effectiveness of protective amulets for everyone on board. While such beliefs may seem irrational, they have a real impact on commanders' ability to deploy women in the field, in a context where some men refuse outright to go on op-

erations with them, believing that it threatens their lives. As such, de facto excluded from field work, some women prefer not to be deployed in a unit at all, preferring to be confined to camps. With few exceptions, the vicious circle of exclusion and segregation is thus perpetuated, with women in the city and men at the battlefield.

To create a work environment conducive to attracting and retaining female talent, it is necessary to develop inclusive institutional cultures, that is, cultures that value the contribution of all, women and men alike, and treat women as valued contributors rather than the other way round. This sometimes requires patient awareness-raising to change the unwritten beliefs prevailing in some quarters of the security forces. The example set by leaders in their behaviour towards both male and female elements can prove decisive.

It is also important that these institutional cultures establish clear behavioural standards for all members of the institution, including zero tolerance for any form of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or abuse of power to cover up such misconduct. The introduction of codes of conduct can help change the rules within institutions in this direction, making them healthier working environments for women and men alike, and more credible in their fight against gender-based violence.

5. SOCIETAL OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND SECURITY MATTERS IN PARTICULAR

5.1. The Status of Women in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

One of the reasons why women's participation in the security sector continues to face major obstacles is that the security sector does not operate in isolation but is embedded in a social and political fabric with its attendant tensions. This also applies to the issue of gender inequality.

Thus, in the three Central Sahel countries, the social and political context remains marked by the persistence of strong gender inequalities in all areas, reducing women's capacity and their access to opportunities to contribute fully to public affairs in general. This is important because the level of women's participation in the security sector needs to be seen, firstly, in the broader context of their status in society, and, secondly, in their participation in public affairs more generally.

The Africa Gender Index, which was developed by the African Development Bank (AfDB), is a tool used to measure and monitor gender inequality in 50 African countries. In its 2019⁷ edition, the Index gave Burkina Faso a score of 0.384, corresponding to 38th place out of the 50 countries examined; Mali had a score of 0.329, corresponding to 44th place out of 50; and Niger a score of 0.320, corresponding to 46th place out of 50. These sluggish performances in terms of gender equality are confirmed by other assessment tools, such as the Gender Inequality Index, the Gender Social Norms Index, and the annual Human

Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as the Social Institutions and Gender Index of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

While they seek to highlight the progress achieved, the periodic progress reports submitted by the governments of the three countries to the International Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also acknowledge the persistence of inegalitarian and patriarchal social norms and practices, such as female genital mutilation, early marriage of young girls, polyandry, and social tolerance of domestic violence. Yet academic research, such as that carried out by Valérie Hudson and her colleagues (see references in bibliography), has shown that societies with the greatest inequalities between men and women are also the most vulnerable to risks of violent conflict, poor governance, and autocracy.

In an October 2022 report on Burkina Faso, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) explains that 'social acceptance of practices such as insults or assault and battery is linked to beliefs that a husband has the right of life and death over his wife. [...] Social acceptance of the use of violence against women within the couple is internalized by the victims, 71% of whom do not talk about it because they consider these acts to be normal'. Similarly, the Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2018 by Mali's National Statistics Office revealed that 49% of men and 79% of women considered conjugal violence by a husband towards his wife justifiable if she talked back to him or burned dinner, for example. While these figures vary from one region to another, depending on local realities, the aggregate figures at national level do reflect a genuine overall trend.

⁷ The latest available at the time of writing.

5.2. Structural Gaps in Women's Participation in Public and Political Affairs

Women's scant political participation remains both a symptom of existing gender inequalities in the Sahel, and a key factor in their persistence and worsening. The absence of women from decision-making circles, or at best their marginal presence, means that they are rarely present in sufficient numbers and with sufficient expertise and seniority to be able to truly influence the definition of security priorities so that they mainstream their concerns.

The proportion of women present in legislative assemblies is a case in point. In **Burkina Faso**, the 2015-2020 legislature included just 14.17% women, or 18 women out of 127 deputies, despite national commitments to at least 30% female representation in elected positions. The situation has not improved much with the transition. In November 2022, the new Transitional Legislative Assembly set up after MPSR 2 came to power, whose mandate runs until the elections scheduled for 2024, had only 12 women out of 71 members, or 16.9%, well below the 30% target set more than ten years ago.

In **Mali**, despite the enactment of Act No. 2015-052 of December 18, 2015, which sets a quota of at least 30% representation of either sex in elected and appointed positions, this target has rarely been met. In mid-2023, women accounted for just 28.6% of the National Transitional Council: 42 women out of 147 members. The 2020 legislative elections had marked a spectacular breakthrough, with three times as many women elected to the National Assembly as in the previous legislature. However, shortcomings in the electoral process soon called this Assembly into question, and it was dissolved following the military coup of August 2020.

The first transitional government following the putsch, led by Moctar Ouane from October 2020 to May 2021, included just 4 women out of 26 members (15.38%). And the National Transition Council (CNT) appointed at that time included just 25 women out of 121 members (20.67%). The second transitional government, announced on June 11, 2021, by Prime Minister Choguel Maïga after he succeeded Moctar Ouane, included 29 members, 6 of whom were women (5 ministers and 1 deputy minister), resulting in a female participation rate of 20.69%, well below the 30% required by law. In the public service, women accounted for only 15.4% of directors of national departments in 2023, and 11.1% of ambassadors in 2021. The figures for the last governments before the August 2020 coup d'état are no better, suggesting a deep-seated trend rather than an exception associated with the context of the transition.

The situation appears to be a little better in **Niger**, where at the beginning of 2022 the National Assembly boasted 50 women out of 166 deputies, i.e., 30.12%. The country thus managed to meet the 30% target for female participation in parliament defined in its National Gender Policy, setting itself apart from Mali and Burkina Faso. Their numbers also enabled women MPs to set up a specific parliamentary committee to monitor the implementation of National Action Plan 1325 – a significant step forward. However, there are still many challenges to be met in order to consolidate this progress over the long term.

The implementation of the gender policy (2017) and the quota law (2000) has provided the government of Niger with a key opportunity to appoint women to critical decision-making positions that have a positive impact on the conduct of peace and security programs in the country, which is negatively affected by conflicts and humanitarian crises.

Niger's National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda over the 2020-2024 period (second-generation action plan) aims to 'sustainably remove obstacles and cultural barriers to women's participation in public and private decision-making spheres, as well as in positions of responsibility' (output 3.1.). However, the actual implementation of these provisions remains a challenge, and progress timid. The Action Plan recommends strengthening the leadership and support of women and girls in public and private decision making and in positions of responsibility (Action 3.1.1.), promoting female SDF personnel to positions of responsibility commensurate with their skill

sets (Action 3.1.2), providing capacity building for women and girls in mediation and peace-building techniques (Action 3.2.1.), advocating for improved representation of women and girls in mediation and peace-building bodies at all levels (Action 3.2.2.), and appointing women and girls to senior diplomatic positions (Action 3.2.3.).

Overall, and in view of these figures, women are not participating in decision-making bodies in sufficient numbers to ensure that their views and specific needs are adequately taken into account, including when it comes to priorities associated with their security.

Box 10. Gender, a Western Brainchild Estranged from African Realities?

'Gender is not a Western, or an un-African concept: Although the terminology relating to gender and inequalities may have been developed by Western sociologists over the last few decades, the realities this terminology refers to are universal and timeless. Beyond the words themselves, what is important to focus on is the actual imbalance – in access to resources and opportunities – created by social norms and expectations of men and women.

Historically, West African traditional texts, such as the 12th-century Kouroukan Fouga Charter, acknowledged that women have a role to play in public affairs. Later transcriptions of the fundamental Charter from the Mali Mande Empire stipulate that "*Women, in addition to their daily business, must be associated with all our Governments.*"

The participation of women in formal military bodies is not new to West Africa either; in the 17th century, the Dahomey Kingdom (which extended across most of modern-day Benin) created a famous all-women combat force that served as an integral part of the royal army, and at times as an elite militia, until the 19th century. The existence of women warriors in the Ashanti Empire is also historically verified. While these historical facts should not be interpreted as an indication that traditional West African societies had achieved gender equality, they demonstrate a long-standing recognition of the value of women's engagement in the public sphere and in the realm of security.

Source: Aisha Fofana Ibrahim, Alex Sivalie Mbayo and Rosaline MCarthy, 'Integrating Gender in Security Sector Reform and Governance', in Ornella Moderan (ed.), Toolkit for Security Sector Reform and Governance in West Africa (Geneva: DCAF, 2015), p.9

The Women, Peace and Security Index, developed by Georgetown University (USA), uses predefined criteria to assess the progress of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in 170 countries. In its 2021 edition, it placed Mali and Niger in the lowest quintile of the index, respectively 143rd and 152nd out of 170 countries. Burkina Faso's position, at 136th, in the 4th and penultimate quintile, shows a slightly better situation, but is still a long way from the ambitions proclaimed in the official instruments.

5.3. Deficits in Women's Formal Participation in the Peace Processes

The experience of women's participation in the Malian peace process offers a particularly eloquent illustration of persistent gaps. Despite all the rhetoric about the important role women are supposed to play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the official bodies of the peace process are dragging their feet when it comes to giving women the space they need to exert real, formal influence, beyond the informal, small-scale and sometimes even symbolic initiatives to which women's organizations find themselves confined.

In May 2021, at an event on women's participation in the Malian peace process, former Minister for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family (2007-2011) Maïga Sina Damba pointed out that 'women were only included in the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) at its 40th session, six years after the Agreement was signed'. She also noted that, at the time of her speech, there were still only 31 women compared to a total of 1,045 men in all the Agreement's implementation mechanisms, i.e., less than 3%.

Although disappointing, these figures are not surprising, as the peace process does not operate in isolation from the rest of society. The

limitations faced by women within it reflect a broader socio-cultural and political environment where women's participation in public affairs is more the exception than the rule.

Similarly, in Niger, one specialist points out that 'despite the primordial role played by women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, they remain under-represented even in peace processes led by government institutions and bodies'.

However, some progress has been achieved, demonstrating that greater involvement of women in the peace process and in decision-making bodies linked to peace and security is possible, provided there is an active political will to do so. For example, Sina Damba was part of the first cohort of 9 women, later extended to 12, who joined the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement Monitoring Committee in 2021. When she was in office, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) had 5 women commissioners, i.e., 20%.

It should also be emphasized that, while their presence is limited in the formal bodies involved in peace processes at national level, women are sometimes more visible in local peace initiatives. In Mali, several cases identified during a previous study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in conjunction with the Mali Centre for Study and Reflection (CERM) show that women are participating in local processes. For example, CAFO (Coordination of Women's Associations in Mali) is involved in coordinating reconciliation commissions in Ténenkou Circle. In the same circle, women are also involved in all the UN Women Peace Lab activities in the communes of Kareri, Ténenkou, Togré, Kodio and Diondori. These are just a few examples, but there are many more in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Research conducted by regional researchers, such as those at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), has also shown that women have played

an active role in mediating local agreements between communities, or between communities and non-state armed groups, when the situation so required.

5.4. The Impact of Gender Stereotypes and Prejudice

Gender stereotypes refer to beliefs and prejudices that assign men or women specific characteristics based on their sex, without taking into account the diversity of personalities that exist in reality. For example, the idea that *'girls are sweet'* or *'boys are brave'*.

These stereotypes are generalizations that do not necessarily reflect reality but are deeply rooted in our psyches because of their omnipresence in mainstream social representations. As a result, they influence our perceptions and expectations of both men and women. This can be an obstacle to women's participation in the security sector, as most stereotypes and prejudices about what is *'typically feminine'* do not correspond to the qualities we would expect of security professionals.

For example, the stereotype that *'women are emotional and indecisive'* provides a rationale

for keeping all women out of management positions, including those who are decisive. This stereotype is a source of discrimination. It restricts the range of opportunities open to women, regardless of their actual abilities.

As mentioned by a Burkinabe civil society activist, popular wisdom holds that *'women give life, they must not give death'*. This formula reflects social perceptions that see the entry of women into the DSFs as unnatural. But at the same time, it also reflects a morbid image of these forces, described implicitly as a space of violence and aggression, rather than one of relief and protection. Ultimately, this image is not flattering for either women or security institutions.

Other kinds of implicit or explicit stereotypes and prejudices also contribute to limiting women's access to security institutions. For example, the idea that women are soft and weak by nature does not work in their favour in positions that require a certain level of energy, physical fitness and combativeness. The stereotype of the gossipy woman is not conducive to facilitating women's access to positions requiring high-level confidentiality accreditations such as *'confidential defence'* or *'classified defence'*.

Box 11. Women's Participation in Peace Processes in Niger

In the 1990s, women stepped in as informal mediators, contributing to the signing of peace agreements between the government and the Armed Resistance Organization (ORA). However, their role is not mentioned in the peace agreements. Their informal status is an obstacle to their representation in public decision-making debates in general, and on peace and security in particular.

Source: Workbook pour l'Analyse genre : Promouvoir l'égalité des genres au sein du secteur de la sécurité, Niger, DCAF: janvier 2022

5.5. Gendered Roles and the Weight of Social Expectations

Also in Burkina Faso, a female officer in charge of a police department reported that women were often reluctant to take on assignments outside the capital, fearing for their family life. While cultural customs require women to follow their husbands when they are posted, the opposite does not apply. For women police officers (or members of other security institutions), a deployment outside the capital often implies a distance from the family unit that may be reproached them by their husbands, in-laws, or society as a whole, in a context where social expectations continue to regard domestic and family-care roles as primarily a female responsibility.

Geographical distance from their families also puts women's reputations at risk, as they are more often suspected of moral or sexual misconduct when they spend extended periods away from the family circle. Attacks on women's reputations are indeed a powerful weapon for those who wish to discourage them from taking on public responsibilities, whether in the security sector, in politics, or in other fields.

A 2018 study by the International Peace Institute confirms the reputational risk and social cost of a career in the military for women. It reveals that in UN peace support operations, as well as within national security forces institutions, *'at the individual and community levels, military women are often seen as less feminine and less suitable for marriage. Single women [in uniform] may be perceived as libertine, while mothers are often seen as neglectful of their families'*.

5.6. Despite the Rhetoric, Gender Issues Remain a Low Priority

Official commitments to increasing women's participation also run up against a strategic context of multiple crises, which tends to relegate the issue of women's participation to the hindmost priorities guiding the choices of political and institutional decision-makers when it comes to security sector reform.

Yet experience, in the Sahel and elsewhere, shows that more inclusive national forces boast a wider range of human, social, technical and professional skills with which to tackle security challenges, which can represent a significant operational asset. Far from being an afterthought, putting in place mechanisms to increase women's participation in the security sector, and ensuring that their specific needs are taken into account by these institutions, offers significant strategic and operational advantages.

6. RESPONSE TO WOMEN'S SECURITY NEEDS BY THE SECURITY SECTOR: A STATUS REPORT ON RESPONSES TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

6.1. Gender-based Violence in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a persistent problem in all three countries and is thus a major challenge for a security sector aiming to meet the security needs of the people – men as well as women, girls as well as boys.

In **Burkina Faso**, the legal clinic of the Women Lawyers Association of Burkina Faso documented some 795 cases of gender-based violence from 2018 to 2019, with an increase in cases of rape and unwanted pregnancies among girls aged 13 to 17. Police and gendarmerie services recorded more than 7,700 cases of victims of violence involving minors and women in 2018 alone, 66% of which threatened the victims' bodily physical integrity or their life, 23% involved moral and psychological violence, and 11% sexual violence. The latter are particularly under-reported due to the taboos surrounding sexual issues in society and the risk of stigmatization faced by victims. In 2018, the last year for which the study was able to obtain complete data, Burkina Faso's security services recorded more than 800 cases of sexual violence affecting minors (boys and girls) and women. These figures appear to have been rising steadily since the start of the political and security crisis in the country: from 2015 to 2018, reported cases of sexual violence increased by 54%, and cases of rape specifically rose by 221%. Data reported by the SIGI Burkina Faso country study, published in 2018 by the OECD, suggest that 37% of women face domestic violence in their lifetime.

The situation of gender-based violence is equally worrying in **Niger**, where so-called cultural violence, such as child marriage and genital mutilation, continues to affect a worryingly high proportion of young girls. A 2015 study also reported a high prevalence of sexual violence (12.9%) and economic violence (3.2%). In contrast, and although girls and women also suffer violence of this type, the forms of victimization affecting men and boys more often involve physical (34.5%) and psychological (32.1%) violence. In 2020, the Niger police recorded 2,628 cases of GBV, 58% of which involved physical violence.

In **Mali**, the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey provides an overview of the scale and persistence of gender-based violence, with significant regional variations (see Box 10). The survey also reveals significant inequalities in participation in decision-making within families, with only 28% of women having a say in visits to their families or relatives, 20% in major household purchasing decisions, and 20% in their own health needs.

In 2021, the annual report of the Gender-Based Violence Information Mechanism (GBVIMS) in Mali recorded 9,540 cases of GBV, compared with 6,605 the previous year, a 44% increase. The report attributed this increase mainly to 'recurring rapes or even cases of gang rape during population movements, while collecting water or looking for fuel around [internally displaced persons] sites.' In Mopti, the worst-affected region (28% of GBV cases reported in 2021), '99% of survivors recorded in the region [were] women, 62% of whom were girls under 18, and 1% were boys.' Proportions were similar in the Gao region, where '99% of cases [were] women, of whom 29% were girls, [and] 1% were boys.'

However, gender-based violence also remains a common reality in areas that are not, or are

only slightly, directly affected by the conflict. This is illustrated by the prevalence and trivialization of domestic and sexual violence nationwide, as shown in Box 12 below.

6.2. Analysis of the Security Sector's Institutional Response to Gender-Based Violence

With such a high prevalence of gender-based and sexual violence, security institutions can only provide all users – regardless of gender – with an effective service that is relevant to their needs if they take GBV into account and respond appropriately. This presupposes the implementation of systems and mechanisms adapted to the care of victims, the investigation of incidents and the prosecution of perpetrators.

In all three countries, the police, the gendarmerie, the judiciary and, in the case of Niger, the national guard, are involved in the institutional response to gender-based violence, both in terms of assistance to victims and repression of perpetrators.

In **Niger**, both the police and the gendarmerie have units dedicated to the protection of women and minors, headed by experienced female officers. The national gendarmerie has a Central Unit for the Protection of Women and Minors, set up in 2018 and headed by Major Hadiza Morou at the time of writing (2023). This unit has focal points in all gendarmerie brigades nationwide, with the role falling to the brigade commander in order to guarantee a sufficient level of seniority to enable effective action in response to GBV. By 2020, the unit had documented 2,042 cases of gender-based violence. Over the period running from the end of 2021 to mid-2023, it recorded a further 5,042 cases. The police division for the

protection of women and minors was headed by Senior Police Commissioner Zouera Hassane Haousseize at the time of writing (2023). In 2022, this specialized division recorded 524 sexual assaults, including 304 cases of rape, nationwide. Civil society organizations specializing in assisting victims of GBV, such as the NGO SOS Femmes et Enfants Victimes de Violences, are also involved in the GBV response chain. However, all of the actors raise the problem of covering the costs of the medical expertise required to document cases of sexual assault and build up the body of forensic evidence. In Niger, these costs amount to CFA F 30,000 per case. Before it was repealed at the end of July 2023, the National Human Rights Commission sometimes had funds available to contribute to this outlay, but other sources of funding remained scarce, and are even more so now. This situation further complicates women's access to security and justice services, in a context already marked by high risks of social stigmatization. Niger's association of women jurists and a number of committed individual lawyers also contribute by providing legal aid services.

In addition, Niger has a National Observatory for Gender Promotion (ONPG), reporting to the Prime Minister's office. The ONPG is responsible for monitoring the situation in terms of gender inequality, and for monitoring the implementation of Niger's commitments in this area. Until the coup d'état in July 2023, the institutional mechanism for monitoring these issues was complemented by the existence of a gender network within the National Assembly, as well as the appointment of a gender focal point within each ministry and the President's office. However, the role of focal point was carried out in addition to the usual tasks entrusted to the person concerned, depending on their main job, and could therefore be limited by time constraints and competing priorities. A further difficulty was that the study

Box 12. Situation of Intimate Partner Violence against Women in Mali, Based on Data from the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Physical Violence

More than two in five women aged 15-49 (43%) said they had experienced physical violence at some point in their lives since the age of 15. Twenty per cent of women had experienced physical violence in the last 12 months. The proportion of women who had experienced physical violence in the last 12 months was highest in the Koulikoro region (24%).

Sexual Violence

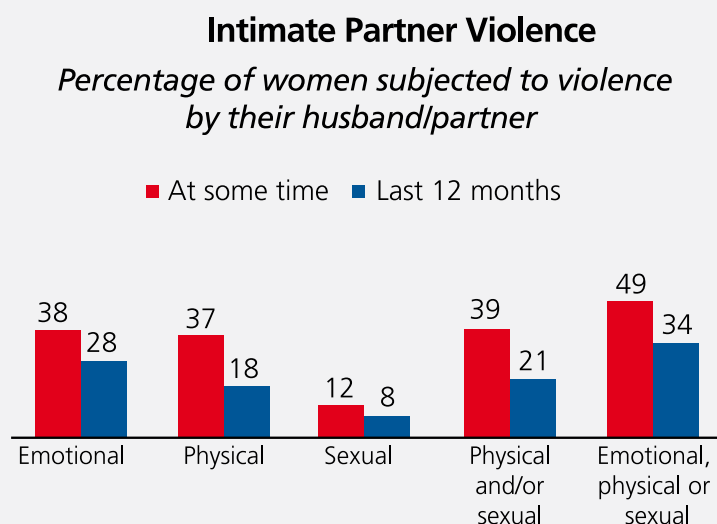
One in eight women (13%) had experienced sexual violence at some point in time. Seven per cent of women had experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months. Recent sexual violence was most common in the Kayes and Ségou regions (11% each).

Intimate Partner Violence

Overall, 49% of women in relationships or in the process of breaking up had experienced intimate partner violence (emotional, physical or sexual) at the hands of their husband/partner at some time, and 34% had experienced intimate partner violence in the last 12 months. Intimate partner violence varied by region, ranging from 16% in the Kidal region to 58% in the Ségou region.

Seeking Help

Of the women aged 15-49 who had experienced physical or sexual violence, 19% had sought help and 12% had not sought help but had told someone. However, 68% of women had never sought help and never told anyone. Women most often sought help from their own family or the family of their husband/partner.



Source: Mali, Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2018, Rapport de synthèse, p.17

revealed that women's organizations lacked the specialized skills to effectively exercise their role as external monitors of the security sector. Supporting these organizations to fill that gap is a potential course of action to be considered.

Unlike in Niger, **Burkina Faso's** internal security forces have no units dedicated to dealing with GBV or violence against girls and women. This situation exposes potential victims to huge variations in terms of the treatment they receive, depending on the training, experience and particular sensibilities of the personnel dealing with them.

In 2021, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women launched a GBV alert and denunciation hotline (free calls). It also set up a legal unit to inform women of their rights, but the latter is experiencing funding difficulties. There is a centre for the integrated care of victims of gender-based violence, the Maison de la Femme de Baskuy. However, this centre does not offer holistic care, as it does not provide legal or judicial assistance. What is more, its service capacities are limited to the capital city of Ouagadougou, whereas available data indicate that other areas, such as the Centre and Centre-Nord regions, are the most severely affected in the country.

Burkina Faso's Justice and Human Rights sectoral policy for 2027 calls for awareness-raising and training on gender issues for prison staff, but no evaluation of this measure is available at present. The issue is also included in initial training at training schools, and in ongoing training on an ad hoc basis, or is in the process of being so. Public institutions such as the National Police School, the National Police Academy, the National Gendarmerie School (ENG) and the National Active Non-Commissioned Officers School (ENSOA) have begun the process of developing a training curriculum on the management of GBV, in collaboration with specialized partners such as DCAF.

It should be noted that the transition government that emerged from the January 2022 coup d'état in Burkina Faso, known as the Patriotic Movement for the Safeguard of the Republic (MPSR 1) and led by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, had set up a General Directorate for Women, Peace and Security, within the Ministry of Women, National Solidarity and the Family. The creation of a department dedicated to the Women, Peace and Security agenda was an innovation not only in Burkina Faso, but throughout the sub-region. However, the department did not have time to prove its worth. Shortly after its creation, in August 2022, it was quashed by a ministerial reshuffle in the wake of the October 2022 coup, which brought to power MPSR 2, led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré.

In **Mali**, both the police and the national gendarmerie have dedicated gender focal points with training in gender issues. However, the actual capacities and freedom of action of these focal points remain variable. Nevertheless, the focal points remain important contributors to the institutional response to GBV. Collaborative links exist with civil society organizations that help women victims of violence, such as the Association for the Advancement and Defence of Malian Women (APDF), or the Mali branch of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF Mali), to name but a few. Mali also has several integrated GBV response centres, known as one-stop centres, some of which are run by the police. Programs such as the Spotlight Initiative, implemented in selected countries around the world, including Niger and Mali, support national efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, especially against women and girls.

Generally speaking, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, the players interviewed highlighted the need to improve coordination throughout the gender-based violence response chain, notably

by guaranteeing free medical expertise; the availability and free provision of high-quality psycho-social and legal assistance services; free access to accommodations and material and food support services for needy victims; rapid and secure transmission of relevant information between services and between victim support organizations and public services; and training for those involved in the judicial system in dealing with offences involving GBV. Respondents also emphasized the need to step up prevention work, in order to significantly reduce the occurrence of GBV, and repeat offences in particular. Finally, the allocation of dedicated resources was highlighted as essential for the implementation of effective and holistic prevention and response strategies covering all dimensions of the problem posed by GBV.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, notwithstanding an impressive legal and political arsenal, the effective implementation of the Sahelian states' commitments to supporting women's participation in security issues continues to pose major challenges in all areas. While collective advances such as women's gradual access to the armed forces since the 1960s or 1970s, depending on the country, are commendable, much remains to be done to truly demonstrate to decision-makers the tangible added value of more women in the DSFs, and to muster the political will needed to prioritize reforms that actively promote women's participation in the security services on an equal footing with men. Popularizing research that clarifies the nexus between gender equality, women's participation and enhanced peace and security could contribute to progress in this direction.

However, data alone are not enough. It is also necessary to create a strong national demand for defence and security forces that are more inclusive and effective in protecting all categories of the population without distinction. Strategic use of the media to highlight the successes of uniformed women and their units, as well as the benefits of including women in the national forces, could help spark a debate, establish female role models and change mindsets.

Besides institutional advances, individual cases of women who have carved out their own path within a uniformed career are to be commended. These women can serve as role models to inspire new vocations and encourage their successors to persevere. However, individual successes remain statistically marginal: they should not be used as arguments to

justify the lack of systemic measures to increase women's involvement in the security sector. The tree must not hide the forest. On the contrary, examples of inspiring women in the security sector should stimulate the adoption of even more vigorous measures to promote women's participation, so that these women role models are no longer isolated in the role of 'the one and only', which is difficult to bear, but find themselves an integral part of a much broader and sustainable dynamic of institutional change.

In short, taking up the challenge of women's participation more resolutely can have a considerable positive impact on the effectiveness of security services.

7.2. Recommendations

To security institutions in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

- a. **Conduct a gender audit (or gender self-assessment) of security institutions:** Implementing institutional adaptations that encourage the participation of women and take account of their needs requires a clear and detailed vision of the challenges faced by each security institution in this area. Conducting a gender audit, which can be entrusted to a specialist or carried out internally in the form of a self-assessment, can help establish an objective diagnosis in order to determine reform priorities. In view of the approach involved, security institutions that opt for self-assessment would do well to consult the tools available and/or enlist the support of thematic specialists with proven experience in gender and security.
- b. **Systematize the introduction of high-quality teaching on sexual and gender-based violence in schools and initial and in-service training centres for defence**

and security forces: Our research findings show that training modules on gender issues exist in the professional curricula of some forces: this is the case, for example, of Niger's national police academy. However, such modules are not available in all security institutions. Even among the institutions that do have them, the quality of the modules available varies from one institution to another, and from one country to another. The quality of the teaching based on the modules is also variable, and depends, to a large extent, on the individuals present within the training team, as well as on the level of importance attached to gender issues by the school's leadership. Setting up a regular training-of-trainers cycle, and a detailed curriculum tailored to the specifics of each security institution, would be a positive step forward.

- c. **Strengthen institutional frameworks promoting women's participation:** The study showed that the lack of mainstreaming of gender issues in human resources policies, and the lack of effective mechanisms for preventing and punishing sexual and gender-based harassment and abuse, hamper women's participation in security institutions. Conducting a review of the regulatory environment and putting in place gender-sensitive policies and the control mechanisms needed to ensure their application can help improve this situation. In addition to putting policies and control mechanisms in place, it is also important to ensure that staff – and in particular line managers – are trained on these issues.

To civil society, partners and regional and international organizations wishing to support security institutions in Burkina, Mali, and Niger:

d. Engage in structured dialogue with security sector leaders on the relevance and usefulness of prioritizing women's participation:

As the study has shown, speeches and commitments in favour of women's participation do not always translate into actual decisions and actions. This may be due to numerous factors, such as the influence of an institutional culture that downplays gender issues, or the coexistence of multiple competing priorities among which the issue of women's participation struggles to stand out. To meet this challenge, civil society organizations working on this issue could collaborate with professional associations in the security sector to develop a documented, substantiated case, to guide advocacy institution by institution, and for the security sector as a whole. The changes needed to increase women's participation in the security sector require the expression of active political will among national and institutional decision-makers. This is where persuasion is needed.

e. Help security institutions that so wish to carry out a self-assessment of their systems and structures in terms of gender, in order to identify priorities for reform in this area:

Guides and models exist to support self-assessment processes, enabling the institutions concerned to draw up their own diagnosis and initiate an internal discussion on the changes they need to make. These self-assessments can be carried out independently by security institutions, especially if they have proven gender expertise in-house; but they can also be supported by external specialists, who play an advisory and guidance role,

and can make firm commitments in terms of confidentiality. A third approach, which externalizes the diagnostic process to a greater extent, is the gender audit, generally carried out by specialists from outside the institution. Each of these formulas has its advantages and disadvantages, which need to be weighed up carefully in order to choose the one best suited to the context and to a specific institution.

f. Provide coaching and support to women's professional associations in the security sector:

These associations are relatively new in Sahelian countries, and often lack the material and human resources they need to realize their full potential. Setting up support and coaching mechanisms could help turn them into more dynamic platforms for collaboration and mutual support for their women members. This could also serve as a channel for strengthening members' leadership capabilities, by structuring or reinforcing training or mentoring offerings, for example. Assistance to these associations should also include support for public communication activities around women's participation in the security sector.

g. Communicating to inspire and prevent prejudice:

Production of testimonial videos and organization of roundtables, or dialogue sessions in schools, universities and places where young women not attending school live are just some of the many avenues to be explored. Another component should also be dedicated to dialogue between the association and the leadership of the institution (e.g., the police), so that the hierarchy is constantly informed of the association's activities; this is essential to combat fears and perceptions of unionization, which can lead to these networks or associations being banned. They could also work together to develop and disseminate

portraits of inspiring women security professionals, to spark new vocations through the power of role models. Awareness-raising efforts should also target boys, to combat the entrenchment of exclusionary stereotypes and rigid gender norms that reduce the range of professional choices available to men or women.

h. Finally, support and strengthen the response chain to gender-based violence with concrete actions in the short, medium and long terms:

The study clearly shows the persistence of high levels of gender-based violence, especially violence against girls and women, whether in Burkina Faso, Mali, or Niger. Various initiatives to raise awareness and prevent such violence are underway in each of these countries and should be continued by learning from the lessons of the past (what works well, and what does not). But beyond this, it is also essential to recognize that the deep social roots of such violence mean that it will not disappear overnight. In this respect, strengthening the response chain appears to be a necessity which, in some cases, can be achieved through rela-

tively straightforward and inexpensive arrangements. In Niger, for instance, setting up a mechanism to finance the cost of forensic expertise for rape victims could have a considerable impact on victims' access to justice, for an investment of just CFA F 30,000 per case. In the short term, this service could be set up on a provisional basis, alongside a medium-term advocacy process for the adoption of a law ensuring free forensic care for all reported cases of sexual violence. The impact of such a law would, in turn, be felt in the long term. Additionally, in all three countries, the short-, medium- and long-term reinforcement of integrated support services for victims (with medical, emergency, psychosocial, legal, and empowerment or reintegration components) requires greater dialogue between the various players. To this end, a more detailed diagnosis of the GBV response chain in each country could lead to the organization of roundtables bringing together all stakeholders – institutional and civil society – with a view to finding systemic solutions. This would also enhance the quality of the response work carried out by security institutions.

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About this publication

Security is undoubtedly the most pressing of the numerous challenges facing the Sahel region. Jihadist attacks and criminal are on the rise, with a macabre toll in terms of casualties and displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in particular. Conventional strategies developed by governments and security institutions have failed to produce convincing results. As a result, a growing number of voices are calling for a change of strategy and a far-reaching security sector reform (SSR) to provide more effective security tailored to the needs of the region's populations. It is also necessary to engage the various categories of the Sahel's population in order to play a role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Women represent a key category in this respect, and their integration and the consideration of their needs, among others, is no longer a straightforward option, but a strategic priority which is now increas-

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ingly integrated into the development programs of countries in the region. In a statement issued by its presidency in February 2021, the UN Security Council stressed the importance of the role played by women in West Africa and the Sahel in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict situations. In this declaration, Council members emphasize that women 'must participate on an equal footing in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, and be fully and effectively involved'. Similarly, in its framework policy on security sector reform, the African Union recalls that 'SSR will adhere to the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment (...). The entire SSR process will, therefore, include women-specific activities, gender awareness and responsive programming, and aim to bring about transformative possibilities for gender equity within the security sector'.

