



EMPOWERING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN MALI THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT



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1. SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION



Six years after a rebellion in northern Mali provided a text-book example of how sexual violence is used against women in modern conflict, sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) has again reached alarming levels in the West African nation. According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), service providers in Mali treated 2,882 cases of GBV in 2017 – higher even than in 2012, the year of rebellion.ⁱ

This report examines the reasons for the increase and the response of Malian civil society through the experience of one Malian nongovernmental organization (NGO), *Sini Sanuman* (“Healthy Tomorrow”). From this one example, the report seeks to show how women’s civil society can offer a front-line defense against GBV during conflict and in underserved areas where the state cannot ensure the protection of women.

Between 2014 and 2017 *Sini Sanuman* provided emergency support and training for 645 GBV survivors at four centers situated in the northern towns of Bourem and Gao and on both sides of the river Niger in Bamako. Another 2,212 Malians benefited directly from the program, including village women, students from poor families, and women’s cooperatives.

In addition, over 40,000 women attended outreach sessions in urban neighborhoods, where they learned from *Sini Sanuman* animators about the risks from GBV. If one includes indirect beneficiaries such as family members, this one program has reached over 55,000 Malian women and children. Moreover, it has been designed and run by Malians.

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Perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from *Sini Sanuman*'s work on GBV is that a successful response will have to involve the survivor's entire community. This is in line with a 2014 recommendation by Zainab Bangura, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, when she urged governments to "build the capacity of civil society groups including women's organizations and networks to enhance community level protection mechanisms against conflict-related sexual violence on conflict and post-conflict situations."ⁱⁱ

Pramila Patten from Mauritius, the current Special Representative, echoed this in her 2018 report when she called for a "sustainable, survivor-centered response that empowers civil society and women's rights defenders."ⁱⁱⁱ

Sini Sanuman has shown how local NGOs can turn these important recommendations into practice by working in parallel with survivors of GBV and with women's civil society. *Sini Sanuman*'s four centers offer a place where survivors can regain their confidence in the company of other women. At the same time, *Sini Sanuman* works through 245 women's groups, chiefs, local politicians and religious leaders to provide practical and emotional support for GBV survivors in poor neighborhoods. This underscores the enormous value of the community-based approach: such work could simply not be done by internationals.

Community support also allows women to reduce their exposure to sexual violence. *Sini Sanuman* prefers to talk of "risk reduction" rather than "prevention" because GBV can only be prevented by ending the conflict and improving security, which is the role of government. But NGOs like *Sini Sanuman* can certainly help women to reduce their personal exposure to GBV through education and information. This is an important part of the model.

It is also the case that *Sini Sanuman* can do little on its own to address the deep structural discrimination against women that – as UN reports have shown - contributes to GBV in Mali. Malian women are under-represented at all levels of life and it will take a national effort to change this. But *Sini Sanuman* could contribute by mobilizing women in urban areas. The organization made an important start in 2017 by collecting signatures at outreach sessions (*animations*) in support of a new law to outlaw gender-based violence.

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The report offers some broad recommendations for international agencies and governments. In particular, it finds that funding for the protection of women and for GBV programs in Mali fell to a dangerous level in 2017 and should be increased.

The report also recommends that UN agencies and western governments adopt a more proactive approach to community-based initiatives like *Sini Sanuman*. They should seek out

innovative Malian programs, encourage complementary partnerships, and make it a priority to strengthen the technical and administrative capacity of Malian NGOs.

Ms Patten, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) have a particularly important role to play in supporting and encouraging Malian initiatives. But other specialized agencies and bodies could also lend their expertise, including the UN's World Food Program, the International Organization of Migration, the International Criminal Court, and the UN Human Rights Council.

Finally, all aid workers who work with women in Mali should meet with survivors and hear their stories of abuse and resistance. Many already do, and they would surely agree that such meetings are uplifting for survivors and visitors alike. The women who provided information for this report are a reminder that the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence can be inspiring as well as deeply distressing.

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This report has been written by Iain Guest, director of The Advocacy Project (AP), a nonprofit organization based in Washington that has provided technical support for *Sini Sanuman* since 2013. AP has sent three graduate students to volunteer as Peace Fellows at *Sini Sanuman* and made many on-site visits to the underserved neighborhoods of Bamako where *Sini Sanuman* works. The data for this report is drawn from *Sini Sanuman's* reports to donors, AP's evaluations for the donors, and interviews with survivors in Gao and Bamako in 2017.

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2. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Conflict in Mali and Gender-based Violence

The incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) in Mali rose sharply in 2017. This was largely due to conflict and insecurity in the north:

- Responders handled 2,882 cases of GBV in 2017 - a 33% increase over 2016. 1,643 cases involved sexual violence, including rape (197 cases).
- The UN Population Fund reported that most cases were linked to the conflict.^{iv} But a larger threat to women in north and central Mali comes from the absence of security and the rule of law which allows criminals, extremists and traffickers to operate with relative impunity. It is also difficult to determine how many attacks were ideological (and hence conflict-related) because most perpetrators could not be identified. The impact of the conflict continues to be felt far from the north in Bamako, by women who have been displaced and have not returned home.
- Extremist groups stepped up attacks against the security forces in 2017 and took their fight to central Mali. This posed an obvious threat to women. There was no evidence that sexual violence was used as a deliberate tactic of terror against women, as in 2012. But several incidents in 2017 showed that radical groups are ready to use violence against women during hit and run attacks and this can cause widespread panic.

The Humanitarian Crisis

The protection of women is made more difficult and urgent by a humanitarian crisis.

- Shrinking government services: The UN estimates that only 22% of government officials are at their posts in the north and center. This has drastically affected essential services.
- Food insecurity: 5.1 million Malians (out of 18.9 million) suffer from food insecurity. Malnutrition has risen above 10% in conflict areas like Gao.
- Forced migration poses a threat to women in Mali and increases the likelihood that they will suffer sexual violence. 30,000 Malians were displaced by the conflict in 2017 and many were women. Those that have remained in the north are vulnerable to violence, while many of those who fled south to Bamako lack family support and are vulnerable to food insecurity. The IOM's estimates on the number of IDPs in Bamako appear to be unrealistically low and should be reviewed urgently.
- Legal redress: GBV survivors find it hard to claim justice because the Malian legal system is under assault from extremists in the north and weakened by corruption and bureaucracy in the south. There is also concern that former Tuareg rebels who committed sexual violence in 2012 might receive an amnesty to speed up the peace process.
- Money: Humanitarian funding for Mali fell below targets in 2017, even as the crisis worsened. Protection (including services for GBV survivors) received less than 10% of the amount sought by the UN.
- International aid workers face an increased threat from violence and kidnapping in northern and central Mali. Most have responded by delegating to local Malian partners, who are managing the humanitarian response with courage and professionalism.

The Needs of GBV Survivors

A profile of the 210 survivors assisted by *Sini Sanuman* in 2017 shows that communities must be central to any solution but can also contribute to violence against women:

- Definitions: *Sini Sanuman* follows the UN in defining GBV broadly in recognition of the fact that many survivors are subjected to several types of assault and will require a combination of services.
- *Sini Sanuman* treated 126 cases of rape in 2017. Several survivors were impregnated by their attackers, causing intense anguish to the women and their families. Some survivors were so traumatized and fearful that they waited for years before seeking help.
- Forty-two survivors were forced into marriage or married under the legal age of 16. While some were coerced by extremists in the north during the 2012 occupation, others were forced into marriage by their parents in Bamako. Such cases often require an intervention by community leaders.
- *Sini Sanuman* took in 33 survivors of physical aggression in 2017. Some cases dated back to the occupation in 2012, when extremists used flogging as a tactic of terror against the entire community. But other assaults were the result of violence by family members and husbands.

- Psychological Distress: Some survivors at *Sini Sanuman* were not targeted directly by rebels in 2012 but remain deeply troubled by what they witnessed and have continued to need help. As with rape, this has affected entire families.
- Poverty: Many GBV survivors are living in extreme poverty. Those without family support are particularly vulnerable. But even these women work hard and will repay any investment.
- The Goal: Responders like *Sini Sanuman* should help survivors to regain their confidence and rejoin their communities, rather than speed their “recovery.” Recovery is deeply subjective and may – for some GBV victims – never be achieved.

The Community-Based Approach

Sini Sanuman offers survivors many varied opportunities to benefit from a supportive community where they can regain their confidence:

- Outreach: Working through 245 local women’s groups, *Sini Sanuman* organizes outreach sessions (*animations*) which strengthen women’s civil society in poor neighborhoods and provide a safety net for GBV survivors.
- Centers: *Sini Sanuman* runs four centers where survivors can draw comfort from the company of other women. However, the two Bamako centers have not received funding for 2018, even though they fill a critical gap in services.
- Emergency support: Survivors enroll for six months at a *Sini Sanuman* center where they receive trauma counseling; a nutritious meal; medical referral if needed; and access to legal advice.
- Embroidery as therapy: *Sini Sanuman* trains survivors to express themselves through embroidery, which is therapeutic and allows them to reach a large audience.
- Income generation during training: *Sini Sanuman* trains survivors to make soap and clothes. This instills teamwork and enabled the trainees to earn over \$10,000 in 2017. The trainees also gained in confidence from selling their own products.
- Community benefits: *Sini Sanuman*’s community-based approach has generated significant benefits for other vulnerable groups, including students from poor families (who receive school uniforms) and village women (who produce shea butter oil for *Sini Sanuman*’s soap trainings).
- Economic reintegration: Faced by the challenge of finding work for survivors once training ends, *Sini Sanuman* has invested in women’s cooperatives which agree to employ former trainees. Tailoring may offer the best hope of a sustained income.
- Managed by Malians: Like many community-based organizations *Sini Sanuman* is rich in human capital (staff) and in social capital (community connections). After managing over 600,000 Euros of German funding between 2014 and 2017, *Sini Sanuman* also possesses most of the technical and administrative skills required by donors. In spite of this *Sini Sanuman* still struggles to build partnerships with other Malian NGS and lacks the confidence to approach international donors. The organization could also benefit from technical support, particularly when it comes to using IT.

- Beneficiaries: Between 2014 and 2017, *Sini Sanuman*'s program benefited over 55,000 underserved Malians.

International Support

The international community is the best hope for protecting women in Mali. This carries opportunities and responsibilities:

- International NGOs (INGOs) serve as an important bridge between international agencies and Malian NGOs like *Sini Sanuman* that work on GBV. These partnerships are immensely valuable. Where possible Malian partners should take the lead.
- The UN Security Council has led efforts to place conflict-related sexual violence on the international agenda. This has led to important procedures under the umbrella of peace-keeping, although these could be made more accessible to Malian community-based organizations.
- The UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has called for a community-based response to GBV and is uniquely placed to advocate for local initiatives like *Sini Sanuman* which act on her recommendations. Her reports and website should promote local success stories, clarify questions (eg about data and the nature of the conflict) and report on the work being done on GBV by other agencies in Mali, in addition to MINUSMA.
- Specialized UN agencies: UNICEF, UN Women and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), provide encouragement and funding for Malian NGOs that work on GBV. UNFPA is particularly well placed because it coordinates the GBV "sub cluster" of NGOs, which offers a vehicle for launching innovative approaches and building local partnerships among Malian NGOs.
- Other international organizations and mandates work should take advantage of their special expertise to support the campaign against GBV. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) should survey IDP women in Bamako. The International Criminal Court should initiate more prosecutions in Mali and work with Malian NGOs to secure reparations for survivors. Mr Suliman Baldo, the Independent Expert of the UN Human Rights Council, should use his annual report to analyze GBV trends, promote community-based approaches, and draw on the data of local providers like *Sini Sanuman* (which has kept records).
- Donor governments: Western governments that have traditionally funded GBV have not made the protection of women a priority in Mali, although they do support GBV programs indirectly through INGOs and UN agencies. These donors should increase funding for GBV, prioritize community-based initiatives, coordinate their funding for GBV and make it a priority to strengthen the capacity of Malian NGOs.
- Listening to survivors: All international actors that work with women in Mali should meet with survivors and hear their stories of abuse and resistance. This would be uplifting for survivors and visitors alike.

3. THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

Growing insecurity has weakened government services in the north and center of Mali, and exposed women to GBV.



The war against women in Mali began in January 2012, when Tuareg rebels attacked Malian troops near the northern town of Kidal. Frustrated by the government's weak response, Malian soldiers mounted a coup in Bamako and seized power. This further weakened the Army and strengthened the hand of the rebels who captured the major towns and declared an independent state (Azawad) on April 6. The rebels were joined by three radical groups with a single-minded ideology – Ansar Dine, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and an offshoot of AQIM known as the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

The alliance between the Tuareg rebels and their radical allies was short-lived. In June, the rebels were decisively defeated in Gao and fled, leaving the north to the radical groups. However, both rebels and extremists are still blamed for their savage behavior towards women during the year-long occupation of the north. Hundreds of women were flogged, raped, and forced into marriage, while thousands fled to the south destitute and – in many cases – widowed. By July of 2013, 342,033 Malians had been displaced by the conflict and another 175,282 had fled to neighboring countries.^v

The assault on women during the rebellion showed how sexual violence can be used as a tactic of war and terror. Zainab Bangura, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, described a “pattern of women and girls being abducted and raped, including gang-raped, by rebels” in her 2013 report.^{vi} Mme Bangura cited the practice of “requisitioning” women, under

which areas under occupation were required to supply women to fighters – something that could only have been condoned by commanders. She estimated that one in every five girls in the town of Ménaka was raped while the town was under the control of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the main rebel Tuareg group.

The tactical use of sexual violence during the 2012 rebellion was further underscored on April 4, 2018 when Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud went on trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Mr Aziz, a former Islamic police chief in Timbuktu during the rebellion, is accused of “participating in a policy of forced marriages which victimized the female inhabitants of Timbuktu and led to repeated rapes and the sexual enslavement of women and girls.”^{vii}

The occupation ended in January 2013 after French troops were deployed to Mali, and in the years since the international community has made a major investment in rebuilding the country. After the French intervention, talks between the former Tuareg rebels and Malian government gathered pace and on June 16, 2013 the two sides signed an agreement in Ouagadougou to restore constitutional rule in Mali. This evolved into a full-blown peace process between the Malian government and two opposing Tuareg factions. The three parties to the process agreed on a detailed plan (The Bamako Agreement) in June 2015.

Also in 2013 the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Elections also took place and resulted in the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, who will stand for re-election on July 29. French troops have remained in Mali, as part of the *Barkhane* regional force.

In spite of this international investment, security deteriorated sharply in 2017. The main reason was the re-emergence of radical terrorism in a new and more cohesive form. On March 2, four radical groups united to form a single organization, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (also known as JNIM). On June 18, fighters attacked a resort near Bamako, killing several foreigners. The radical groups stepped up their attacks and in 2017 the UN and Malian armed forces suffered a combined 141 fatalities – more than double the 70 who were killed in 2016.^{viii} One senior UN official described the conflict in late 2017 as a “slow bleed.”

This renewed offensive was particularly threatening because it extended the conflict to the central regions of Mopti and Ménaka, raising fears of new ethnic tensions between the local Peul and other tribes, and threatening one of the country’s main food-producing regions.

The Bamako peace agreement also came under pressure in the summer of 2017, when fighting broke out between the two Tuareg factions. The factions returned to the negotiating table under pressure from MINUSMA and Mali’s donors, but great damage had been done and many observers asked whether the former Tuareg rebels had lost their appetite for peace. The process of disarming the former rebels also stalled and joint patrols between the three parties to the Peace Agreement were suspended in early 2017, raising the prospect of more insecurity

in contested towns like Gao. Meanwhile, radical group groups are not party to the process and continue to attract Peul recruits.^{ix}

The Malian government, meanwhile, showed signs of losing patience with the peace negotiations and seemed increasingly confident of a military solution following a successful drive to recruit new troops in 2017 and the deployment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, a regional military force formed by Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania with strong support from France. The Joint Force received 414 million Euros of funding in 2017. Its first operation took place in Mali in November 2017 and resulted in the arrest of several fighters from the coalition of groups that represent former Tuareg rebels in the peace process.

While the government's impatience with the peace process may be understandable, a purely military approach could alienate the population in the north and provoke a heavy-handed response by the Malian military, which was accused of serious human rights abuses by two international human rights organizations in 2017.^x Several UN officials said they thought the war was unwinnable in the near term and predicted that the government may have no option but to negotiate with the radical groups. This may become an issue during the forthcoming presidential elections.

A stalemate in the north and center of Mali would certainly have serious implications for the protection of civilians, particularly women. As the UN Secretary-General observed in his March 2018 report on MINUSMA, the crisis "calls into question the ability of the Government to protect the population and its armed forces in the area."^{xi}

The resurgence of radical groups in 2017 has raised fears that sexual violence could again be used as a tactic of terror as it was in 2012. The 2018 report from the UN Special Representative named Mali as one of nine countries where sexual violence is being used with the intent to "forcibly displace and disperse the targeted community, with corrosive effects on social cohesion."^{xii}

In addition, several incidents in 2017 were reminiscent of the 2012 rebellion. On July 4, 100 armed men seized the town of Dialoube and flogged a dozen women for not wearing a veil. On July 20, assailants attacked a wedding party close to Mopti town and beat 10 women.^{xiii} Most of the 16 cases of sexual violence reported by MINUSMA in 2017 occurred during attacks on public transport in the north. After a woman was gang-raped while traveling on a bus, women's groups in Gao demanded a meeting with the Malian security forces in Gao and were promised a military escort. (Several women asked for training in self-defense from one MINUSMA contingent in Gao).

While such incidents may not yet rise to the level of systematic usage, they show that even the occasional act of rape or flogging can create panic and bring back memories of the 2012 occupation. Extremists do not need to occupy a village for long to intimidate and terrorize the larger community. Ominously, the radical groups still seem motivated by the same contempt for women that they showed during the 2012 occupation.

4. THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The resurgence of extremist terror in the north, and the spread of conflict to the center of Mali, have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. At the same time, the crisis has made it harder for international aid workers to operate in the conflict areas and placed more responsibility on Malian NGOs and civil society.



Insecurity in the north has had a devastating impact on government services. By the end of 2017 only 28% of Malian government officials were at their posts – down from 38% in January. Only 69% of the employees in the justice sector were at work.^{xiv}

This exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. By December 2017, 4.1 million Malians needed emergency support, out of a total population of 18.9 million. Aid agencies were only able to reach 819,000.^{xv} 500 schools were closed in the north and center, affecting 300,000 children.

According to the UN humanitarian appeal for Mali, launched in February 2018, 27% of the Malian population – 5.1 million people – now suffer from food insecurity and 2.6% suffer from acute malnutrition. The UN appeal also noted that displaced Malians are particularly vulnerable as their food reserves have become exhausted.

Forced migration was one of the factors behind the increase in GBV cases in 2017. The number of male migrants from West Africa who passed through Mali in the hope of reaching Libya and crossing the Mediterranean rose sharply in 2017 after Niger tightened immigration procedures. But the plight of displaced women in Mali is also serious and should not be ignored.

Although the overall number of displaced Malians (IDPs) fell to a new low in 2017, 30,000 Malians were again displaced by fighting and the majority were women. Any displaced woman on the move in the north was potentially at risk, as sexual assaults against public transport increased sharply.^{xvi} Once again however, the link to actual conflict is often tenuous. *Sini Sanuman* gave shelter to one young woman in 2017 who had fled from violence in her home village to the larger town of Gao. She secured a well-paid job as a house cleaner, only to be raped by her employer's husband.

The situation is also difficult for displaced women in the south. Fifty-four of the 120 women who sought assistance from *Sini Sanuman* in Bamako in 2017 were displaced by fighting in the north and now live precariously with friends or in guesthouses in Bamako – cut off from their support system at home and with their food reserves dwindling.

The UN International Organization of Migration (IOM) reported that 3,229 IDPs remained in Bamako at the end of 2017, but this was almost certainly an underestimate.^{xvii} During a visit to the sixth commune in Bamako (one of six communes in Bamako) in October 2016, AP was told that 10,271 IDPs were living in this one commune alone. IOM should undertake a needs assessment of IDP women in Bamako as soon as possible.

The shrinkage of government in the north and center has left the provision of services in the hands of 156 NGOs and aid agencies, which provide 80% of the health services on the north. At the same time, attacks against aid workers have risen steadily, from 23 in 2014 to 133 in 2017.^{xviii} In addition, the radical groups have threatened to kidnap international aid workers, who can only travel to the north in a UN plane and rarely stay more than two or three days to avoid attracting the attention of kidnappers. As a result, most international NGOs have delegated to Malian partners.

The lack of services cannot all be blamed on the conflict. For example, the legal system remains extremely weak. In the north, radical groups have launched a campaign to intimidate judges and reimpose Islamic law. But even in areas under government control the law moves at a glacial pace. Several high-profile class action suits on behalf of GBV survivors stalled in 2018. NGOs that seek to submit a case on behalf of a survivor are charged a fee of 300,000 CFA (\$600), excluding legal costs.

There are also worries that the government could offer a legal amnesty to former Tuareg rebels in an effort to jumpstart the peace process. Several former rebel leaders have been pardoned since 2013 and in January the government proposed a new Law of National Understanding that some fear could lead to an amnesty for Tuareg rebels who are participating in the peace process.^{xix} All of this undermines confidence in the legal system and makes it less likely that survivors of GBV will seek legal redress.

Overshadowing all is a serious lack of funds. The UN was able to raise about 9% of its appeal for protection, including services for GBV survivors, in 2017.^{xx} As several UN reports have pointed out, survivors of GBV will be much less likely to seek help if they are unlikely to receive services,

or that they will be charged money. The shortage of funding and services also makes it harder for providers to provide comprehensive and integrated services, which are costly.

5. THE NEEDS OF SURVIVORS

Sini Sanuman provided services to 210 survivors of GBV and counseled another 78 survivors in 2017. The following profile is drawn from Sini Sanuman's reports to donors and interviews with survivors in Bamako and Gao in 2017. It shows that GBV has as devastating impact not just on victims, but also on their communities and families.



5.1. Numbers and Trends

Sini Sanuman follows the UN in defining GBV broadly while maintaining a focus on sexual violence resulting from the conflict in the north. The broad definition was adopted in 2015 by a “sub cluster” of NGOs and agencies that provide services to survivors under the coordination of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). The definition covers rape; sexual aggression (including excision); physical aggression; forced (including early) marriage; the denial of economic resources based on gender; and psychological violence.

Mali provides a strong argument for this broad definition because a woman who has been raped, flogged, lost her husband, forced from her home, fled to the south, and now lives in poverty in an overpriced Bamako hostel has clearly suffered from far more than rape. The definition also helps to ensure that the treatment offered will be broad and “holistic.”

Members of the UNFPA sub cluster responded to 2,882 cases of GBV in 2017. Of these 1,643 involved sexual violence, 12% of which were cases of rape. This was a 33% increase over the cases handled in 2016 and higher even than 2012, when agencies treated 2,383 survivors.^{xxi}

Even these figures were almost certainly an under-estimate because the agencies only covered 21% of the country. In addition, survivors of GBV are often reluctant to seek help because they

feel a deep sense of shame and are uncertain whether they will receive treatment. One survivor at *Sini Sanuman's* center in Gao recalled being kidnapped by six armed radical groups during the occupation in 2012, forced into marriage and impregnated. It took her four years to approach *Sini Sanuman*. The UN Special Representative has estimated that on average, between ten and twenty survivors will not seek treatment for every one that comes forward.^{xxii}

5.2 Rape

Rape is the most extreme form of GBV and rape victims have, from the start, accounted for most of the survivors who have sought support from *Sini Sanuman*. Of the 210 women who were treated at centers in 2017, 126 had been raped.

Several of the women were impregnated by their attackers and remain torn between their feelings as a mother and a victim of extreme violence. One woman who gave birth to a child after being raped multiple times by radical fighters in Gao in 2012 still views her daughter with a mixture of affection and fear. "Every time I look at her, I remember," she said. "But I love her."

Another woman was raped in Gao in early 2017 when she went alone to a friend's wedding. For weeks, she could not bring herself to tell her parents. When she eventually shared the news, they were shocked and angry. The psychologist at *Sini Sanuman's* Gao center predicted a difficult adjustment ahead for the woman and her family after her daughter was born. Months into her pregnancy she was still wearing a loose shawl and dress to disguise her pregnancy.

Sixty-eight of the 120 survivors who stayed at *Sini Sanuman's* two Bamako centers in 2017 reported having been raped. Most had been attacked in the north and fled to Bamako. But *Sini Sanuman* has also responded to several rape cases in Bamako that were not connected to the conflict and were handled outside the centers.

While the argument for supporting such cases may seem self-evident, Malian law is unhelpful, particularly when it comes to children who are born from rape. As the UN Special Representative observed in her 2015 report: "Malian law prohibits abortion and international adoption, which limits the coping mechanisms and options available to survivors. In the majority of cases, these women are socially stigmatized and abandoned by their husbands and families, leaving them in extreme poverty. Their children often face abandonment and death."^{xxiii}

5.3 Forced and Early Marriage

After rape, women and girls who were forced to marry against their will constituted the second largest group of survivors to be treated at *Sini Sanuman* centers in 2017. Of the 210 beneficiaries, forty-two had been forced into marriage before the legal age, with the largest number (15) reported from the Bourem center.

As with rape cases, it is possible to separate cases that are clearly linked to the conflict from those that are not. Forced marriage was widely imposed on women and girls during the occupation in the north and often served as a cover for rape.^{xxiv} In many cases, the rapists forced entire families to agree to the marriage or face death and even forced them to accept a dowry. *Sini Sanuman's* northern centers have dealt with many such cases. (In 2015 alone, the Bourem center took in 92 girls who had been forced into marriage.)

In the south, *Sini Sanuman* worked with 24 victims of forced and early marriage in Bamako in 2017. Most had fled from the north, but *Sini Sanuman* has also helped several young women and girls in Bamako who were forced to marry older men by their parents, unconnected with the conflict. One girl attempted suicide out of desperation. Another fled from her home and went north. But a much larger number of cases went unreported because young Malian women are generally unwilling to confront their parents for fear of being expelled from home and ostracized by the community.

Family disputes of this kind require a community solution and are often settled by local and religious leaders. *Sini Sanuman's* extensive community contacts make it ideally placed to mediate.

5.4 Physical Aggression

Sini Sanuman took in 33 survivors of physical aggression in 2017. Some of the cases dated back to the occupation in 2012, when radical groups used flogging as a tactic of terror. Women were flogged in public for not wearing a veil, for riding a motorcycle, for shopping in public, and even for "lewd" posture at public markets.

But physical aggression also covers domestic violence which may or may not be linked to the conflict. One woman at *Sini Sanuman's* center in Gao escaped violence at the hands of radical fighters during the 2012 occupation by carrying her baby brother around on her back. Her troubles began after the rebels were expelled from Gao and she married a Malian army officer, only to learn that he was already married to another woman. When she protested, her husband beat her with his army belt. The beating continued for two years until the woman finally sought refuge at a woman's group and was referred to the *Sini Sanuman* center in Gao, where she came under the care of the psychologist. Her wounds were still visible in November 2017.

Such domestic violence may or may not involve sexual violence, but it contributes to the larger problem by undermining a woman's confidence and willingness to seek treatment. A 2015 report from UNFPA notes: "It is not easy to break the silence of GBV and it becomes more difficult when the act takes place in a context of conjugal violence caused by an intimate partner. Many women succumb to this violence or suffer almost irreparable consequences because they delay in seeking treatment."^{xxv}

5.5 Psychological Violence

Many survivors who were not targeted directly by rebels in 2012 remain traumatized by what they saw and by the shock of being forced from their homes.

One woman who fled from Gao to Bamako observed her 16-year old neighbor and her husband, a soldier, being attacked. The assailants killed the soldier, and then seized and raped his wife before stoning her to death. Such memories have left deep scars. Another survivor recalled how fighters had broken into the family store in Gao and beat her husband. She brought her paralyzed husband and children to Bamako and was supporting the entire family by recycling plastic bags.

The trauma brought on by such experiences can last for years, underscoring the importance of having trained psychologists as part of the response.

5.6 Excision

Excision - also known as genital cutting – is widespread in Mali and listed by the UN as a form of GBV. *Sini Sanuman* did not treat any cases of excision in the four centers in 2017 but the organization was established in 2007 to combat excision and still plays an active role in the Malian campaign, with the encouragement of UNICEF in particular.^{xxvi}

This work on excision has enabled *Sini Sanuman* to build up a large network of community contacts that it now uses against GBV more broadly. *Sini Sanuman* is an active member of a civil society network known as PACTE which has lobbied against excision and supports a new law on GBV that will make rape a punishable crime.

5.7 Economic Hardship

Poverty is both a cause and a result of GBV and many survivors taken in by *Sini Sanuman* in 2017 were living on less than \$1 a day. Single mothers and widows were most vulnerable. One young woman left Timbuktu in early 2017 with fourteen other family members. Within months three had died, including the father. The woman arrived at *Sini Sanuman's* Bamako center severely traumatized and spent hours with the psychologist. Poverty also leads to malnutrition.

But if most GBV survivors are impoverished, they are also willing to work and invest. Many beneficiaries of *Sini Sanuman* have turned tiny amounts into a profit and shown a tenacious determination to avoid dependency on others.

One woman who enrolled at a *Sini Sanuman* center in Bamako formed a small business with six other women and was earning 1,500 CFA (\$3) a day washing clothes at the end of 2017. “She works hard and is young and courageous,” said a friend. “She will repay any loan with interest.”

5.8 A Challenge for the Community

This review suggests the outlines of a response to GBV.

In the first place, it is difficult to define “conflict-related” sexual violence. This is particularly true of northern towns like Gao where the underlying problem is a lack of security rather than conflict, and where common criminals mix with traffickers, discontented former rebels or radical groups. How many attacks on women were ideological is also hard to establish because most perpetrators were unknown.^{xxvii}

It is also the case that the impact of conflict is felt far beyond the “hot” zones of active fighting. For example, displaced women in Bamako will remain vulnerable for years. This is a strong argument for not limiting the response to situations of open conflict.

In addition, many survivors have suffered different types of violence and will require an integrated response that combines counseling for trauma, nutrition, legal aid, shelter and economic support. To be effective, the treatment will have to last for several months and be given by professionals.

A successful response must certainly focus on the community. In the first place, the community can be part of the problem, as in cases of domestic violence and forced marriage. But the community may also be a casualty because sexual violence destroys the fabric of a community and isolates the victim from her community of support. Any treatment will have to repair the victim’s ties to her family and community.

For these same reasons, a survivor’s community also offers the best hopes for a successful response, although service providers would be advised not to seek her *recovery* - a subjective state that may never be attained. Instead, responders should seek to rebuild her confidence and ease her re-entry into society. This means creating an environment where the survivor can feel at ease, and nothing is likely to be more effective than the company of other women. The best sign that progress is being made will come when the survivor speaks out about her ordeal (*declarer*) and seeks help.

6. A COMMUNITY-BASED RESPONSE

Between 2014 and 2017, Sini Sanuman developed a response to the needs of GBV survivors that combined emergency support with training to prepare the women for their re-entry to society. The focus throughout was on building a supportive community.



6.1 Outreach and Risk Reduction

Working through local women's groups, *Sini Sanuman* sends animators deep into the underserved and overcrowded neighborhoods of Bourem, Gao and Bamako to meet with vulnerable women. According to the animators, 47,952 women and girls attended animation sessions in 2017 alone.^{xxviii}

Animations allow *Sini Sanuman* to identify vulnerable GBV survivors, who are invited to enroll at one of the four centers. They also allow the animators – who are skillful communicators – to advise women on how best to reduce their exposure to GBV. At the same time, animations strengthen women's civil society, by attracting new members to the groups that organize the sessions. The number of groups that cooperate with *Sini Sanuman* grew from 110 in 2014 to 245 in 2017. Every group that organizes an animation with *Sini Sanuman* is guaranteed a strong turnout and an entertaining discussion.

These women's groups play a key role in helping GBV survivors to rejoin society. Most survivors seek out a local women's group when they feel ready to re-appear in public, and many displaced women from the north make straight for a women's group when they arrive in

Bamako. The groups may also offer a way to provide survivors with a sustained income once they leave *Sini Sanuman*'s program (below).

Finally, animations have helped *Sini Sanuman* to build a network of community contacts that include local chiefs, religious leaders (*marabouts*) and chiefs, many of whom have received training from *Sini Sanuman*. They return the favor by helping to resolve difficult cases that require a community solution, such as those involving early marriage or domestic violence.^{xxix} This network represents a major asset for agencies and donors who want to reach vulnerable women in the north and in Bamako – one of Africa's fastest-growing cities.

Looking ahead, there are many ways in which animations could produce an even greater impact. *Sini Sanuman* could collaborate with other Malian NGOs that also conduct animations (although on a smaller scale and in different areas). Indeed, there seems no reason, apart from funding, why all major towns in Mali should not be served. *Sini Sanuman* could also monitor impacts with greater precision. Finally, animations could help to mobilize marginalized women around a broader agenda for women's participation and empowerment.

6.2 Community Centers

Sini Sanuman invites survivors to enroll at one of four centers in the towns of Bourem, Gao and Bamako, where they receive six months of emergency support and skills training. In 2017, the four centers took in 210 survivors and offered counseling to another 78 survivors who dropped by for advice or were visited in their homes.

The centers are at the heart of *Sini Sanuman*'s model. Not only do they provide a physical space for trainees, but they also allow survivors to relax in the company of other women who have gone through the same experience.

All four centers are located in areas of need and receive support from their local community. The northern town of Bourem was chosen because sexual violence had been practiced on a large scale during the occupation and all projects for women had been destroyed.^{xxx} Communal leaders in Bourem have since shown their gratitude by providing staff from the center with some cover as security has worsened. Like many others who use public transport *Sini Sanuman* staff members have been robbed at gunpoint while traveling to Gao; but they have otherwise been shielded from the violence that has plagued some aid agencies. Staff are convinced that this is due to their relations with community leaders.

The first center in Bamako was situated in Commune 1 – the largest in Bamako – and served women on the left bank of the Niger river. Pressure to expand came quickly from women's groups on the right bank and the local council in Commune 6, where most of the displaced families disembark from buses from the north. A fourth center opened in Gao in July 2017 at the recommendation of UNFPA, which estimated that Gao had the largest number of undeclared GBV survivors in the north. *Sini Sanuman* handled the expansion with ease.

The centers help to offset the shortage of shelter and accommodation for GBV survivors that has resulted from the fall-off in donor funding.^{xxxix} Most beneficiaries spend the day at a center and return home at night, but the two Bamako centers also offer beds where women can stay overnight if they live far from the centers or dread the prospect of being alone. Demand for a place is so great that only three of the 210 beneficiaries were asked to leave in 2017 after missing more than three days in a row.

When the first two centers opened in 2014, UNICEF expressed some concern that they could identify GBV survivors and deepen their isolation. But this has given way to enthusiastic support as it has become clear that the centers provide a space for counseling, food, training - and a supportive community. Visitors will likely be impressed by the calm, leafy atmosphere which offers a retreat from the tension of the slums.

However important the centers may be, the model of support described in these pages should not be limited to physical structures. Psychologists and animators already go outside the centers to counsel traumatized women in the community, and in 2017 *Sini Sanuman* also began to take its training outside the centers and work directly with women's groups and small businesses. This should continue, while still respecting the vital role of the centers in providing training and emergency support.

6.3 Emergency Support

Precisely because beneficiaries have so many different needs, *Sini Sanuman* offers what might be best described as "multisectoral" support. This covers psychosocial counseling; food (in the form of at least one cooked meal a day); medical care; and legal aid.

Psychosocial counseling is offered to women who are deeply traumatized. The program's three professional psychologists have the responsibility of creating a supportive community at the centers and helping beneficiaries to adjust. Being in the company of other women, is, they say, critically important.

AP has spent many hours with the program psychologists, who have established a deep rapport with their clients. They avoid talk of "recovery," and while there is no clear way to measure improvement they are looking for tell-tale signs like nightmares, sleeplessness or compulsive weeping. As noted above, counseling can take months and may need to continue after a survivor returns home after six months. The psychologists also try to rebuild trust between the survivor and her family, which can be a long and difficult task. They know they are succeeding when a survivor comes out of her shell to describe her ordeal.

Medical support: *Sini Sanuman* has built up an extensive network of medical contacts from its work with excision and this allows the organization to treat urgent medical cases. Of the 210 women who passed through centers in 2017, one hundred and twelve required medical care - a clear indication of their poor health.^{xxxix}

Food: Each of the four emergency services reinforces the others. The feeding program is one example. In 2017 the program provided 31,800 cooked meals to the 210 beneficiaries. While some might question the cost - 16,961 Euros (\$20,240) – women cannot train on an empty stomach. In addition, as noted above, 4.1 million Malians are suffering from food insecurity and they almost certainly included the women who visited *Sini Sanuman*'s centers every day. By feeding a mother or breadwinner, *Sini Sanuman* strengthens the entire family.

Legal support: Of the four services offered by *Sini Sanuman*, legal support is the most difficult. No one disputes the importance of offering legal aid to women who have suffered sexual violence, but as noted above the legal system is weak and very few beneficiaries have been willing to subject themselves to the public exposure. In addition, *Sini Sanuman* has neither funding for legal cases nor legal expertise.

At the same time, *Sini Sanuman* is regularly confronted with cases that cannot be ignored. In one extreme example in 2014 Mariam Seck, who handles sensitive cases at *Sini Sanuman*, learned that a 2-year old girl had been raped by her uncle in Bamako. *Sini Sanuman* launched a case against the man, who was found guilty and jailed. But this provoked a furious counter-suit from the man's family, which led to Ms Seck herself being charged and appearing in court. She was acquitted, but the experience was unsettling.

Sini Sanuman has since referred legal cases to other NGOs with legal expertise, but this has not been entirely successful. One 2017 case involved a ten-year old girl who was raped by a neighbor. The girl was staying at the time with her grandmother, who was alerted to the crime when the man's wife sent the bloodied sheets to be washed. Outraged, the grandmother contacted the police and asked *Sini Sanuman* to act. Ms Seck referred the case to Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), a leading NGO which offers legal aid, but the grandmother was reluctant to work with another organization she did not know.

This shows the importance of building complementary NGO partnerships. *Sini Sanuman* should not offer legal support, but it has the confidence of women in the community and will probably remain the first point of contact for the occasional highly-charged legal complaint. In such cases, *Sini Sanuman* should continue to provide emotional support (*accompagnement*) even if the legal work is handled by others. Whether or not justice will eventually prevail is of course dependent on the legal system, which remains frail.

Expression as therapy: The UN requires that survivors of GBV are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity to avoid them being "re-victimized." This is respected by *Sini Sanuman*, but at the same time expression is a part of the healing process and can be a tool for empowerment. It is important that survivors are treated as people, not statistics, and that they be given the chance to speak out if they so desire. *Sini Sanuman* offers beneficiaries the chance to describe their experience through embroidery, which can offer a powerful form of expression (below).

6.4 Income Generation Through Training

As noted above, most GBV survivors live in extreme poverty. As a result, *Sini Sanuman* offers training in soap-making, tailoring and embroidery at the four centers. Initially in 2014, the aim was to prepare beneficiaries for a job after they leave, but this has since evolved to include income generation during training. In the process, it has become clear that training in the company of other women can build confidence and create an empowering community.

Soap

Soap was an obvious choice for training because soap is relatively easy to make and much in demand locally. But soap must also be made to a high quality if it is to compete on the open market and this calls for expert trainers. *Sini Sanuman* employs three professional trainers who are prominent in local women's civil society and deeply committed to *Sini Sanuman*. Lala Maiga, who teaches soap-making at the Gao center, also coordinates a large network of women's groups in Gao and led a delegation to demand better protection on public transport after a woman was gang-raped on a bus in September 2017. Aissata Toure in Bamako directs soap-making at a large women's cooperative in Bamako while also managing soap training at the *Sini Sanuman* centers. These trainers have a reputation in their communities and this helps to make newly arrived survivors feel at home in the centers.

Judged by production and sales, the soap training has been a success. Trainees produced 780 bars of soap in 2014 and 4,253 bars in 2015. In 2016 the process was improved by the purchase of new steel molds, a storage shed, and the introduction of a system for tracking sales. The soap was also branded under the name of *Sini Savon* to make it more appealing. These changes led to an improvement in the quality of soap and boosted production to 34,576 bars in 2017.

As the quality of soap has improved, so have earnings. Sixty per cent of the proceeds are shared between trainees, while the remainder is reinvested in the program. In 2017, the soap sold for 4,862,250 CFA (\$9,724.50), with \$5,835 being shared among the 210 beneficiaries. This was significant when combined with the money earned from other trainings.

The psychological benefits from making soap are almost as rewarding as the money because the process emphasizes collegiality and creates deep friendships. Soap training also throws up natural leaders who are selected by the trainers to form a team. Teams then depart together to a local market where they haggle for the best prices. AP has accompanied several teams to the market and never failed to be inspired by the elation shown by trainees when they sell their own product. Selling soap plays a critical part in helping the women to regain their confidence.

Tailoring

Tailoring was included in training in 2014 because a tailor's apprentice can earn a good living in Mali. As with soap, the first goal of training is to provide survivors with a supportive community and a marketable skill. For those with motivation this approach has proved to be extremely

successful. Sirantou S was inspired by the training and received a large loan (500,000 CFA - \$1,000) from her husband. She then formed a business ("*Nieta*") to train apprentices and make clothes. By November 2016 Sirantou was training 30 young apprentices (mostly school drop-outs) and bringing in almost \$4,000 a month.

Sirantou is the model beneficiary – a talented seamstress who thrived in the communal atmosphere of the Bamako center and went on to launch a successful business. She also shows that producing to a high quality, be it soap or clothing, can be both satisfying and therapeutic.

By November, almost all trainees in Bamako had produced clothing for sale. They were able to take advantage of the Tabaski festival, which offers Malian women the chance to purchase a new outfit. Overall in 2017 trainees sold 180 items of clothing and produced many more items as gifts. As well as showing that traumatized GBV survivors with no prior experience of tailoring can produce quality clothing in just six months, the training left them with a sense of achievement and the confidence that comes from a job well done.

Producing school uniforms: In 2016, *Sini Sanuman* trainees began to produce school uniforms for students from poor families. The hope was that this would provide trainees with a clear production target, while producing a social good for the community. The women produced 2,000 uniforms in 2016 and 2017.

AP visited several schools to evaluate the impact and identified three clear beneficiary groups - families, schools and students. Families were enthusiastic because they were saving the 6,000 CFA (\$12) they would spend on a new uniform. Several teachers also described the benefits to their schools. For the principal at the *Jardin d'Enfants* in Gao, *Sini Sanuman's* uniforms were a boost for morale at a time when education was under threat from extremist violence. The principal at the *EF Djanguineougou* school in Bamako said that the uniforms had improved discipline and removed differences of class and income. "If everyone wears a uniform you cannot tell the rich from the poor," he said. "I myself wore a uniform when I was at school."

The third group of beneficiaries were the students themselves, who were struggling to study in overcrowded classes. One teacher at the Sikoro School in Bamako, which received 100 uniforms in 2017, said that uniforms "gave poor students the courage to attend school and put them at ease." It also lessened the temptation for students from richer families to dress extravagantly. This teacher was convinced that uniforms has helped to lift school grades.

By the end of 2017 it was clear that the uniform project was producing benefits for survivors and for the community alike. Working on a simple line of products allowed the trainees to learn the basics of tailoring in 6 months and produce clothing that could compete with the professional product – an important first step in learning a skill that could eventually bring an income. At the same time, the uniforms were also helping to improve discipline and lift education standards at schools in Bamako and ease some of the pressure on vulnerable families and mothers. A far-sighted donor would find more than enough here to justify continuing and scaling up the experiment.

Embroidery

Embroidery is not central to Malian culture like Malian *bogolan* (mud cloth). But experience in the DRC has shown how sewing can enhance the treatment of GBV survivors by providing them with a means to express themselves, which can be therapeutic, and a marketable skill. As with other trainings, sewing in a group also contributes to the sense of community that is such an important feature of *Sini Sanuman's* centers. Visitors are impressed by the number of women who sit under the trees, working on embroidery and chatting to a friend. In 2017 trainees at the four centers produced 330 embroidered squares, wall hangings, quilts and bedspreads.

Embroidery as expression: *Sini Sanuman* launched embroidery training in 2014 by offering trainees the chance to tell their story through embroidered squares. This produced images that were so shocking that the psychologists were consulted and asked whether the activity should continue. They concluded that the squares were a legitimate expression, but the process also brought back terrible memories and several women wept as they explained the story behind their designs. AP brought the squares back to Washington, where they were assembled by an expert team of quilters in Bethesda Maryland as an act of solidarity with the Malian survivors. The quilt has been widely shown and allowed AP to promote *Sini Sanuman's* work in the US.

Embroidery for sale: Trainees have continued to tell their story through embroidery, but it is unlikely that images of rape will sell, and in 2016 *Sini Sanuman* asked trainees to switch to scenes of village life in the north. This has produced several fine wall hangings which are now offered for sale under the brand of *Sini Brodage*. The first hanging sold for \$250, suggesting that there might be a market for *Sini Brodage* outside Mali.

6.5 Re-entry Into Society

UN reports agree that re-entry (*réintégration économique*) must be part of any support for GBV survivors. The main question is whether this can best be done by an NGO like *Sini Sanuman* which has an entirely different mandate and offers emergency services. Much larger agencies have struggled to bridge the same gap and create what is sometimes called a “continuum” between the emergency and development.

Sini Sanuman's first response in 2014 was to give beneficiaries a “re-entry” grant of 10,000 CFA (\$20) when they left the centers. A spot check in 2016 found that the money had been wisely invested, but that the amounts were too small to launch a sustainable enterprise. As a result, *Sini Sanuman* tried a different approach in 2017, and decided to make a small investment in several women's groups if they agreed to hire past trainees.

Soap: The first group to benefit was *Moussou Kalanso*, a soap-making cooperative in Bamako that had organized animations for *Sini Sanuman*.^{xxxiii} As an added attraction, many of the cooperative's 32 members had been displaced from the north, thus ensuring that the investment would benefit vulnerable women in the local community. *Sini Sanuman* offered the

cooperative a subsidy of \$600 to rent new space where members could make soap during the rainy season. In return, the group agreed to recruit several former *Sini Sanuman* trainees.

This produced some unexpected results. At a meeting in June 2017, cooperative leaders said that their production of soap had increased over the previous year. Four former *Sini Sanuman* trainees had joined and had shared 768,000 CFA (\$1,536) from soap sales – far more than they had earned during training at the centers.

But the situation had changed by the end of the year. The subsidy from *Sini Sanuman* helped *Moussou Kalanso* to earn \$10,172 from soap in 2017 - more than double the \$4,380 they had earned the previous year. But individual members had taken home less money. The reason, ironically, was that they had been over-zealous in honoring their agreement with *Sini Sanuman* and given the former *Sini Sanuman* beneficiaries a third of their soap income, thus reducing the profitability of the overall business. It was agreed that in future the new trainees would be treated like other members.

Tailoring: In late 2016 *Sini Sanuman* offered to subsidize another community-based business, the *Nieta* tailoring shop in Bamako, if the owner agreed to hire former trainees. The first recruits started work in January 2017. AP returned to the shop in June to evaluate results.

As noted above, the *Nieta* shop was started in 2015 by Sirantou S, a former *Sini Sanuman* trainee who started her own business with a loan from her husband. By late 2016 Sirantou was earning almost \$4,000 a month from training 30 young apprentices and selling clothes. By investing in this successful group, *Sini Sanuman* hoped to provide a sustained income for its past trainees and also reach more marginalized women.

Sini Sanuman offered to cover half of the *Nieta* rent and purchase six new sewing machines. In return, Sirantou agreed to employ five former trainees. Once again, everyone benefited: *Nieta* increased its productivity and provided work to women in need, while the former trainees earned around 7,000 CFA (\$14) a week. *Sini Sanuman* offered the same arrangement to a tailoring shop in Bourem.

As well as bringing in an income during training, the *Nieta* experiment also shows how *Sini Sanuman*'s trainees might obtain long-term employment after their training ends on their own. Under the system of tailoring in Mali, clients buy the material for their own clothes and are then fitted at the tailor's home. In other words, the tailor does not have to purchase the ingredients or work in a group, as with soap-making. All she needs is the training and a sewing machine. UNICEF filled the gap in late 2017 by donating 200 sewing machines to *Sini Sanuman*, to be given to trainees on their departure.

Looking ahead, these experimental projects offer some important lessons about how best to make the transition from humanitarian aid to development at a community level.

NGOs like *Sini Sanuman* can act as a middleman between donors and community-based women's initiatives which can offer employment to GBV survivors. *Sini Sanuman* could also collaborate with other NGOs and INGOs that have more expertise and funding but do not offer training. For example, Oxfam GB provides grants to GBV survivors in the town of Bourem close to the *Sini Sanuman* center but does not offer training.

But *Sini Sanuman* should not itself seek to create jobs directly or finance survivors once they leave the centers. That would require new skills and more money. It would also take *Sini Sanuman* away from its essential role as a provider of emergency services at a time when GBV services are in short supply.

6.6 Managed by Malians

As noted earlier in this report, Malian NGOs play an increasingly important role in delivering humanitarian aid in the north and center of the country. This is a strong argument for placing Malian organizations at the center of any strategy to combat GBV and building their capacity. Such a strategy requires, first and foremost, an understanding of their strengths and needs.

Sini Sanuman's greatest asset lies in its human and social capital. By the end of 2017, 41 Malians worked for the program. They included animators who now have several years of experience working with women's groups and organizing trainings for community leaders. Several of the trainers are also leaders in women's civil society. The psychologists are well known in their communities – as they would have to be to win the confidence of 645 survivors during four grueling years.

This field team is backed up by a management team that has acquired the skills to satisfy Western donors while remaining close to its Malian stakeholders. The drive comes from the founder, Siaka Traore, whose training as an accountant enables him to ensure transparency and fiscal responsibility. The program coordinator in Bamako, Mariam Seck, has won the trust of women in the slums, enabling her to handle sensitive rape cases and legal disputes. Alpha Boubeye, a Tuareg who coordinates in the north, has close contacts to community leaders and has operate in a very difficult region. Finally, no asset is more important than *Sini Sanuman's* social capital – its network of community contacts, particularly among women.

AP has made several recommendations to *Sini Sanuman* about how staffing could be strengthened, for example by promoting more women. But the main takeaway from four years of partnership is that *Sini Sanuman* does not need to work under an International NGO to run a successful program and satisfy the demands of western donors. Between 2014 and 2017, the organization managed over \$600,000 of aid money from the foreign ministries of Germany and Liechtenstein and submitted reports every six weeks to donors.

This is not to say that *Sini Sanuman* has no needs. However skillful it may be at *vertical* networking with women's groups, the organization has been less successful when it comes to *horizontal* networking with other NGOs and at building complementary partnerships. There

would seem to be many opportunities for complementarity in Gao, Bamako and Bourem, where *Sini Sanuman* works.

Sini Sanuman has also struggled to maintain a website and exploit social media, which it needs to could keep its donors and friends informed. Part of this is due to a weak Internet connection and the inefficiency of Orange, the main provider in Mali. But *Sini Sanuman* also lacks an organizational strategy for using ICT to strengthen the program.

AP volunteers helped *Sini Sanuman* to build a new website in 2015. But the site has not been sustained since the end of 2017. One conclusion to be drawn is that while outside “techies” can certainly help to provide technical support, it may be more important to create *demand*. Once an NGO is convinced of the value of a web site it will find the investment and motivation to produce content and update the site – a major undertaking.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing *Sini Sanuman* has been to identify new sources of funding. Between 2014 and 2017 *Sini Sanuman* raised 601,024 Euros (\$617,567) at a time when international funding for GBV in Mali was on the decline. But the bulk came from the German Foreign Office which (by prior agreement) withdrew in December 2017. *Sini Sanuman* is currently funded by UNICEF and the Foreign Ministry of Liechtenstein. But it has not yet secured sufficient funding for the two Bamako centers which have been serving a large number of vulnerable women and girls.

Fundraising is, of course, difficult and time-consuming – and the main effort will have to come from the suppliant. But *Sini Sanuman’s* experience also raises an important question for donors. *Sini Sanuman* lacks the confidence, the contacts and the expertise to approach international donors directly. Given the critical lack of GBV services in Mali, the questions might be asked. Should the onus of finding funds rest solely with the local NGO? Should donors not also do more to seek out promising local partners?

6.7 Beneficiaries

The number of beneficiaries is a valued indicator of success. *Sini Sanuman* has, if anything, underestimated the number of Malians who have benefited from its work since 2014:

- 645 survivors of GBV: The four centers took in 540 survivors between 2014 and 2017. Psychologists counseled another 105 women who dropped by the centers or were visited at home.
- 2,212 direct beneficiaries: The program has made uniforms for 2,000 students; provided employment for 40 members of a village women’s group who produced shea oil for the soap program; supported 128 vulnerable women through cooperatives and shops like *Moussou Kalanso*; provided work to 41 Malians; and enriched the lives of 3 graduate volunteers from the US (Peace Fellows).
- 12,285 family members: By benefiting one woman, the program benefits her entire family. According to the Malian government, the average family size in 2001 was 5.3.^{xxxiv}

- 40,000 animation attendees: *Sini Sanuman*'s reports show that 142,594 women and girls attended animations between 2014 and 2017 but did not indicate how many attended multiple sessions.^{xxxv} Based on AP's experience of animations, it seems safe to assume that one third of those who attended did so for the first time. By this calculation over 40,000 women have attended one or more animations since the program began.

This breakdown produces a grand total of 55,142 beneficiaries for the four years of the program. While the figure is a rough estimate at best, it is still impressive.

The impact on individuals has, of course, been dramatic. AP has met scores of GBV survivors who arrived at a *Sini Sanuman* center feeling isolated and distraught, and left six months later with their confidence restored. They included Mariama S, who lost her parents in Kidal and arrived in Bamako so traumatized that she would break into tears when left alone. Within a year, Mariama was leading a team of soap-sellers, and out-haggling other team leaders at the local soap market. She then surprised even her friends by getting married and returning to Kidal.

7. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Given the weakness of the Malian state the international community offers the best hope for protecting women and providing support for CBOs like Sini Sanuman.



5.1 International NGOS (INGOS)

International NGOs (INGOs) play a key role in the campaign against GBV by channeling funds from donors to their Malian partners, ensuring that the donor's requirements (particularly monitoring and evaluation) are met, and offering skills training, encouragement and international contacts.

Sini Sanuman's program in Mali between 2014 and 2017 also shows how a donor can invest directly in a local community-based organization without going through an INGO. *Sini Sanuman* was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office through the agency *Zivik*, based in Berlin, and by the Foreign Ministry of Liechtenstein. The Advocacy Project was contracted by *Sini Sanuman* to provide technical support from Washington through three young professionals (Peace Fellows) who were embedded with *Sini Sanuman* in Bamako, and through short-term visits from Washington.^{xxxvi} But the program was designed and managed exclusively in Mali, by Malians.

Sini Sanuman's success in meeting its goals between 2014 and 2017 suggests that this formula was generally successful. But it has also left *Sini Sanuman* without an INGO partner in Mali at a

time when the organization is seeking to sustain and expand the program. In addition, as noted above, *Sini Sanuman* needs further skills if it is to grow stronger as an organization.

As a result, *Sini Sanuman* should consider seeking a partnership with an INGO with a long-term presence in Mali. The Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Church Aid, Oxfam, FHI 360, Mercy Corps and Handicap International (renamed Humanity and Inclusion) all work with Malian partners and possess the sort of expertise that would help *Sini Sanuman* to move to the next level of professionalism. Hopefully, any INGO partner will respect the integrity of *Sini Sanuman's* model.

5.2 The UN Security Council and the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict

The UN Security Council has taken the lead in placing sexual violence on the international agenda. Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000) called on all parties to conflict to protect women and girls against sexual violence. Resolution 1820 (2008) called for an immediate halt to acts of sexual violence against civilians in conflict zones and described sexual violence as a “tactic” of war.

The Council’s commitment to protecting women in war has led to several new UN procedures in the field, including the deployment of women protection advisers who mainstream gender into UN peace-keeping missions and report to the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.^{xxxvii} In Mali, MINUSMA publishes detailed quarterly reports under the name of the UN Secretary-General that can include information about the protection of women from MINUSMA’s perspective. The UN has also created a coordinating mechanism, UN Action, to help UN agencies that work on GBV to avoid overlap.

The most prominent advocate for GBV survivors in the UN system is the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, a position that was created in 2009 through Resolution 1888 of the Security Council. The position has been held by Margot Wallstrom of Sweden, Zainab Bangura of Sierra Leone and the current office-holder, Pramila Patten of Mauritius. As noted above, Mme Bangura and Ms Patten have used their reports to argue that communities must play a central role in supporting survivors of GBV. The latest report by Ms Patten, issued on March 23, 2018, also names five non-state groups in Mali that continue to use sexual violence. Two represent Tuareg and participate in the peace process.

The Special Representative is the advocate for survivors of GBV at the international level and plays a key role in implementing the Security Council’s agenda, but her most recent report on Mali seems narrow in light of the challenge. It notes, for example, that MINUSMA identified just 16 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2017. Presumably, these were the only cases that MINUSMA felt able to confirm, but the small number contrasts sharply with the figures offered by the UNFPA and the fact that responders treated 1,643 survivors of sexual violence in 2017. *Sini Sanuman* alone treated 126 cases of rape in 2017, almost all connected to the conflict.

This may well be explained by the mandate of the Special Representative, which is to focus exclusively on conflict-related sexual violence and by MINUSMA's methodology for data collection. But the methodology is not explained to readers unfamiliar with the UN, and past reports by the Special Representative have included data from the UNFPA and its NGO partners. This helped to provide a broader context.

The bigger problem is that the conflict in Mali is, as noted above, ill-defined and the identity of most perpetrators is unknown. This makes it difficult to define "conflict-related" sexual violence with precision. The same point could presumably be made about other conflicts reviewed by the Special Representative's latest report.^{xxxviii}

The Special Representative is in a unique position to clarify some of the confusions that may exist over the data and nature of conflict, as well as analyze trends. As such she might choose to interpret "conflict-related" violence more broadly, given the fluid and ill-defined nature of the conflict in northern Mali, and also explain the pressures on women who have fled from conflict to Bamako but remain vulnerable. Her representatives at MINUSMA could cast the net more widely in collecting data, to include information from service providers and explain the methodology. Ms Patten might also encourage other international bodies like the International Organization of Migration and the World Food Program to develop GBV programs through the lens of their own expertise. All of this could find expression on her website.^{xxxix}

Finally, and most important, the Special Representative could use her prestige and visibility to support local community-based initiatives that act on her recommendations. The importance of her mandate cannot be over-estimated.

5.3. UN Specialized Agencies and Other International Bodies

Much of the interaction between Malian providers like *Sini Sanuman* and the international community occurs by way of three UN specialized agencies - UNICEF, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women. These agencies have a mandate to work on GBV broadly, and not just on conflict-related sexual violence. They support Malian partners by channeling funds from donor governments and by setting policy. They receive significant funding from western governments.^{xl}

Sini Sanuman's closest UN partner has been UNICEF, which has supported *Sini Sanuman's* work against excision since 2007 and made several generous in-kind contributions to *Sini Sanuman's* program between 2014 and 2017. The latest donation provided sewing machines and soap material to help *Sini Sanuman's* beneficiaries after they return home. UNICEF has also agreed to support *Sini Sanuman's* two northern centers. This will hopefully evolve into a sustained investment in *Sini Sanuman's* general program.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has played a leading role within the UN system on sexual violence in since its work in the DRC, where it coordinated data collection on GBV and helped

the government to draft a new law on rape. In Mali, UNFPA coordinates the sub cluster on GBV and publishes data from the sub cluster members (currently 19) every three months.

UN Women coordinates programs for women within the UN system and views GBV as one of four priority issues. In 2017, the agency worked with eight Malian NGOs in Gao (excluding *Sini Sanuman*). Prior to 2017 UN Women undertook several important community-based initiatives in Gao that included bringing the two Tuareg parties to the peace process together.^{xli}

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) publishes a valuable regular summary on the humanitarian crisis that includes data from the GBV sub cluster. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) does not have a mandate for women or protection specifically but publishes regular data on migration. As noted above, *Sini Sanuman* feels that IOM has underestimated the number of displaced women in Bamako and should conduct a new needs assessment.^{xlii} The UN's World Food Program could support *Sini Sanuman's* feeding program in Bamako, Bourem and Gao as a way to address the crisis of food insecurity in Mali.

In Geneva, the UN Human Rights Council has appointed an Independent Expert, Suliman Baldo, to review human rights in Mali. Mr Baldo's reports have covered sexual violence anecdotally but without offering any deeper analysis of trends or the work of Malian civil society.^{xliii} As a human rights expert, his main interest appears to lie in legal reform.

The International Criminal Court in The Hague has prosecuted two extremists for their role in the 2012 rebellion in Mali. The first case produced a landmark verdict against Ahman Al-Faqui Al Mahdi in September 2016 on a charge of cultural war crimes. The second case is against Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud on a charge of sexual slavery. Hopefully, the prosecutor can follow up by building a strong relationship with civil society in Mali, publicizing the trial of Mr Aziz in Mali, moving quickly to provide reparations for victims, and launching more prosecutions as urged by human rights NGOs in Mali.^{xliv}

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of these international agencies as a source of funds, training, policy and encouragement to Malian NGOs. In spite of this, *Sini Sanuman's* experience suggests that the agencies can be hesitant to actively encourage innovation and seek out Malian initiatives, even as their own reports complain of a shortage of GBV services. UNFPA seems particularly well placed to support and initiate community-based partnerships between Malian NGOs, as well as implement the agenda set out in the reports of the UN Special Representative.

5.4 Donors

Like the UN specialized agencies, Western donors are an essential source of funding for GBV services. They also give substance to policy that is developed by the UN Security Council. Some governments have taken their own high-profile initiatives, like the "Global Summit" on sexual

violence in conflict that was held in London in June 2014 and co-chaired by the British Foreign Secretary and the actress Angelina Jolie.

In spite of this, the protection of women in Mali appears to be a low priority for donors. A German embassy official in Bamako in 2016 described Germany's priorities in Mali as "decentralization, water and food security." The Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation lists Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) as one of four priorities on the Ministry website, but embassy officials in Bamako said this covers maternal health care, HIV/AIDS, and family planning – not sexual violence. There is no reference to sexual violence or GBV more generally on the USAID-Mali website. Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom served as the first UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, but protecting women is not among the activities described listed on the SIDA website.^{xiv}

This is not to say that no money is available for GBV in Mali. As noted above, three UN agencies (UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF) all receive funding from donor governments. But the question still arises why embassies in Bamako appear passive when it comes to the protection of women – a critical issue to many western governments. Judged by Sini Sanuman's experience, there is much they could do to reach out to Malian NGOs, explain their policies on websites, and seek out innovative local programs. At the very least, embassies that do not fund GBV could pool information and refer innovative programs to others who may have money. It is not clear whether this happens in Mali.

Finally, and regardless of whether they work specifically on GBV, it is to be hoped that international aid workers and diplomats should, whenever possible, meet with survivors. Many have done so, and they can confirm that such meetings are uplifting for the survivors and visitors alike. The women who provided information for this report are a reminder that the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence can be inspiring as well as deeply distressing.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Data from the 2017 annual report of the working group (“sub cluster”) of agencies that work on sexual and gender-based violence in Mali, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Mali. Sub cluster members responded to 2,383 cases in 2012. The number rose to 3,844 in 2013 before falling to 90 in 2014.

ⁱⁱ UN Security Council report S/2014/181, March 3, 2014, para 97.

ⁱⁱⁱ S/2018/250, March 23, 2018, para 23.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v UNOCHA situation report, August 5, 2013.

^{vi} S/2013/149, March 14, 2013, para 52.

^{vii} Media Advisory from the ICC, April 3, 2018.

^{viii} Report of the UN Secretary General on Mali (S/2018/273), March 28, 2018, para 34.

^{ix} See for example: *We Hope and We Fight - Youth, Communities, and Violence in Mali*, Mercy Corps, September 6, 2017; and *Journey to Extremism in Africa*, UNDP, 2017, page 5.

^x *Terrorism and Impunity Jeopardize the Fragile Peace Agreement*, International Federation of Human Rights, May 2017; and *Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations*, Human Rights Watch, September 8, 2017.

^{xi} Report of the UN Secretary-General (S/2018/273) March 28, 2018, para 35.

^{xii} S/2018/250, para 12.

^{xiii} Report of the UN Secretary-General on Mali (S/2017/811, September 28, 2017, para 38).

^{xiv} Ibid, paras 10 and 11.

^{xv} The UN 2018 Humanitarian Appeal for Mali, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), February 2018, page 9.

^{xvi} MINUSMA reports that several women were sexually assaulted while traveling on public transport along main roads in the north in 2017 (S/2018/250, April 28, 2018, para 52).

^{xvii} *Report on the Movement of People*, IOM Mali, October 12, 2017.

^{xviii} The 2018 UN Humanitarian appeal for Mali, page 24.

^{xix} For information on leaders of the rebellion who have been amnestied see *Choosing Justice in the Face of Crisis*, a report by the International Federation of Human Rights (December 2017). One of the prisoners granted an early release, Houka Ag Alhousseini, officiated at forced marriages in 2012. The latest report from the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict lists two Tuareg groups that are parties to the peace process as using sexual violence as a tactic of terror (SC/2018/25, March 23, 2018, Annex).

^{xx} Above, endnote v.

^{xxi} From the 2017 annual report of the GBV sub cluster.

^{xxii} S/2016/361), para 7.

^{xxiii} From the 2015 report of the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict (S/2015/203), para 37.

^{xxiv} For example, Hassan Abdoul Aziz is charged by the International Criminal Court with having helped to direct a policy of forced marriage and sexual slavery in Timbuktu during the occupation.

^{xxv} 2015 report of the GBV sub cluster, UNFPA Mali, page 3.

^{xxvi} *Sini Sanuman*'s work on excision was recently featured [in a documentary for German television](#).

^{xxvii} Out of the 2,882 acts of GBV reported by UNFPA in 2017, 643 were committed by "unknown persons." 54 cases were linked to "nonstate actors" 392 to "farmers" and 662 to "unemployed persons." (2017 annual report of the GBV sub cluster.)

^{xxviii} *Sini Sanuman*'s animators keep detailed records and reported that 142,594 women and girls attended their sessions between 2014 and 2017. At least two thirds of the beneficiaries attended multiple sessions.

^{xxix} *Sini Sanuman* is so well connected to the community in Bamako that its staff have been alerted to cases of GBV by the Orange phone company.

^{xxx} Information from Abdou Zoualla Toure, representative of the Mayor of Bourem. Before 2012, the facilities for women in Bourem had included a sewing center run by the Red Cross, a café, a soap-making cooperative, and a popular 3-day music festival *Tamasonghoi*, which served to showcase culture of the main ethnic groups.

^{xxxi} According to the 2017 annual report of the sub cluster, only 9% of GBV survivors received shelter in 2017 (UNFPA, Mali).

^{xxxii} UNICEF covered medical costs in 2017 up to \$90 per beneficiary.

^{xxxiii} *Moussou Kalanso* means "women who are literate" in the Bambara language.

^{xxxiv} From the Mali Demographic and Health Survey, which was supported by UNICEF.

^{xxxv} According to *Sini Sanuman*'s reports to the German donor, animation sessions were attended by 14,596 women and girls in 2014; 32,884 (estimate) in 2015; 47,162 in 2016; and 47,952 in 2017.

^{xxxvi} Visit the following pages to meet the three Peace Fellows who worked for *Sini Sanuman*: [Giorgia Nicatore](#) (2014); [Refilwe Moahi](#) (2015); and [Rose Twagiramukiza](#) (2017).

^{xxxvii} Twenty-one advisers are currently deployed in seven peace-keeping missions, including MINUSMA (S/2018/250, para 4).

^{xxxviii} See above, endnote xxvii

^{xxxix} The Special Representative's website can be found [here](#).

^{xi} UN Women in Mali receives funding from the embassies of France, Holland, Sweden, Germany and Belgium, according to UN Women officials in Bamako. UNFPA is also spending \$100 million from the World Bank as part of a \$250 million program to improve maternal and child health in the Sahel (the *Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographics Project*.)

^{xlii} From a discussion with Sekou Traore, director of UN Women in Gao, November 2017. There is no GBV sub cluster in Gao, as there is in Bamako and UN Women fills the coordinating gap. Its initiatives have included helping the NGO GREFFA to publish the first report on the systematic use of GBV during the 2012 crisis.

^{xliii} See above endnote xv11.

^{xliiii} HRC/37/78, February 2, 2018.

^{xliv} See, for example, *Choosing Justice in the Face of Crisis* from the International Federation of Human Rights December 2017.

^{xlv} [https://openaid.se/aid/sweden/mali/all-organisations/emergency-response/2017/.](https://openaid.se/aid/sweden/mali/all-organisations/emergency-response/2017/)