

## The Motivations of Civil Society in Designing Evidence-based Approaches to a Human Security Strategy in Mali

### Policy Brief, April 2017

David Connolly and Boubacar Thera<sup>1</sup>

#### Executive Summary

This policy brief provides fresh insights and practical lessons for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers on the motivations of Malian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organization (CSOs) for designing evidence-based approaches to a human security strategy in Mali. In understanding why civil society chose specific methods of collecting data to inform human security strategy, the research utilized Q Methodology to conduct interviews with key decision-makers from a sample of 8 NGOs in the city of Bamako and 30 CSOs in the three regions of Kayes, Timbuktu, and Mopti from March-April 2016. It also drew upon 12 semi-structured interviews in Bamako in January 2016 with representatives of the Malian government, international organizations, and local organizations on questions of human security, coordination and collaboration, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), lobbying, and advocacy.<sup>2</sup>

There are six main findings relevant to the current and future design and monitoring of human security strategy in Mali:

1. The NGOs in Bamako use a variety of methods to collect data, comprising of focus groups, consultations and surveys, and are prepared to adapt and employ new methods;
2. The NGOs in Bamako and the regions highly value the active involvement and input of communities and citizens;
3. The NGOs in Bamako and the regions emphasize the importance of having a representative sample of Malian voices from all regions;
4. The NGOs in Bamako and the regions do not feel pressure from the government or from donors to use a specific methodology for data collection;
5. The CSOs in the regions value the importance of M&E in improving their work and roles, and do not consider M&E reports and outcomes as a potential threat to their work; and
6. There is a need for greater coordination among NGOs and CSOs in terms of sharing data and best practice on its collection, and a more urgent need to strengthen partnerships between NGOs, CSOs and the Malian government, and international actors.

Overall, the main findings demonstrate the important role that NGOs and CSOs play in strengthening the evidence base for human security strategy, but at the same time reveal significant untapped potential which, if realized, could help strengthen stability and peace in the

---

<sup>1</sup> David Connolly is Head of Research at The Hague Institute for Global Justice (The Hague Institute). Boubacar Thera is a Program Officer at the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding –Mali (WANEP-Mali).

<sup>2</sup> This 6-month study was conducted by The Hague Institute, The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and WANEP-Mali. The project received financial support from NWO-WOTRO - commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands and developed in close collaboration with the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law. The authors would like to acknowledge the helpful comments on an earlier draft from Jenny Aulin and Charlotte Divin at GPPAC, and Dr Eamon Aloyo at The Hague Institute.

country. Based on these findings, this policy brief outlines recommendations for NGOs and CSOs, donors, policy-makers, and researchers. It also reflects on the use of Q Methodology in researching human security strategy in Mali and other war-torn and crisis-affected states. It begins by summarizing the background to the study.



Figure 1. Map of Mali (UN Cartographic Section)

## 1. Background to the Study

One of the central aims of this study is to critically review the methodologies and methods used by Malian NGOs and CSOs in designing and implementing their evidence-based approach for a human security strategy in Mali. To this end, Q Methodology was used to understand why NGOs and CSOs choose specific methods to collect data on human security. It is important for all stakeholders to understand the reasons and motivations – as well as the constraints – of NGOs and CSOs in Mali in making these methodological decisions, given their significant contributions to human security policy and practice.

“Civil society” in Mali, according to Nyirabikali (2016: 6) who draws upon the work of Michael Edwards and John Ehrenberg, can be defined broadly as “any collective, voluntary and non-profit oriented organization outside the family and the state, established for the purpose of pursuing the collective interests of its members.” This policy brief focuses on NGOs based in Bamako that also work in other regions as well as CSOs that are based in the regions.

Since the “human security” concept was first introduced through the United Nations Development Programme’s 1994 *Human Development Report*, its theoretical underpinnings

have been marked by a lack of consensus on its exact definition (King and Murray, 2001: 591–92). Unlike the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or a binding international treaty such as The Genocide Convention or The Rome Statute, there is no single binding document that defines human security.

However, a “common understanding” on human security was agreed by consensus in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290 (United Nations, 2012), framed by the pillars of freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. There are additional features of human security that leading scholars and practitioners generally accept. First, the unit of analysis is the individual, not the nation, state, or any other group or institution (Sen, 2013: 18), in line with the shift in recent decades from focusing on the survival and moral importance of a state as a political entity toward the importance of individuals (King and Murray, 2001: 588). Second, human security includes, but is broader than, protection from physical violence. Other dimensions include access to basic goods necessary for life such as nutrition, water, healthcare, clothing, and shelter. Exactly what these other goods include and exclude, however, remains contested.

Operationally, civil society organizations around the world have shaped their principles and strategies around the people-centered approach articulated by the human security framework (GPPAC, 2013) as illustrated in the work of WANEP throughout West Africa. In Mali, local consultations on human security have identified four areas of insecurity common to each region: health, personal security, environmental, and economic security.<sup>3</sup> The human security concept provides a multi-dimensional lens on the crisis, which promotes an analytical understanding and integrated response to the causes and dynamics of insecurity. The many obstacles to human security in Mali include insufficient education and an over-emphasis on the elite, a lack of good governance, weak coordination between the main stakeholders, and the complex geo-politics of the country. This study understands human security data in relation to one or more aspects of human security, such as the rule of law, security, peace, and gender.

## 2. Q Methodology

Q Methodology is a research method that enables a systematic understanding of people’s perspectives, motives, goals, and subjectivity in making decisions, and can identify a set of generalizable trends. Researchers provide respondents with a set of statements which they are asked to rank and order from least to most agreement. In the first step, respondents place all statements in 3 separate piles for a “first sorting” (disagree – agree – neutral). In the second step, they are requested to make a more fine-grained choice of which column to put a specific statement in. This requires respondents to decide which statements they most strongly agree and disagree with, and those which they feel neutral about. The scale is divided into 9 different categories, from ‘1’ (very strongly disagree) to ‘9’ (very strongly agree), with ‘5’ being neutral. The Q sort (resulting from the sorting of statements) requires that respondents only place two statements in columns 1 and 9, and the most in column 5.

For this study, the Q sort was given to 8 respondents in Bamako city and to 30 respondents in 3 regions: Kayes, Timbuktu, and Mopti. There were two main questions. For the first question, answered by 8 people, there were 32 statements. For the second question, which 37 people

---

<sup>3</sup> Identified in a series of consultations and dialogue sessions with civil society in each region in Mali from 2014-2016. For more information, see <https://www.peaceportal.org/web/human-security-in-mali>

answered, there were 57 statements. Data gathered by Q Methodology was cross-checked and analyzed systematically using the median, mode, and average.

Nine (22.5 per cent) of the 38 respondents that answered both questions were women. This does not include women who participated alongside male respondents since some Q sorts were taken by several individuals, as explained in the section on “limitations” below. In these situations, only the name of the male respondent was recorded. It is important to note that in Mali, women leaders at the national level face challenges in terms of the systematic implementation of Women, Peace and Security policies both at social and political levels. Gender is mainly translated into typically siloed issues of women’s empowerment, gender-based violence, and equal representation. In this sense, gender is not systematically mainstreamed in a society that is predominantly traditional.

### **Limitations of Q Methodology**

While systematic and insightful overall for the study, there were several limitations to using Q Methodology in Mali. First, as is the case for all studies based on Q Methodology, it was not possible to verify the claims of respondents. Their answers could have been influenced by what they thought they wanted the researchers to hear, or perhaps they did not want to admit the real reasons for choosing their methods to gather data on human security. Their responses could have been representations of how they would like to be perceived. To mitigate these potential biases, we followed up the Q sort with additional questions that probed these possibilities.

Second, the method is also leading, in that it requires respondents to choose from a limited list, as the answers are by their nature limited to those statements that the researchers identified in advance of the interviews. Although we produced these statements based on the expert knowledge of the project partners and following a survey of the academic and policy-based literature, it is still possible that the statements may not have captured the full range of reasons and motivations for NGOs and CSOs in selecting the methods to gather data on human security.

Third, some of the respondents in the regions did not adhere to the Q sort process. In some cases, they refused to put statements into the bell-shaped diagram required of the Q Methodology (see Figure 2 below) because they argued that these were too limiting and did not reflect their actual views. These respondents did not follow the precise instructions partly because they did not want to have to make this second round of more fine-grained choices.

As noted above, the fourth limitation was that Q Methodology is supposed to be answered individually. However, certain interviews were completed collaboratively between the respondent and his or her colleagues at the selected CSO/NGO. Technically, this could distort the responses and at a minimum it meant the process took longer. However, in the local context, this deviation was seen to be constructive as the researcher felt that the respondents thought more deeply and carefully about the statements.

Last, due to security reasons, researchers were unable to access some regions (either physically or electronically) because of high insecurity, weak roads or poor internet connection. However, this is a challenge for all primary data methods in Mali and other war-torn and crisis-affected contexts.

Nevertheless, the use of Q Methodology proved relevant overall to the objectives of the study as it enabled fresh insights into, and a systematic understanding of, why NGOs and CSOs select their methods for gathering data to shape the design of human security strategy. The Q sort was well-received by respondents, because it was different from the typical methods for data collection (semi-structured and focus group interviews) and they enjoyed the interactive experience of the Q sort process. While the study faced obstacles that affect all approaches to primary research in Mali, it also revealed specific limitations that emphasize the need to contextualize the “usual” Q sort process before implementing it in Mali and in other similar contexts.<sup>4</sup>

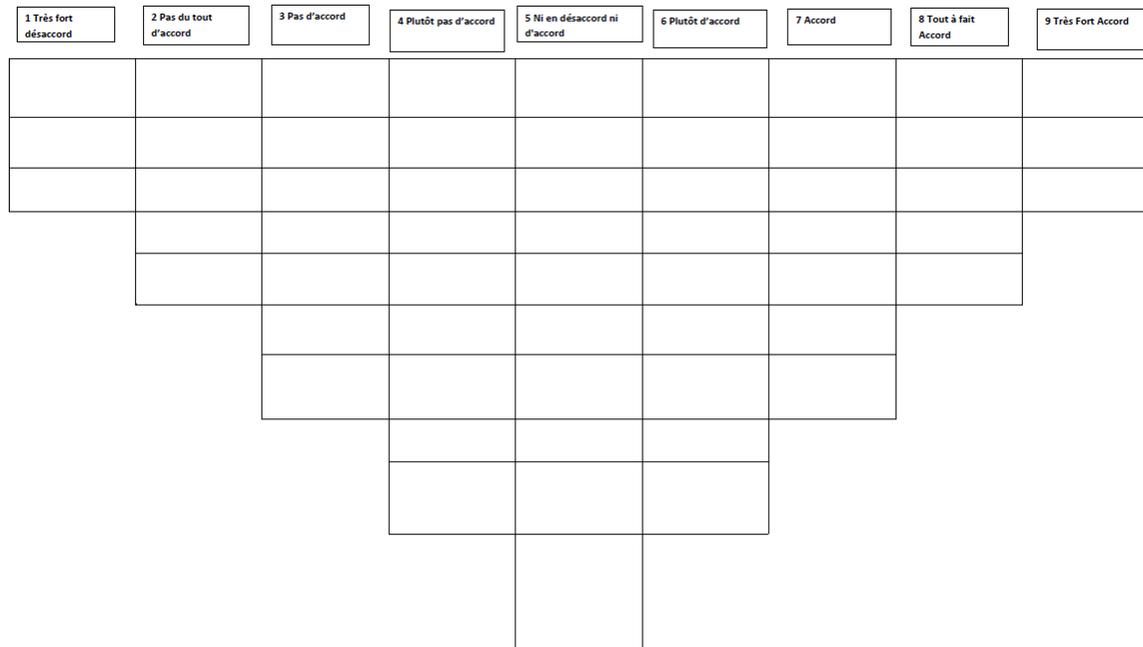


Figure 2. Bell-shaped Diagram for Q Method

### 3. Main Findings

This section presents the main findings from the analysis of the data gathered by Q Methodology and the semi-structured interviews. The findings are divided into the results from Bamako followed by the regions, with a final summary at the end. The Q Methodology comprised Questions A and B. Question A was directed more to the NGOs and it sought to understand *why specific method/s were chosen*. Question B was directed both to the NGOs and the CSOs and also had a broader focus, since it sought to explore *the basis upon which they value* data collection methods and evidence-based approaches to a human security strategy.

#### Analysis from Question A and B in Bamako

First, the findings from Bamako reveal that NGOs use a variety of methods to collect data, with five using focus groups, two using consultations, and one using surveys. They were prepared to

<sup>4</sup> For more on Q Methodology see van Exel & de Graaf (2005).

adapt and employ new methods where necessary. Second, the NGO representatives selected specific methods based on their potential to provide a voice to the communities that they attempted to assist, in particular, underrepresented groups. Third, the data suggests that NGOs want to be representatives of their constituents, in that they portray the dimensions of human security that are most important to those they consulted. Fourth and linked to the former motivations, NGO representatives rejected the claim that they limited their choice of method/s to those they knew how to use based on prior experience, or that the selection was influenced by government or donor preferences. While further research is needed, it is tentatively concluded that the selection of methods by NGOs came from the bottom-up, and that NGOs were willing to choose and adapt new methods if they strengthened the voice of the communities, especially marginalized groups, whom they worked with.

### **Analysis from Question B in the regions**

First, CSO representatives claimed that they, like the NGOs consulted, are not influenced by any preferences of the government or donors when it comes to data collection. Second, the findings reveal that CSOs are acutely aware of regional variations and recognize the importance of adapting data collection methods to the nuances of local contexts. This suggests that CSOs appreciate the importance of tailoring human security strategies to the diversity of the regions. Third, based on the interviews, CSOs also valued the importance of M&E in improving their work and role and did not see such reports and outcomes as a potential threat to their work.

### **Summary**

The Q sort from the regions outside of Bamako and in the capital suggests that NGOs chose their methods for a combination of reasons. At the forefront was the shared belief that their methods for collecting data enabled greater participation and voice from the communities, especially the underrepresented. It was also interesting that respondents rejected the idea that they are influenced by donor and/or government demands, given that it was a pre-study assumption that there would be top-down pressure based on national and international preferences for quantitative data and surveys. NGOs and CSOs in the regions did not feel that M&E processes would adversely affect them. Moreover, they exhibited a critical approach to their work and agreed that their methods could be improved and supplemented, which would only increase their potential to influence government policy. This demonstrated that data collection and an evidence-based approach was considered not simply a means to an end - improving human security policy - but also valued as a learning opportunity and an iterative process of development.

In summary, the findings from the Q Methodology demonstrate that NGOs and CSOs valued the role of evidence in designing a human security strategy. More profoundly, the prevailing practice was to choose methods that embody the principles of human security: participation, representation of individuals, contextualization, and a multidimensional perspective.

To locate these positive findings in a broader and more cautious context, the semi-structured interviews with key national and international actors in Bamako pointed to three practical limitations that might undermine the role and/or perception of civil society in providing a compelling evidence base for human security policy. First, it was argued that that NGOs and CSOs are not sufficiently coordinated, and employ different approaches to collecting, measuring, and analyzing data within and across the regions. It was felt that these variations affect the overall consistency of the data. Second, some respondents at this level argued that the lack of

coordination between NGOs, CSOs and the government, and international actors limited the space and opportunities for direct policy engagement and design. Third, some policy makers also questioned the credibility of some civil society actors, as they were unsure if they represented the local populations.

#### **4. Policy Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of the main findings, this policy brief provides the following recommendations to four main types of stakeholders toward the development of a human security strategy in Mali.

##### **NGOs and CSOs**

- a. While appreciating the challenges, NGOs and CSOs should, as a sector and with other relevant sectors, coordinate their activities to the best of their ability in order to share best practices, and establish data collection methods that can reliably track human security trends over time, with a particular focus on the dimensions of gender and youth.
- b. More specifically, NGOs and CSOs in Mali should increasingly work with research organizations/academia to monitor and evaluate the success of various practices and policies so that they can identify the most cost-effective approaches to promoting human security.
- c. By being more transparent in the choice and use of data collection methodologies, the policy documents of NGOs and CSOs can be more credible for policy makers, as they could be seen as truly representing the views of local populations.
- d. Malian civil society needs to take stock of their respective and combined roles and reflect on their work as a sector rather than individual organizations. This would help increase their impact on the government, international actors, local populations, and more broadly, the development of a human security strategy.

##### **Malian Government**

- e. As an immediate objective, the Malian government should support better cooperation in order to strengthen the protection of NGO and CSO representatives who collect data in the most insecure areas in Mali. Ensuring access for data collection, without affecting the independence of civil society, will help understand better the needs of these particularly vulnerable communities that face deteriorating living conditions. It is the first step towards designing and implementing adequate responses and increasing the capacity and legitimacy of the emerging state.
- f. Longer-term, the government ought to recognize the important roles played by NGOs and CSOs in gathering data on human security and in linking communities and citizens to a process from stability to state building and sustainable peace in the regions. This requires concrete partnerships between government and civil society and an appreciation of how NGOs and CSOs can uniquely link communities and citizens to the government.

##### **Donors**

- g. Donors should fully recognize the potential of, and seek to develop, the operational/human capacity of CSOs working in the regions by ensuring they are eligible to apply for project tenders and calls for proposals. Many CSOs feel excluded from these calls because of the emphasis on the amount of funding previously managed as a criterion for selection.

##### **Researchers**

- h. Researchers should take their lead from the approach of NGOs and CSOs in Mali to data collection and evidence building, which emphasizes the importance of participatory methodologies, the ability to tailor methods to local contexts, and self-reflection and learning throughout. As demonstrated by this study, partnerships between international and local organizations and the collaboration between researchers and practitioners in gathering data has many mutual benefits in terms of capacity building and knowledge sharing. A key component of this effort is to support the innovation of methods and to test new methods, as promoted by this study through the use of Q Methodology.
- i. Q Methodology proved relevant to understanding some of the motivations of NGOs and CSOs in selecting their methods for data collection. However, this study recommends that further designs of the Q Methodology process carefully consider its target groups and recognize the local nuances of data collection in Mali and other similar contexts, in order to tailor the process and to help mitigate bias.

### Works Cited

- van Exel, J., & de Graaf, G. 2005. "Q Methodology: A Sneak Preview". Working Paper, pp.30, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.558.9521&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- GPPAC. 2013. "The Human Security Approach in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding - A Civil Society Position Paper", *Civil Society Network for Human Security*, IKV Pax Christi, April.
- King, G., Christopher J., & Murray, L. 2001. "Rethinking Human Security." *Political Science Quarterly*, 116 (4): 585–610. doi:10.2307/798222.
- Nyirabikali, G. 2016. "Opportunities and Challenges for Civil Society Contributions to Peacebuilding in Mali." No. 2016/1. *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*. Stockholm: SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIInsight1601.pdf>.
- Sen, A. 2013. "Birth of a Discourse" in M. Martin and T. Owen, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Human Security*, 17–27. London; New York: Routledge.
- United Nations. 2012. "Follow-up to Paragraph 143 on Human Security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome." UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/66/290. [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/290&referer=http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/r66\\_resolutions\\_table\\_eng.htm&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/290&referer=http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/r66_resolutions_table_eng.htm&Lang=E).

GPPAC, WANEP and The Hague Institute would like to thank the following organizations for participating in the interviews:

<b>REGION</b>	<b>ORGANISATIONS</b>
TOMBOUCTOU	Action Recherche Développement Initiatives Locales (ARDIL)
	Groupe Action (GABVI)
	Association pour le Développement Zone Aride (ADAZ)
	CAFO Tombouctou
	Association pour la Promotion du Monde Rural au Sahel (APROMORS)
	ONG Santé et Développement SANDEVE
	Association pour la défense des victimes de la rébellion au Mali (ADVRMA)
	Forum des ASC-Tombouctou
	DEMINIS AEDT
MOPTI	Action pour la Formation et l'Autonomisation Rurale (AFAR)
	Agence Evangélique de Développement du Mali (AEDM)
	Association pour le Développement des Collectivité Locale (ADCL)
	Delta survie
	Groupe Recherche et d'Application Technique (GRAT)
	Association Pour l'Appui aux Populations Rurales (APPOR)
	Organisation pour le Développement Intégré au Sahel (ODI Sahel)
	Œuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance au Sahel (OMAES)
	ONG Action Mopti
ONG Eveil	
KAYES	Association d'appui aux actions de Développement Rural (ADR)
	FANDEEMA
	Stop Sahel
	Charte de Collaboration
	Fondation pour le Développement au Sahel
	Association pour la Valorisation des Ressources locales (AVRL)
	Culture pour Développement Participant
	Association pour le Développement Communautaire (ADCO)
	Fédération Régional des Personnes Handicapés (FERAPH)
Coordination des Associations Et ONG Féminines Au Mali (CAFO)	
BAMAKO	West Africa network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)-Mali
	Institut Malien Recherche Action pour la Paix (IMRAP)
	Réseau des femmes pour la paix et la sécurité de l'espace CEDEAO (REPEFSCO)
	Association pour le Développement des Droits de la Femme (APDF)
	Amnesty International
	Alliance pour Refonder la Gouvernance en Afrique (ARGA)
	Freedom House