

Engendering the Nexus

A CASE STUDY ON HOW TO MAINSTREAM GENDER IN THE TRIPLE NEXUS AND ITS OPERATIONALIZATION

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This text presents the Early Warning System on Gender-Based Violence in Conflict (SAT-GV), a tool developed by the organisation Women in Conflict Zones (MZC) to be applied both in open conflicts and in situations where serious human rights violations are taking place. The SAT-GV aims to improve MZC's performance and contribute more efficiently to the fight against gender inequalities in conflict contexts by making it possible to identify the different levels of human

rights violations, threats, as well as resources and capacities for action.

MZC adopts a concerted, cross-cutting approach to development, peace, and women's rights throughout all its addressing humanitarian programmes, needs with long-term approaches focused on empowerment and human rights (HR) to reduce discrimination and vulnerability, including poverty, insecurity and structural inequality that particularly affect women and girls, thus promoting peace and social justice.

BACKGROUND AND FRAME OF REFERENCE

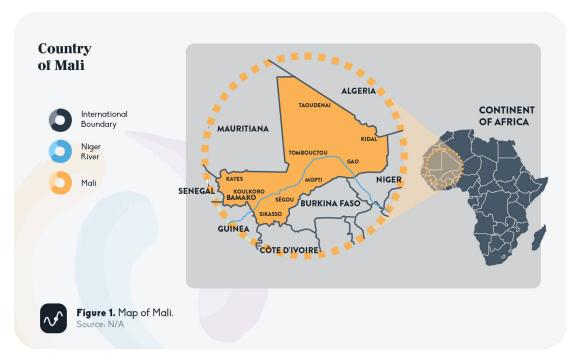
1. Interpretative Framework

The feminist paradigm conceives of peace as an environment that enables a dignified life free of violence. This definition of positive peace (Galtung, 1969, p. 183) addresses structural violence and gender

justice in line with frameworks such as the:

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- Convention on the Eliminatoin of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 2013)
- Istanbul Convention
- Women, Peace and Security (MPS)¹
 Agenda
- Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals)

This set of norms reinforces the premise, assumed by MZC, that development, security and peace are only possible with equality and HR, emphasizing the importance of women's participation in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and the eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), produced both in the private and public spheres.



Armed Conflict in Mali

It is a complex conflict with numerous active armed actors, where foreign armies are perceived with mistrust and have been the subject of allegations of rape (Europa Press, 2013).





Figure 2. Armed Conflict in Mali. Source: Women in Conflict Zones (MZC)

2. Context

Mali, classified as a country with low human development, is experiencing a chronic crisis with multi-causal origins. Chronic poverty was compounded in 2012 by armed conflict, considered in 2019 as one of the 11 most serious conflicts (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2020). It is a complex conflict with numerous active armed actors, where foreign armies are perceived with mistrust and have been the subject of allegations of rape (Europa Press, 2013).

The signing of the peace agreement in Algiers in 2015 did not end the conflict, which remains particularly active in the north of the country where the Malian government has a weak structure. In 2019, inter-ethnic clashes became widespread, reaching the centre of Mali and the regions of Mopti and Segou, which are being severely affected.

This instability has a serious impact on the lives and security of women and girls. Armed actors use various forms of sexual violence (rape, gang marriages) especially with girls, and other forms of sexual slavery in a context of impunity. On the other hand, increasing poverty reduces women's livelihood opportunities, forcing them to beg or prostitute themselves as a family survival strategy. This situation fuels trafficking mafias, especially in Bamako.

The scenario in which the Early Warning System on Gender-Based Violence in Conflict Settings (SAT-GV) is implemented must therefore be understood from a threefold perspective:

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPS): IDPs from different ethnic groups and nomadic peoples are "trapped" and, in the absence

of resources, are perceived as

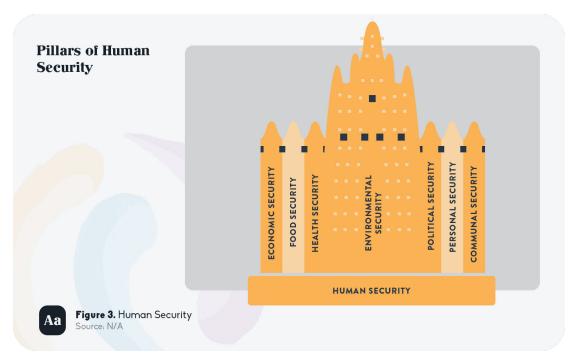
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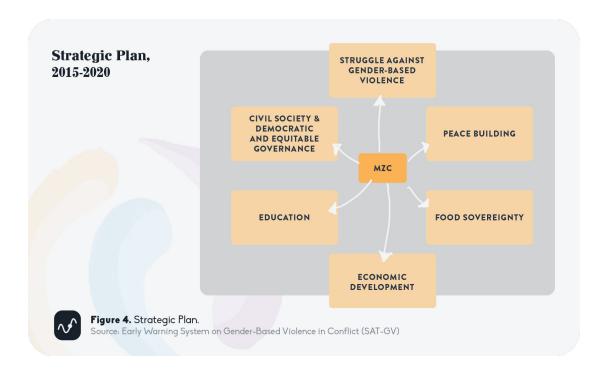
"enemies", creating a new source of tension.

- **O2 ENDEMIC POVERTY** and chronic **FOOD INSECURITY** add to the vulnerability imposed by the armed conflict.
- **O3 DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE:** The generalization of armed and inter-community violence favours VAWG, especially sexual violence.

3. Organizational Appproach

MZC is a multi-mandate NGO founded in 1994 in Bosnia-Herzegovina and is characterized by an integrated approach. This is due to its commitment to women's rights: the fight against all manifestations of gender-based violence, women's empowerment and peacebuilding are central dimensions in all the interventions





and processes promoted. In some cases, as an essential cross-cutting element; in others, as a main objective; and in all cases as a strategy in favour of peace, equality, respect and safeguarding of HR, gender justice and democratic strengthening.

The implementation and dissemination of the MPS agenda is central to MZC, alongside the strengthening of resilience and the promotion of human security, especially in its economic, food, security and health dimensions.

MZC began its intervention in Mali in 2007 by addressing the needs arising from the humanitarian situation with a long-term approach focused on reducing vulnerability and risk, on the one hand, and promoting peacebuilding and social justice, on the other.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAT-GV

1. Background

The initiative is based on research carried out between 2015 and 2016 by the EpD (Development Education) area, funded by the Andalusian Agency for Cooperation (AACID) with EUR 78,332.00.

It arises from the realization that VAWG does not emerge out of nowhere at the outbreak of conflict but is embedded in gender inequalities, and poses a threat to women's security and development in line with international frameworks.

2. Description

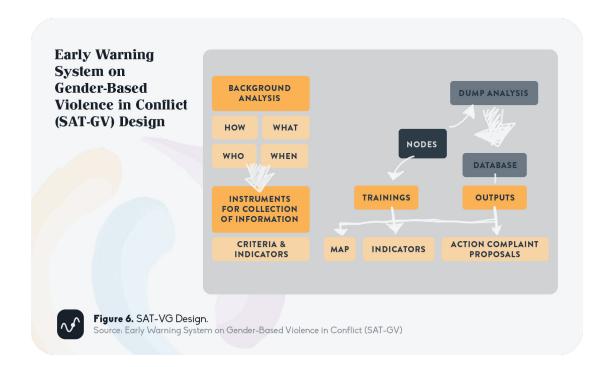
The SAT-GV is conceived as an instrument to identify different levels of threats and vulnerability, defining these in a broad manner in line with feminist approaches, to help establish proposals for action, and to denounce the "culture of impunity".

It takes the form of a software tool that analyzes data provided by local informants "alerting" them to the increase in situations prone to the emergence/recurrence of violence. It identifies rights violations, threats and vulnerabilities as well as resilience capacities and resources through a battery of indicators built on inputs from specialists and informants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Palestine, Mali and Spain.

It has 46 indicators divided into 3 dimensions:

- Systemic: structural conditions (political, economic, institutional and socio-cultural);
- Emerging trends (IDP and refugees, levels of violence, abuses by armed forces, etc.);
- Intervening factors, which increase/ decrease the likelihood of conflict or peacebuilding in the case of active conflict.





It includes both statistical data and perceptions of perceived risk by the community or individuals. The weighted data are displayed in a graph with different "alarm levels".

After its design, it was tested in the field (Colombia and Mali) and a series of training sessions were initiated with local staff, partners and counterparts, key to the implementation and inclusion of communities in the process.

3. Implementing the SAT-GV

Its implementation has made it possible to understand how the dynamics of the armed conflict were affecting VAWG, especially sexual violence. Prior to the conflict, Mali was a transit and destination country for trafficking, especially of women from Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics, a marginal option today. Instability has significantly increased

sexual exploitation, making it a provider. MZC has detected a growing presence of Malian women in northern Morocco and Spain, a phenomenon almost non-existent five years ago.

As a first step, it was decided to implement it in Bamako and the Gao region. Initially, Timbuktu, where MZC had been present since 2007, was also considered, but this was not possible due to the destruction of its office by jihadist groups. MZC therefore decided to move the proposal to Sikasso, the second largest city in the country.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, assessments were conducted to contextualize and document the issues, modalities and impacts of VAWG. In Gao, 326 victims were identified (95% women and girls). Of these, 15% reported having been raped and 21% had been sexually assaulted. Physical assaults and early/forced marriages amounted to 17.5% respectively.

Another 16% reported being deprived of resources, and 13% were regular victims of psychological and emotional abuse.

Just over 80% of the victims were minors and most of them had been forced into prostitution.

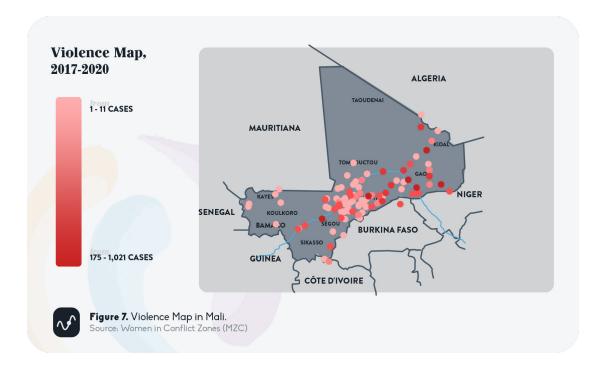
Other evidence:

- Socio-economic factors, as well as the collection of firewood and the remoteness of the springs, exposed women and children to rape and other sexual assaults.
- Widespread impunity, due to the silence of victims who feared being blamed and stigmatized by their families.
- High vulnerability of the Belá ethnic group, enslaved until recently and still discriminated against.

In order to activate the implementation of the SAT-GV, training sessions were held for a group of informants, who were responsible for collecting information and data. They were selected from among activists with whom MZC had been collaborating:

- members of the anti-slavery association TEMEDT in Gao;
- Coordination of Women's Associations (CAFO) in Bamako; and,
- in Sikasso, the women's associations Woiyo Kondeye, Koule Djakan and Timinandja.

Particularly relevant are the trainings that have been carried out with women's associations in the villages. These associations work for the eradication The SAT-GV is
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of harmful practices such as female circumcision², early and/or forced marriages and sexual exploitation.

In addition to these associations, there was also an equity champion in the person of Mohamed Ag Akeratane, the country coordinator (UN Women). He is a renowned anti-slavery activist and defender of women's rights, and his role in the implementation of the SAT-GV is key as he has great credibility with national institutions and especially with village chiefs, the power base at the local level.

The training workshops have been interrupted by the intensification and generalization of instability and tension in various regions of the country throughout 2018 to 2019, seriously affecting the proper development of the activities. This situation was aggravated in 2020 by COVID-19 and the coup d'état. This context also made it necessary to take into

account the risks taken by informants and to activate a specific protocol to reinforce their security.

Obtaining the first evidence and mappings has made it possible to propose interventions adapted to local needs through which food aid distribution projects implemented were (2017 -2019) together with initiatives aimed at strengthening community resilience to overcome the food crisis through agricultural projects and the promotion of economic activities of women's cooperatives, incorporating actions to strengthen women's human rights and reduce VAWG through the prevention of forced child marriages and trafficking, and care for victims of sexual violence.

These projects aim to contribute to women's participation by supporting the women's movement in actions in favour of peacebuilding and economic empowerment.

Finally, the SAT-GV facilitates the return to the communities with localised data, facilitating awareness-raising, through workshops and theatre³, on the impact of violence. Thus, during one of the workshops in the commune of Songo, one of the men was astonished to discover "but then women feel!", which shows the degree of dehumanization and, consequently, the extreme vulnerability of women and girls.

EVALUATION OF THE SAT-GV

Due to the incidents, we do not yet have final results. In addition, the SAT-GV is under revision. Nevertheless, we can point out some considerations:

- The initiative is **HIGHLY CONSISTENT** with international and state normative frameworks, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Spanish Peacebuilding Strategy.
- 102 The SAT-GV is CONSISTENT WITH THE PREMISES OF THE TRIPLE NEXUS. The SAT-GV helps to identify the differentiated needs (humanitarian, development and peace) of women and men, helping to determine "the power available to women, girls, men and boys, as well as their ability to access and control resources" (IASC, 2017, p. 17) on the ground. In parallel, it enables the mapping of different levels of threats, risks and rights violations, including sexual violence and VAWG, which are key to the analysis not only because of their prevalence and intensity but also because of their close link to structural conditions and socioeconomic factors that contribute to greater/lesser vulnerability to exclusion and violence in both humanitarian and development contexts.

This breaks the humanitarian-development-peace silos, as the proposals developed respond to the most immediate needs, especially those of women and girls and other excluded groups, as well as to the structural, political, cultural and/or socio-economic conditions that place these groups in a situation of discrimination/subordination and as objects of violence. In this way, it

is possible to build bridges between humanitarian intervention and the construction of more equitable and just societies.

MAINSTREAM GENDER. Includes gender indicators during data collection and a gender analysis in the subsequent analysis without confining gender issues to a single point in time (Schmeidl & Piza-Lopez, 2015, pp. 7-8).

On the other hand, grassroots participation, especially of women of the Belá ethnic group, has been promoted in all phases of the intervention.

PROGRAMMING. Having an instrument that generates localised information contributes to establishing more efficient and relevant proposals for action by supporting local capacities for resilience and peacebuilding processes adjusted to local realities.

The initiative thus complements all the projects implemented by MZC in Mali, contributing to the ultimate objective of improving the well-being of the Malian population, especially the most vulnerable groups and women as a discriminated group, and increasing their level of personal, food, socio-economic, community and political security. Briefly, through the SAT-GV the following have been activated:

Programmes for the prevention and transformation of sociocommunity beliefs and behaviour (theatres, debates and meetings);

Capacity building programmes for prevention, mediation and education against violence and sexual exploitation;

Holistic care of VAWG victims (support and accompaniment centres);

Capacity building on HR, and causes and impacts of VAWG;

Reducing women's socioeconomic vulnerability by strengthening women's economic autonomy and productive structures;

Strengthening the presence of women in decision-making spaces (water management committees, health committees, community assemblies, etc).

APPROPRIATION by local actors. All local staff involved in the process positively assessed the relevance of the instrument and the potential of its implementation, considering that it is a valid instrument to contextualise the different types of violence, victims, and perpetrators.

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CONCLUSION

Peace, development and security are key elements for the feminist agenda. Already in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) special attention was paid to women's participation in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, and the exercise of women's HR, especially the right to live a life free of violence, both during conflict and in pre- and post-conflict situations.

For MZC, human security means enjoying development, the absence of violence, fear and threats (peace), and the full enjoyment of human rights. MZC is fully committed to this concerted and crosscutting approach, dedicating 100% of its resources to its operationalization. This implies, on the one hand, a solid coordination between organizational areas to overcome the intersectoral silo and, on the other hand, long-term programming based on strategic alliances, where community participation ownership are fundamental.

The SAT-GV is characterised by the use of simple technology and low-cost, easy-to-use equipment, with the key contribution of community members as informants. It allows to unravel the complexity of violence in contexts of armed conflict where violence directly derived from the conflict, and perpetrated by the various armed actors, is superimposed on the violence suffered by women. Thus, although arranged marriages, the exchange of girls and wedding trousseau, on the one hand, and the sexual exploitation of women and girls, on the other, already existed with greater or lesser intensity

prior to the conflict, these modalities take on new forms and intensify with the socio-economic insecurity that forces the adoption of survival and "protection" strategies⁴.

This finding is consistent with evidence that establishes a direct link between armed conflict and gender inequality: 83% of armed conflicts in 2019 took place in gender-discriminatory contexts (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2020).

This is why the fight against gender inequality must become a central element of the Triple Nexus strategy, which implies greater budgetary attention. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020b), despite some growth in funding for gender equality, only 4% of commitments had gender equality as a main objective, and this is expected to decrease with the advent of COVID-19.

During the process, some challenges and areas for improvement were also identified, to which must be added the considerations arising from the complexity and difficulties imposed by the pandemic. Among the gaps identified, we highlight the following:

It is necessary to **UPDATE**INDICATORS and include those required by the new scenario.

Among them, we highlight the relevance or intensity of the following:

indicators related to the identification and management of trafficking in persons (CEDAW

General Recommendation No. 38);

indicators linked to the reduction of civic spaces (Istanbul Principles, 2010);

hate speech and the rise of fundamentalism and extremism.

- 102 In the framework of the review that is being carried out with the support of an external consultant (CEIM), it has been detected that it is difficult for local informants to adequately complete a LARGE NUMBER OF INDICATORS, some of which are also complex.
- COVID-19 has severely affected implementation, adding to previously existing difficulties due to widespread insecurity and tensions in the country. MOBILITY HAS BEEN REDUCED, making data collection and access to VAWG survivors difficult, especially in marginalized urban and/or remote rural areas, where cases of violence have increased exponentially according to key informants.
- **Q4** The intensified insecurity and **ATTACKS SUFFERED** BY MZC interrupted its implementation: The destruction of infrastructure and equipment required reconstructing all lost organizational information and documentation. On the other hand, it prompted the reinforcement of security protocols during 2018-2019. This protocol was revised during 2020 to include

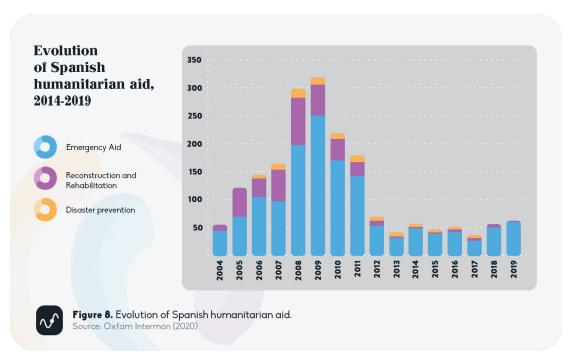
the specificities resulting from the pandemic.

- **05** The **TENSION BETWEEN** strict. adherence to **HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES**⁵ of access to the most vulnerable populations on the one hand, and personal and community **SECURITY** on the other, has not been resolved.
- **06** Another aspect to improve is the PROCEDURE FOR **REPORTING** HUMAN **RIGHTS VIOLATIONS** to national and local institutions responsible for providing protection in a context of state failure such as the Malian one.
- **07** Finally, the **DIFFICULTY** IN FINDING RESOURCES is a major weakness, so the challenge lies in finding sources of funding to ensure its full development and

improvement, which currently relies on MZC's own resources and the voluntariness of the actors involved, which generates great uncertainty and irregularity in its implementation.

We highlight the complexity of funding initiatives aimed peacebuilding, at prevention and gender equality (GE) which receive very little attention and funding, despite international and national commitments⁶. Thus, although almost a third of DAC members define GE as a main or significant objective, only 19% of EU aid provided to fragile states focused on GE. Furthermore, only 20% of aid allocated to peace and security has a GE dimension (OECD, 2019).

In Spain, the MPS agenda does not have a budget to guarantee its implementation, to which is added its militarised vision7. With regard to humanitarian aid, the "prevention" line is the least well endowed,



reaching its peak in 2008 and 2009, after which its resources began to decrease significantly.

In 2020, despite an increase in emergency aid to EUR 8.8 million, it was dragged down by the war in Syria⁸, while reconstruction and rehabilitation plummeted from EUR 4 million in 2018 to EUR 711,000 in 2019. Prevention barely reached EUR 678,000.

Focusing on Mali, Spanish cooperation (AECID) (V Master Plan 2018-2021) considers it as a geographical priority. Of the EUR 7 million allocated in 2017, only 0.8% is earmarked for Sustainable Development Goal 16, compared to 30% for humanitarian action, and 6% (EUR 480,506) for GE.

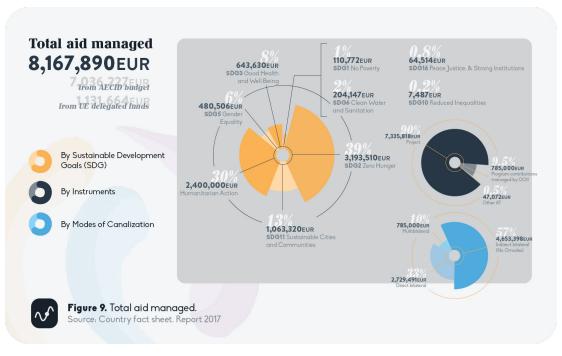
RECOMMENDATIONS

At the organizational level (MZC):

This initiative exemplifies how **SYNERGIES INTERNAL** are **REINFORCED THROUGH** research and innovation of instruments that, in turn, feed back information and learning to MZC as a whole, especially in relation to VAWG, trafficking peacebuilding and in which all departments the entity are involved. It is recommended that this line of work be strengthened, constituting cross-cutting teams and joint transcending programming, the interdepartmental current coordination.

Peace, development and security are key elements for the feminist agenda.

- **102** The **INSTRUMENT** needs to be **UPDATED** to incorporate new dimensions that are now key (reduction of civic environments, COVID impact, etc.).
- VOLUME OF INDICATORS. While a large set of multidimensional indicators is feasible for technical staff to handle, it is difficult to handle for local informants. The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security index on MPS is inspiring.
- BROADEN ITS SCOPE and initiate its implementation in all countries where MZC is present, including Spain. The use of new information technologies and social networks can partially alleviate the difficulty in accessing victims and communities in the COVID-19 context.



A COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY STRATEGY is needed based on the information generated by the SAT-GV on the (in)security situation of Malian women and girls and their relevance as peacebuilders. To this end, it would be of interest to create an online platform with an accessible configuration.

To donors:

More resources, accountability and political will need to be mobilized to implement commitments on equality, peace and sustainable development, such as the SDGs and SDG16 that would make the Nexus principles a reality.

Despite political declarations, countries, including Spain and Mali9, currently have these priorities concentrated in an MPS Action Plan. Only 33% of them have a budget (Peacewomen). Neither Spain nor Mali have allocated resources. On the other hand, preventive actions are scarcely addressed by donors who mostly embrace a militarised vision of security, dispute resolution, and the "protection" of civilians during conflicts (UN Women, 2015, p. 198).

"Women, peace and security is about preventing war, not about making war safer for women." (UN Women, 2015) Specifically, it is recommended to:

Increase support for local feminist organizations and women's associations involved in peace prevention and peace building.

Allocate increased resources to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the implementation of local violence prevention, recovery and positive peace policies.

Support comprehensive protection for women and girls who are victims of VAWG.

Provide financial support for women's economic empowerment.

Q2 Finally, it is necessary to monitor the RISE OF EXTREMISM AND EXCLUSIONARY POLITICS, only in Mali, which threaten the commitments to equality, peace and human security driven by the 2030 and MPS agenda. This rise makes it even more difficult to obtain resources and advance women's which is increasingly rights, challenged at the global level. On the other hand, it affects the reduction of civic space and the role of civil society organizations in the defense of HRDs. This concern has been taken up in the last meeting of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks in October 2020.

ENDNOTES

¹Composed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent ones, and implemented through National Action Plans (NAPs): Spanish NAP II (2017); EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (2018).

²100% of the women MZC works with in Sikasso and Bamako have been cut, which is not the case in Gao.

³We refer to the methodology of social theatre or "Theatre of the Oppressed" developed by Augusto Boal, used by MZC as a tool for building global citizenship for the transformation and eradication of VAW.

⁴There is a common belief that marriage protects girls from violence.

⁵These principles are: Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence.

⁶In addition to the 2030 Agenda and the above-mentioned agenda, the European Consensus on Development (2017) recognizes women and girls as key actors in development, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and humanitarian response.

⁷See Agirregomezkorta (2018).

⁸South Sudan and Yemen received EUR 1 million and EUR 810,000 respectively. Mali received EUR 18.7 million, of which EUR 6.5 million was for grants for asylum, refuge and social and health care in Temporary Stay Centres for Immigrants..

⁹More info at: https://www.peacewomen.org/action-plan/national-action-plan-mali

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