

MALI

POPULATION IN 2016

17.994.837

SIZE

1.240.000 KM²

HDI RANKING 2016

175/188

INEQUALITY ADJUSTED HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT INDEX 2016

0,293

GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX 2016

0,689

CIVIC SPACE (CIVICUS MONITOR 2017)

OBSTRUCTED

HDI - Human Development Index and its components, ranks countries by HDI value and details the values of the three HDI components: longevity, education and income.

IHDI - Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index - IHDI looks beyond the average achievements of a country in longevity, education and income to show how these achievements are distributed among its residents. An IHDI value can be interpreted as the level of human development when inequality is accounted for.

GDI - Gender Development Index, measures disparities on the HDI by gender. The table contains HDI values estimated separately for women and men; the ratio of which is the GDI value. The closer the ratio is to 1, the smaller the gap between women and men.

Civic space - The CIVICUS monitor assigns each country a rating on civic space based on constant analysis of multiple streams of data on civic space. The rating is open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed or closed. <https://monitor.civicus.org/Ratings>

Introduction

Mali, officially the Republic of Mali, is a landlocked country in West Africa. It is the eighth largest country in Africa, and shares a long border with seven countries. 48% of the estimated population in 2012¹ was below 15 years old. Its capital is Bamako. The country's economy centres on subsistence agriculture, cotton, and salt. It is also the third largest producer of gold in Africa.

In recent years, Mali has been plagued by insecurity, conflict and violence, particularly in the north, following a coup in 2012 combined with fighting between Tuareg and Islamist rebels. In response to Islamist territorial gains, the French military launched an operation in 2013 and has since had a strong military presence in Mali combined with a UN Peacekeeping Mission. A fragile peace has prevailed with intermittent attacks on refugee camps and military bases in the north as well as terrorist attacks in the capital.

Voice in Mali is managed by Oxfam and focuses on the following target groups:

- 1 People living with disabilities, especially small/little people, albinos, people with a mental disability and people with visual and hearing impairments. As most governmental programmes focus on people with physical disabilities, Voice intends to prioritise other disabilities.
- 2 Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence, particularly in the rural areas. Due to their level of marginalisation and discrimination, Voice will prioritise commercial sex workers, widows, domestic workers, women and girls working in the informal sector and women living with HIV/AIDS.
- 3 Age-discriminated vulnerable groups (youth and elderly).

Voice in Mali is particularly interested in supporting those groups that face double or triple discrimination such as young women with disabilities or girls from an ethnic background who do commercial sex work in rural areas. This way, we can address and support all five target groups within Voice.

The emphases with these target groups will be:

- Access to productive resources and employment;
- Access to basic services, namely, health and education; and
- Citizen participation.

Voice works in the following regions: Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Segou, Mopti and Bamako district.

State of affairs

Mali's legislative framework guarantees equality between all citizens as well as specific rights for the Voice target groups. The reality however is very different. All the target groups experience exclusion from public life, discrimination and marginalisation by state institutions and from the community.

People living with disabilities

People living with disabilities make up 10% of the population and, like elsewhere, experience challenges seeking employment, accessing social services, stigma and discrimination within the family and by society at large.

There is no legislation promoting the economic, social and cultural rights of people living with disabilities and their employment is predominately in the informal sector. Aside from select government departments, there are very few private businesses that employ people living with disabilities, exacerbating their economic vulnerability. The private sector, while being an essential actor, contributes little in terms of its commitment to people living with disabilities.

In addition to high levels of stigma and shame associated with having a family member living with a disability, there are many myths associated with two people living with disabilities getting married and pregnant women living with disabilities. The latter are often denied medical care and support.

In many instances, Mali has failed to ratify or conform to international conventions that protect the rights of people living with disabilities. This deficiency in the regulations, together with poor enforcement, increases the vulnerability and lack of protection for people living with disabilities. These shortcomings result in low political representation of people living with disabilities in community decision-making processes at local, regional and national levels. While the state remains a key player in the development and enforcement of policies, its commitment and engagement sadly remains very weak.

In contrast, civil society plays an important role in social mobilisation and communication for behaviour change by providing psychosocial, medical, legal and economic support to people living with disabilities. Organisations working with and for people living with disabilities have an important role in advocating for equitable rights and for challenging and holding government to account.

Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence

Voice will focus on women and girls engaged in the informal sector with limited financial and material resources who face the risk of exploitation, abuse and/or violence. These include domestic workers, street vendors, commercial sex workers and those working in agriculture. This group is also characterised by low levels of education and literacy, poverty and the lack of vocational training qualifications and opportunities.

Family 'maids' or domestic workers occupy the lowest status in society. They are expected to stay home and devote themselves to cooking, doing laundry, washing dishes and child-care, among other duties. A study conducted in September 2011² on domestic workers and HIV/AIDS/STI in the urban centre of Sikasso highlighted the following demographics: 86% of domestic workers were between 15 and 19 years, 10% were between 20 and 24 years and 4% were between 25 and 29 years. Most get up early in the mornings and work very long hours. Many experience physical, verbal and sexual abuse, and violence. They often do not receive a national minimum wage, known as SMIG (Salaire Minimum Inter-professionnel Garanti) and struggle to access sexual and reproductive health services which exposes them to rape, unwanted pregnancies, etc.

Commercial sex workers are most often young girls from very poor families and/or daughters of divorced women. The business of sex work, or prostitution, is known in all areas and is especially rife in cities, mining sites, holiday resorts/hotels and border areas. Social attitudes towards sex work have shifted considerably over the years. Today, sex work is increasingly accepted by society as a means to circumvent the economic difficulties of families. In some instances,

¹ Perspectives of the resident population of Mali, 2010-2035/ DNP

² The Sikasso branch of the executive secretariat of the National High Council to fight AIDS (SER/HCNLS); the Centre for training and support for local development (DELTA C) and the department of public health of the Medical School of Bamako.

parents accept the situation without seeking other alternatives. This was articulated by a 16-year-old girl who took part in a target group discussion organised by Voice during the context analysis:

We must meet our needs and help our parents. We must eat and provide for our own clothes. What should we do? My parents are aware of what I am doing and they don't discourage me. Nobody opposes it. Because it is thanks to my business that I am able to solve the problems of my family ... the main thing is to NOT steal or beg.

Sex workers are however excluded from participating in political and civic life by the very nature of their activity.

The vast majority of informal street vendors are women. Many travel to the capital, Bamako, from the rural areas seeking a livelihood. They, too, work long hours making little money due to low profit margins from selling perishable items such as fruit and vegetables.

Age-discriminated vulnerable groups

While 48% of Mali's population may be under 15 years of age, young people are marginalised and excluded from accessing land, equipment and resources, and from citizen participation and decision-making processes. They also have limited access to information about sexual and reproductive health rights, which remain taboo subjects within the family. Young people are absent from all levels of government; they are expected to enforce or implement decisions made by other political entities. Politically, young people hardly have a voice, thereby reducing their participation in civic life. Over 74% of Malians live in the rural areas where education and employment opportunities are limited. Many young people migrate to the cities, mining sites or to other countries in the hope of a better future. Those in formal employment tend to have the lower paid jobs.

Despite the fact that, in Malian culture, the elderly are respected and traditionally supported by the extended family, there is an emergence of nuclear families with elderly people being left out. Old people often lack financial support both from the government and from their families. The cost of health care also puts them at a disadvantage. Inactivity and low or no income increases their economic vulnerability. Given the issues with health and mobility, they are often unable to support themselves from their personal income/pension. Despite efforts by the Malian authorities to provide the elderly with priority passes in public places, they struggle to access health and social services.

Within the political spectrum, sex discrimination is rife. Older men dominate the political scene and women are almost absent from proceedings and decision-making bodies. Older women are required to manage daily family life and the social activities of their households.

Role of civil society and government

In Mali, civil society has an important role to play in sensitising and raising awareness of the situation of people living with disabilities, domestic workers, street vendors, sex workers, the young and the elderly. Civil society organisations are an important voice and provide valuable direct support services such as training and funding for income-generating activities. They also influence the social dialogue between the target groups and the state. They have a moderate status in the monitoring of policies and give meaning to the actions of the target groups.

The state guarantees the framework for training and creation of jobs for young people. It is a powerful ally for Voice but it lacks support for the informal sector due to weak taxation. The state has a medium-level influence because of the legalistic choices in the economic governance of the country relating to the informal sector. Despite its low commitment to making improvements in the informal sector, the state remains an indispensable and essential player for Voice and a key player in the change process.

