ENGENDERING THE NEXUS:

MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN THE TRIPLE NEXUS, A CASE STUDY FROM MALI

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The feminist paradigm understands that true peace is an environment where a dignified life, free of violence, is possible. This is more than just the absence of armed conflict. This definition, consistent with the positive peace definition (Galtung, 1969:183), makes it possible to address structural violence as well as social and gender justice. It is in line with frameworks such as *the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW)(1979); the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BDPfA) (1995) and the *Istanbul Convention* (2011), all of which emphasize key elements such as the participation of women and girls in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts; respect for women's human rights; and the eradication of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in both the public and private spheres.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, composed of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, has established a set of norms and frameworks that reinforce the premise,

assumed by the organization Women in Conflict Zones (MZC), that security and peace are impossible without equality and human rights. The WPS Agenda is committed to the *concerted and integrated approach*[1] of mandatory compliance with these norms and frameworks, regardless of the context.

These frameworks were taken into account with the design of the 'Early Warning System on Violence against Women and Girls in Conflict Contexts' (SAT-VG). The intention is to apply SAT-VG in both open conflicts (such as Mali or Colombia) and in situations where serious human rights violations occur, such as sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This chapter focuses on the case of Mali.

In 2018 Mali was classified by the United Nations as a country with low human development. For many years this country has struggled with a chronic crisis which has many origins and causes. Chronic poverty was aggravated in 2012 by armed conflict, which continued throughout the decade and was identified in 2019 as one of the 11 world's most serious conflicts.[2] Mali is dealing with a complex conflict, with numerous actors and armed factions including government, rebel, jihadists and international forces.[3]

The 2015 Algiers peace agreement, unfortunately, did not include all the armed groups in the negotiations. Perhaps because of this, it failed to end the conflict, which has remained particularly active in the northern part of the country where the Malian government does not have a strong structure. The presence of foreign armies, such as the French army (MINUSMA mission), has been a major factor in the conflict, generating distrust among the population.[4] They are seen as a source of violence and insecurity and have been the subject of rape complaints.[5]

During 2019 and 2020, violence has increased in Mali. There have been serious inter-ethnic clashes throughout the country, which are being instrumentalized by military groups, such as the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara, for their own benefits. Ethnic attacks have been reported, particularly in central Mali, in the hard-hit regions of Mopti and Segou.

Violence and instability have had a high impact on the lives and security of women and girls, especially in the three northern regions. Armed actors use various forms of sexual violence, particularly against minors. Rape and collective marriages and other forms of sexual slavery are carried out in a context of impunity. At the same time increasing poverty has reduced women's livelihood opportunities, forcing them to beg or prostitute themselves as a family survival strategy. This situation fuels trafficking mafias, particularly in cities such as Bamako.

Given these factors, the implementation of SAT-VG must therefore be understood from a three-fold perspective:

1. Displaced populations: The displaced population trapped in Gao are from different regions and belong to various ethnic groups and nomadic peoples. They took refuge in Gao thinking it was a "safe" place protected by the army. After its capture by Ansar Din, an Islamist group suspected of having ties to Al-Qaeda, a new mass departure took place. However, a substantial number of people remained in Gao for a lack of other options. Due to their poverty and lack of resources, these people are perceived as "outsiders" and "enemies," which has become a new focus of conflict and tension.

2. Endemic poverty and chronic food insecurity: In addition to the vulnerability imposed by the armed conflict Mali's people have lived many years with constant food insecurity and poverty. A persistent and severe drought causes annual population movements in search of wetter areas where survival is possible. This places the population, especially women from discriminated ethnic groups, in a position of vulnerability and risk.

3. High rates of violence, particularly against females: Extensive violence resulting from all armed conflicts affects men and women differently. The generalization of inter-communal violence and violence against women and girls, especially sexual violence, turns the bodies of women and girls into battlefields. While this is often the case in times of war, it is even more so in Mali. Even before the conflict, women and girls lived inside a system of patrimony and male domination.

2. MUJERES EN ZONA DE CONFLICTO (MZC)'S ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

MZC began its work in 1994 with the development of humanitarian projects during the armed conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In subsequent years the organization has expanded its activities to countries as diverse as Morocco, Palestine and the Spanish state itself. Like many agencies, Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto develops its work with the traditional instruments of development cooperation: 1) humanitarian action deployed in humanitarian contexts; 2) development projects and 3) and education for development for the transformation of societies in the North. But what distinguishes MZC's approach is that these areas are not fragmented; instead, they are closely linked.

MZC's organizational approach is to mainstream women's rights and to resist any manifestation of violence against women and girls as part of its work in peacebuilding. These priorities are included in each and every intervention and process created and promoted by MZC. In some cases, these dimensions are integrated as essential crosscutting elements; in others, they are the main objective of the project or program. In all cases this approach is seen as a strategy for peace, equality, respect and the safeguarding of human rights, gender justice and the strengthening of the rule of law.

Thus, the implementation and dissemination of the WPS agenda is a central strategy for MZC, together with the strengthening of resilience and the promotion of human security, especially in its economic, food, security and health dimensions, with a focus on rights and gender justice.[6]

It is a comprehensive and crosscutting approach consistent with that of the "Triple Nexus," which focuses on the need to coordinate humanitarian, development and peace in conflict and fragile situations. MZC addresses the needs arising from a humanitarian situation with a long-term approach to reduce the vulnerability and risks faced by people. These include the immediate needs of poverty and insecurity, on the one hand, while paying careful attention to the causes of vulnerability and the promotion of peace building and social justice on the other.

In the area of peace building, MZC seeks to contribute to the participation of women as key actors in the prevention and management of the conflict. It includes support for the organized women's movement in areas of armed conflict, actions to promote peace building, and economic empowerment. The focus is on addressing existing gender inequalities and the protection of women and girls from threats to their security at all levels (physical, social, political) during all phases (pre-conflict, conflict, post-conflict).

Equally important is MZC's work for the prevention, attention, rehabilitation and denunciation of any form of violence against women and girls, especially their trafficking.

3. THE 'EARLY WARNING SYSTEM ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS' (SAT-VG)

The SAT-VG is based on two fundamental findings: 1) The realization that violence against women and girls in any of its forms is a threat to human security, and 2) MZC's experiences in countries of armed conflict, such as Colombia or Mali, has shown that this violence does not appear out of nowhere when a conflict is declared, but is embedded in society. Recognizing these critical factors, it is possible to identify signs and anticipate possible violence and thus activate prevention and protection mechanisms.

The SAT-VG is conceived as an instrument to identify different levels of human rights violations; to analyze threats and vulnerabilities; to establish resources and possibilities for action; and to promote warning mechanisms/ guidelines in conflict situations. All of these initiatives are defined broadly according to feminist principles and approaches. The SAT-VG takes the form of a computer tool that analyzes data provided by key informants, or nodes, in the different territories. In doing so it is able to detect "warning" signs in situations prone to the appearance/recurrence of conflict and violence and sending "alerts" to key agents.

Other expected results are the development of vulnerability and risk maps as well as proposals for action and to enhance resilience capacities in ways appropriate to a given situation. The program also aims to obtain reliable information that will contribute to the denouncing and combating cultures of impunity.

The SAT-VG instrument identifies the different rights violations and threats suffered by women and girls. Equally important is to examine their vulnerabilities and resilience capacities as well available resources and possibilities for action. These are accomplished through the use of a battery of indicators built on inputs from local specialists and informants from Bosnia, Colombia, Palestine, Mali and Spain.

The indicators include the following three dimensions:

1. Systemic: general structural conditions (political, economic, institutional and socio-cultural);

2. Medium-term conditions and emerging socio-political and economic trends such as internally displaced persons and refugees, rates of violence, law enforcement abuses, etc.; and

3. Intervening factors, or accelerators, that may increase or decrease the likelihood of armed conflict or peacebuilding in the case of an active conflict.

The SAT-VG tool has 46 indicators divided into these three levels, including both statistical data and perceptions of risk by the community and individuals. Together these indicators capture information on both acts of violence and "risk" trends in the community. Examples of relevant information could be an increase in discriminatory and aggressive messages and images against women or a decrease in the level of women's empowerment in the communities. The weighted data is displayed in a graph with different "alarm levels."

The process for implementing the SAT-VG has several stages. The first is the design of the instrument to ensure it suits the nature of a particular context. Once this first stage is completed the fieldwork begins. Fieldwork is accompanied by a series of training and education sessions with local teams, collaborators and counterparts, which are key to its implementation and the inclusion of local communities in the process.

The collection of accurate data is crucial. Field researchers are responsible for collecting information and data, so their training is of utmost importance. Particularly relevant are training sessions with village women's associations. These groups are often informal associations that work for equality, women and girls' rights, and the eradication of harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages, or sexual exploitation.[7] Because of their contact with women at the community level these associations are particularly valuable informants.

As noted above, SAT-VG's application can provide reliable information as the basis for making proposals for action, awareness raising and the denunciation of rights violations, thus combating the culture of impunity. Among some of the expected tools are: 1) the development of an IT tool; 2) vulnerability and risk maps; 3) the identification of violence modalities; 4) resilience capacities maps including contextualized resources to support meaningful action.

4. IMPLEMENTING THE SAT-VG IN MALI

Mujeres en Zona de Conflicto began its intervention in Mali in 2007, focusing on its SAT-VG program.

In the implementation of the SAT-GV in Mali, a fundamental issue was the early detection of all forms of violence against women and girls, and the analysis of the dynamics of the armed conflict that were affecting the level and nature of these violations.

As a result, special attention has been paid to sexual exploitation, including prostitution and the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, as Mali is both a transit country and a supplier of women. Prior to the outbreak of the conflict in 2012, Mali was a destination country, especially for women from Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics, but the country's instability has now closed this channel, or it is very marginal. However, internal sexual exploitation has increased significantly, and Mali has become a country of origin in the trafficking of women and girls. The growing presence of Malian women in Northern Morocco and Spain has been identified, a phenomenon that was almost nonexistent only five years ago.[8]

As a first step, it was decided that the project would be implemented in the district of Bamako and the region of Gao. Timbuktu, where MZC has been present since 2007, was also considered, but this was not possible due to the destruction, by jihadist groups, of the office and all the organization's infrastructure. Therefore, MZC decided to work instead in Sikasso, the second largest city in the country. Among the reasons for this choice was the fact that sexual exploitation and forced child marriage had been detected. Throughout 2016 and 2017, a study was conducted to contextualize and document the modalities and impacts of violence against women and girls.

As the first step in the implementation of the SAT-VG, a group of key informants and field researchers were selected from among women's and girls' rights and human rights activists with whom MZC had already been collaborating.[9] These included 1) Members of the TEMEDT Anti-Slavery Association in Gao; 2) The Coordinating Committee of Women's Associations (CAFO) in Bamako, and 3) Three women's associations in Sikasso (Koutiala): Woiyo Kondeye, Koule Djakan and Timinandja.

Training workshops were developed and held with the women and men of these associations. Unfortunately, these sessions were interrupted by an overall intensification of instability and tension throughout the country in 2018 and 2019. This reality seriously affected the proper development of activities. The eruption of COVID-19 has only worsened the situation affecting the program.

Once the first evidence was obtained it was possible to return to the communities with data and stories based on the local reality. Through workshops and theater, it was possible to facilitate awareness in the community of the scourge and violence faced by women and girls.[10] For example, in one of the workshops held in the commune of Songo, a male participant commented with astonishment "but then women feel!" This is one indication of the degree of dehumanization, and consequently of extreme violation, suffered by women and girls in the region.

The project obtained both qualitative and quantitative findings. In the city of Gao 326 victims were identified with 15% reporting having been raped and 21% 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, relating to threats and vulnerabilities included:

- Socio-economic factors (e.g. remoteness from water springs) and work obligations (firewood collection) exposed women, girls and boys, to rape and other sexual assaults;

- Ignorance of gender-based violence due to the silence of victims for fear of being blamed and stigmatised by their families; and

- Socio-cultural causes, particularly for the Belá ethnic group, who were enslaved until recently and are still discriminated against, which have caused unequal relations between men and women. This context has legitimised and maintained an overall culture of impunity.

5. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS, GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS

Peace, development and security are key elements of the feminist agenda. 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. Priority was given to addressing the exercise of women's human rights, both during a conflict and in the pre- and post-conflict periods, especially the right to live a life free of violence.

For MZC, *Human Security* means the enjoyment of development, the absence of violence, fear and/or threats (i.e. positive peace), and the full enjoyment of human rights. MZC is fully committed to these values through a *concerted* and *crosscutting* approach. Consistent with the Triple Nexus, its implementation of these values combines a solid coordination between organisational areas to overcome the inter-sectoral silos with long-term programming in its areas of action. Central to this approach is the promotion of strategic alliances, where

community participation and ownership are key. MZC takes the Triple Nexus one step further and makes a significant contribution by mainstreaming gender into these processes.

MZC has designed an instrument that facilitates an integrated approach to humanitarian need, resilience and peacebuilding. Its SAT-VG has contributed the following:

- Programs for the prevention and transformation of socio-community beliefs and behaviours (through theatres, debates and raising-awareness campaigns);

- Capacity building programs for the prevention, mediation and capacity building to address violence against women and girls and sexual exploitation;

- Capacity building on human rights and the causes and impacts of violence against women;

- Holistic care for victims of violence against women and girls (support and assistance centres);

- Reduction of women's socio-economic vulnerability (projects directed to women`s livelihoods and economic empowerment, supporting women`s cooperatives); and

- Promoting women's presence in the political sphere (decision-making).

The SAT-GV is characterised by the use of simple technology and low-cost, user-friendly equipment. It prioritizes input from community members as key informants. The active participation of people from the communities where MZC operates is a fundamental requirement for its implementation.

The SAT-VG facilitates the unravelling of the complexity of violence inside armed conflicts, and its implications for violence against women and girls. It identifies how this violence directly links to a conflict and is perpetrated by various armed actors overlaps and is based on the inequality suffered by women and girls. Thus, although arranged marriages, the exchange of girls and wedding *trousseau*, or the sexual exploitation of women and girls, often already exists with greater or lesser intensity prior to the conflict, these modalities take on new forms and are intensified by the socio-economic insecurity that forces the adoption of survival and/or "protection" strategies by women.[11]

Evidence supports this direct link between armed conflict and gender inequality: 83% of armed conflicts for which data on gender equality was available in 2019 took place in gender-discriminatory contexts.[12] Combating gender inequality against women and girls, therefore, becomes a central element of the *Triple Nexus* approach. But increased budgets and resources are urgently needed make the difference.

According to the OECD,[13] 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 emergence ofCOVID-19. In terms of the ODA provided for example by the European Union to fragile states:[14]

- Only 19% of the aid focused on gender equality;

- Only 20% of aid allocated to peace and security had a gender equality dimension; and

- Only 38% of DAC members included a gender equality objective for aid allocated to the fragile states governance sector.

Along the same lines, 89 countries, including Spain and Mali, currently have the already mentioned priorities concentrated in a Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (NAP).[15] With only 33% of NAPs have a budget (Peacewomen), they often lack the resources to operational these Plans.[16]

Preventive actions are scarcely being addressed. Donors primarily embrace a militarised vision of security and conflict resolution, one that is out of keeping with the realities of today's civil wars. These views need to be challenged and replaced by a new vision. It is one that has been proposed by UN Women whereby the 'protection of civilians' during conflicts and "*women, peace and security is about preventing war, not about making war safer for women*."[17]

ENDNOTES

1. General Recommendation No. 30, CEDAW Committee.

2. ESCOLA DE CULTURA DE PAU - ECP (2020): "*Alerta 2020! Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz*". ECP-Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona Barcelona: Icaria.

3. Government, CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA), Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction), MSA, Ansar Dine, MUYAO, AQIM, MRRA, al-Mourabitoun, Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP), Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, France (operation Barkhane), G5 Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso).

4. United Nations stabilization forces in Mali.

5. EuropaPress 2013.

6. n his report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005), Kofi Annan outlines three main thematic principles: "freedom from fear", "freedom from want" and "freedom to live in dignity".

7. 100% of the women MZC works with in Sikasso and Bamako, belonging to ethnic groups such as Minianka, Senufo, Bámbara Peul, Sorai, and Bozo, have been cut. This is not the case for women in Gao.

8. MZC's work on trafficking in Morocco and Spain included the collaboration with a women's association, as a key informant. Their work with women in prostitution is extremely helpful in tracing and assisting victims.

9. It should be noted that during the implementation phase, the risks assumed by the informants were taken into account including the development and activation of a specific security protocol to reinforce their safety.

10. The methodology of social theater or "Theater of the Oppressed" developed by Augusto Boal, was used by MZC as a tool for building global citizenship for the transformation and eradication of VAWG.

11. The belief that marriages protect girls from violence is widespread.

12. ESCOLA DE CULTURA DE PAU - ECP (2020): "*Alerta 2020! Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz*". ECP-Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona Barcelona: Icaria.

13. OECD- DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET) (2020): "*Aid Focussed on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A snapshot of current funding and trends over time in support of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*". Paris: OECD Development Co-operation Directorate.

14. OECD (2019): "Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment". OECD-DAC Secretariat. Paris: OECD.

15. National Action Plans (NAPs) are the main tool for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. It reflects the national Roadmap for implementing WPS commitments during a concrete period.

16. Neither Spain nor Mali have allocated resources to implement the WPS NAP.

17. UNWomen (2015): "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325". USA: UNWomen.

Yemeni children play in the rubble of buildings destroyed in an air raid. In 2019, an estimated 24 million people—80% of the population—are in need of humanitarian assistance or protection.

SOURCE: European Union