# Endogenous protection practices for children on the move during emergencies in Gao and Timbuktu, Mali

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## Our partner

Established in 1960, Terre des Hommes is a Swiss foundation dedicated to build a better future for poor children and their communities through innovative approaches and concrete and sustainable solutions in the fields of health and protection in over 30 countries worldwide.

## Acknowledgements

This study by Terre des Hommes in Mali aims to identify endogenous protection practices of children on the move in Gao and Timbuktu (Mali), analyse the relevance and use of these practices by humanitarian actors when developing child protection responses, and identify the challenges and approaches to integrating these practices into the national humanitarian response. Drawing mainly from Mali's emergency context, we make recommendations to help child protection actors improve their strategies while taking into account local context, field actors and any protection practices developed by the communities themselves.

# Contents

# Executive summary

In launching this study, Terre des Hommes (Tdh) in Mali aimed to produce a descriptive profile of endogenous and community protection practices for children on the move, to analyse their effectiveness and identify any opportunities and challenges for integrating them into the humanitarian response in Mali.

Our study focused on several key questions:

- How do endogenous protection practices in Gao and Timbuktu help improve protection for children on the move?

- What are these practices' fundamental and operational characteristics?

- What experiences and best practices can help institutional actors strengthen and use endogenous protection practices?

- What recommendations can we draw from these experiences to improve the national response to child protection in the Mali crisis?

Our study took place in two cities – Timbuktu and Gao – where we collected data by interviewing children on the move, their parents, community leaders, institutional state actors and non-governmental organisations. Our findings highlight the existence of child protection practices developed by children, their families and their communities to address the risks and dangers of mobility while also enhancing children's capacities.

Our study emphasises community mechanisms for child protection, particularly during emergencies. It examines the weaknesses and challenges in both community practices and institutional protection services that actors have to overcome as they develop mechanisms for the protective accompaniment of children.

We demonstrate the existence of endogenous (community-based or locally developed) protection practices and the need to better identify, strengthen and integrate these into the interventions of exogenous (or external) community structures.

Our desk research on community protection literature reveals the poverty of existing academic studies and literature on the subject (Wessells 2009). The quality and quantity of documents on community child protection in general – and the protection of children on the move in particular – are low. To overcome this lack of academic data and literature on child mobility in Mali, we drew heavily on resources available online and sources from agencies dealing with child protection issues in Mali, such as Save the Children, Plan International, UNICEF, Tdh, Environment and Development Action in the Third World, Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council and International Organization for Migration.

Children are of central importance in all communities and all societies have their own child protection practices. Although not always immediately obvious at first glance or through surface observation, further study allows us to identify these practices, note their added value, strengthen them or link them with institutional protection services.

While the role of communities and families is obvious, the difficulty lies in formally identifying these practices, understanding their scope and replicating them. But on the whole, these practices are second nature to those who implement them. They arise from good intentions to give children the protection and support they need in terms of educational advice and protection from occult practices within extended family and community groups.

Child mobility differs according to area, community and other factors such as recurrent crises, poverty, insecurity and changes in wider society and local communities (UNICEF *et al.* 2012).

The main results of our study are as follows.

- In both survey areas – Timbuktu and Gao – a multitude of actors are working on different aspects of child protection.

- Children have very few spaces to get together and for recreation.

- The rights of children on the move are not adequately addressed or considered by community actors and children on the move themselves.

- Local administrative services are visible and highly developed in our study areas.

- International and state actors need to understand the value of the endogenous protection practices we observed in Gao and Timbuktu, and support them.

# 1

# Study description

## Background[1]

In 2012, Mali experienced a multidimensional (security, institutional and humanitarian) crisis that disrupted its entire social and economic system. This conflict led to the massive displacement of children and adults, both inside Mali and to neighbouring Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. It also exacerbated existing problems in the country, where the humanitarian situation was already a huge concern.

Towards the end of 2011, armed groups launched a rebellion against the national government, with the aim of claiming independence for the north of the country. There were countless human rights violations against civilians, including public executions, amputations, rape, sexual violence and the forced recruitment of adults and children from both Mali and neighbouring countries. This led to the massive displacement of people: more than 350,000 were displaced internally and 175,000 left Mali to seek refuge in neighbouring countries (50,000 in Burkina Faso, 75,000 in Mauritania and 50,000 in Niger) (OCHA 2013 and 2013a).

In October 2014, some 230,000 people were still displaced as a result of the armed conflict in 2012: around 86,000 internally (Population Movement Commission (CPM) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) figures) and 143,500 as refugees in neighbouring countries (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures). Although was a period of gradual stabilisation in 2013, the political, security and humanitarian situation deteriorated in May 2014 following violence in Kidal during a visit by the prime minister.

Most IDPs were living with host families, adding pressure to those families and to basic community services, including schools. The trend towards a gradual return to the north of the country – particularly in the Timbuktu and Gao regions – was confirmed in June 2014, when the CMP registered 151,150 IDPs: 51,334 more than in September 2014. At the same time, 143,253 people were refugees in neighbouring countries (UNHCR figures). Other estimates put the figure of IDPs and returnees at 406,102 (figures from IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) end of October 2014 and UNCHR-Government of Mali 30 September 2014). Nearly 600,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Malian refugees – mostly women and children, 67.5 per cent returnees and repatriated people – still needed protection as reported in January 2015 (OCHA 2015a).

As of 31 July 2015, CMP partners counted 78,183 IDPs (18,081 households), which shows a decrease of 12,035 individuals compared to June 2015 data (IOM 2015). These estimates include data on IDPs between May and June 2015, as well as displacement estimates from the 2012 crisis (CMP 2015).

Timbuktu and Gao have the highest number of internally displaced persons, with 16,713 and 10,307 respectively. In 2016, the displaced population was 55 per cent women and 45 per cent men. More than half – 53 per cent – were children (aged 0–17); 47 per cent were aged 18 and over (IOM 2016).

This mobility of children can be assessed in two ways. It can be a positive step in a child's life, in terms of learning opportunities, education, training and protection. But it also exposes them and makes them

[1] Source for general background (excluding more recent data): UNCHR-UNICEF (2013).

more vulnerable to risks and dangers such as trafficking, exploitation through work, worst forms of labour and slavery.

Through this study on the protection of children on the move in an urban context, Terre des hommes (Tdh) in Mali hopes to contribute to improving the quality of child protection by identifying and strengthening endogenous child protection practices. By analysing the practices developed by families and communities in Timbuktu and Gao cities during the 2012 crisis in Mali, we aim to:

1) Identify endogenous practices for protecting children on the move in both cities

2) Analyse the relevance of these practices and the value humanitarian actors place on them when constructing their responses

3) Identify challenges and good practices for integrating and enhancing endogenous practices for protecting children on the move into the national humanitarian response.

# Key concepts

**Endogenous protection practices:** The word endogenous comes from *endo* (inside) and *gene* (which engenders). So endogenous means 'that engenders itself internally' – in other words, that originates within a homogeneous unity – an organism, group or society – and carries their main characteristic features.

Endogenous child protection practices in West Africa refer to any practices developed at local or community level that have a protective effect for children, whether they are on the move or living with their own families (Dottridge 2014). Endogenous child protection practices can be described as "attitudes, behaviors and actions aiming to protect children from beliefs, knowledge and ways of doing things deriving from tradition or experience. Individual or collective practices were identified through research and capitalization processes. These are practices aimed at preventing risks (blessing, donating money, information on routes and risks, accompaniment of displacements, etc.), mediating or carrying out direct actions in order to help children in distress, offering a minimum of well-being, safety and education for children on the move, facilitating the success of their business, and maintaining social control, etc" (Feneyrol 2011, cited in Dottridge 2014).

**Child mobility:** Refers to the displacement of children between geographical and social environments, as well as these children's experiences during their displacements and stays in different places on their journey. A child on the move is a child who, having left their usual place of life, experiences changes in their identity and living conditions (Feneyrol 2011).

**Unaccompanied child:** A child under the age of 18 who has been separated from their parents and other family members, and who is not supported by an adult holding this responsibility by law or custom (UNHCR).

**Children separated from their parents:** Children who are separated from their parents or the person who was responsible for supporting them, according to local law or custom, but is not necessarily separated from other members of their family. It includes children who are accompanied by other adult family members (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

**Displaced children:** "Internally displaced persons [children] are persons [children] or groups of persons [children] who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their place of usual residence, in particular as a result of armed conflict, situations of widespread violence, violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters or to avoid their effects, and who have not crossed the internationally recognized borders of a State" (Kampala Convention's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement).

**Community:** A group of people living in or belonging to a particular environment – such as a village or urban area. Although a community may not always represent a homogeneous group – for example, members may belong to different ethnic groups, religious groups and socioeconomic classes – communities can act in various ways to prevent risks related to child protection. This holds true even in situations of massive population displacement where communities are not easy to identify, because people can organise themselves into groups to help vulnerable children (UNICEF 2015).

**Community-based mechanism for child protection:** A network or group of individuals working at community level in a coordinated manner to ensure the protection of children. These mechanisms can be created and supported internally (under the mixed influence of local traditional representatives and external pressures) or externally (UNICEF 2015).

# Scope of the study

Community-based child protection practices are wide-ranging. They comprise both endogenous practices and initiatives or actions developed within or by the community that have an exogenous origin or are supported or organised by external actors. In this study, our entry point of endogenous child protection practices focused on initiatives instigated by communities or the children themselves. But our study description and analysis also considers so-called community practices, extending the scope of our study and incorporating other potentially protective initiatives developed within communities.

# Methodology

Our research included a review of literature and data collection in the field.

## Literature review

We analysed documents on child protection issues in general and children on the move in particular, especially in the context of emergencies in Mali. We explored several national and regional sources, processing some 40 reference lists and bibliographies to make links with other authors, research and countries. The documents we consulted included: study or research reports; scientific articles and publications; national policy documents; and reports on the activities of various actors – such as states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local associations – dealing specifically in the Malian context.

We also explored documents available on Tdh databases, including those published by organisations such as UNICEF and Save the Children, national policy texts, outreach strategies and internal project and programme documents from Mali or elsewhere. In the field, we researched documents from the Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family, the Ministry of Social Development and town councils.

Our analysis of these documents highlights not only the complexity of child protection, but also the need to deepen knowledge on the protection of children on the move. The data we collected online was also useful. Our literature review showed that all societies have practices aimed at protecting children – in other words, children are important in all communities – and while child protection practices might be not be immediately obvious at first glance, a closer look usually allows us to identify them and understand their value.

The literature showed that the mobility of children in West Africa has existed for a long time, in many forms, and that this mobility varies by area and community. It is dependent on factors such as recurrent crisis, poverty, insecurity and changes within societies and communities. Previous studies have tried to show the involvement of the community, the family and the children themselves in child mobility and protection issues.

We analysed more than 50 documents and summaries on child protection, the protection of children on the move and the mechanisms of protection. But while the role played by the community and the family is often obvious, the difficulty lies in formally identifying these practices, understanding their scope and replicating them.

## Field data collection

We collected data through surveys in the cities of Gao and Timbuktu, our two study areas. We used directed and purposive sampling to collect our qualitative data,[2] selecting survey respondents according to location, position within the community, responsibilities or status. They included children, parents of children on the move, parents or guardians hosting or having hosted children on the move and traditional leaders. We also interviewed staff working in institutions and in the field of child protection in Mali.

In view of our study expectations and specifications, we chose a qualitative approach that combined documentary data collection and field surveys. We based this twofold approach on individual interviews and focus group discussions, using open-ended and/or closed-ended questions.

To collect our data, we used an individual interview facilitator, a focus group facilitator and an analytical framework. We recruited and trained a team of researchers who we then deployed in the field to conduct interviews in each city. They recorded interviews on smartphones provided by Tdh Mali's programme monitoring and quality department.

The study involved 224 people involved in or affected by child mobility in Timbuktu and Gao and about 30 resource persons from formal organisations.

Table 1. Distribution of survey respondents in Timbuktu and Gao

| CHILDREN ON THE MOVE | | PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE | | COMMUNITY LEADERS | | INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS | | TOTAL | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Girls | Boys | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men |
| 39 | 70 | 24 | 46 | 6 | 14 | 11 | 14 | 80 | 144 |
| Total: 109 | | Total: 70 | | Total: 20 | | Total: 25 | | Total: 224 | |

[2] In qualitative studies, it is permissible to specify a reasonable number of participants to represent the target population.

# 2

# Approach and summary

## Our study areas

Our study areas – the cities of Gao and Timbuktu – are regional capitals of northern Mali (see Figure 1). Historically crossroads where populations have gathered, they are areas of departure, transit and destination. Both regions share long borders with Mauritania, Algeria and Niger, making them perfect transit areas.

## Timbuktu[3]

The urban commune of Timbuktu is in the Timbuktu region, which covers an area of 497,926km$^2$ or 40 per cent of the national territory. The city of Timbuktu has eight neighbourhoods and is administered by a communal council of 23 members headed by a mayor, who is assisted by three deputies. It has a regional hospital, a main municipal health centre and seven pharmacies.

- City population: 54,629

- School enrolment: 51.25 (boys); 51.29 per cent (girls)

- Municipal population distribution: 43 per cent live in the city; the north is uninhabited; in the valleys, population concentrations might exceed 15 inhabitants per km$^2$

- 44 per cent of the population is aged 0 to 14

- 52 per cent are aged 15 to 59.

## Gao[3]

- Regional population: 544,120 (48.8 per cent women)

- Average annual population growth rate: 3 per cent (1998–2009)

- Largest municipal population increases: Ansongo (58 per cent); Gao (40 per cent) and Bourem (35 per cent).

Both cities have historically been and continue to be subject to population movement due to recurring crises, starting with the droughts of the 1970s.

The regions of Timbuktu, Gao (and Kidal) have been most affected by the Malian conflict. Timbuktu and Gao cities have been occupied since 2012 by jihadists and armed groups, almost bringing them to their knees, and families and children have been most severely affected by the crisis.

The post-conflict situation in both areas remains alarming and the restoration of normal activities has been slow. "The presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW) in these localities, which are also areas of return of internally displaced persons and refugees , threatens the lives of the populations and especially children, who constitute 61% of the victims of ERW" (OCHA 2015).

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[3] Based on census data from INSTAT Mali (2009).

Figure 1. Administrative map of Mali (2013)
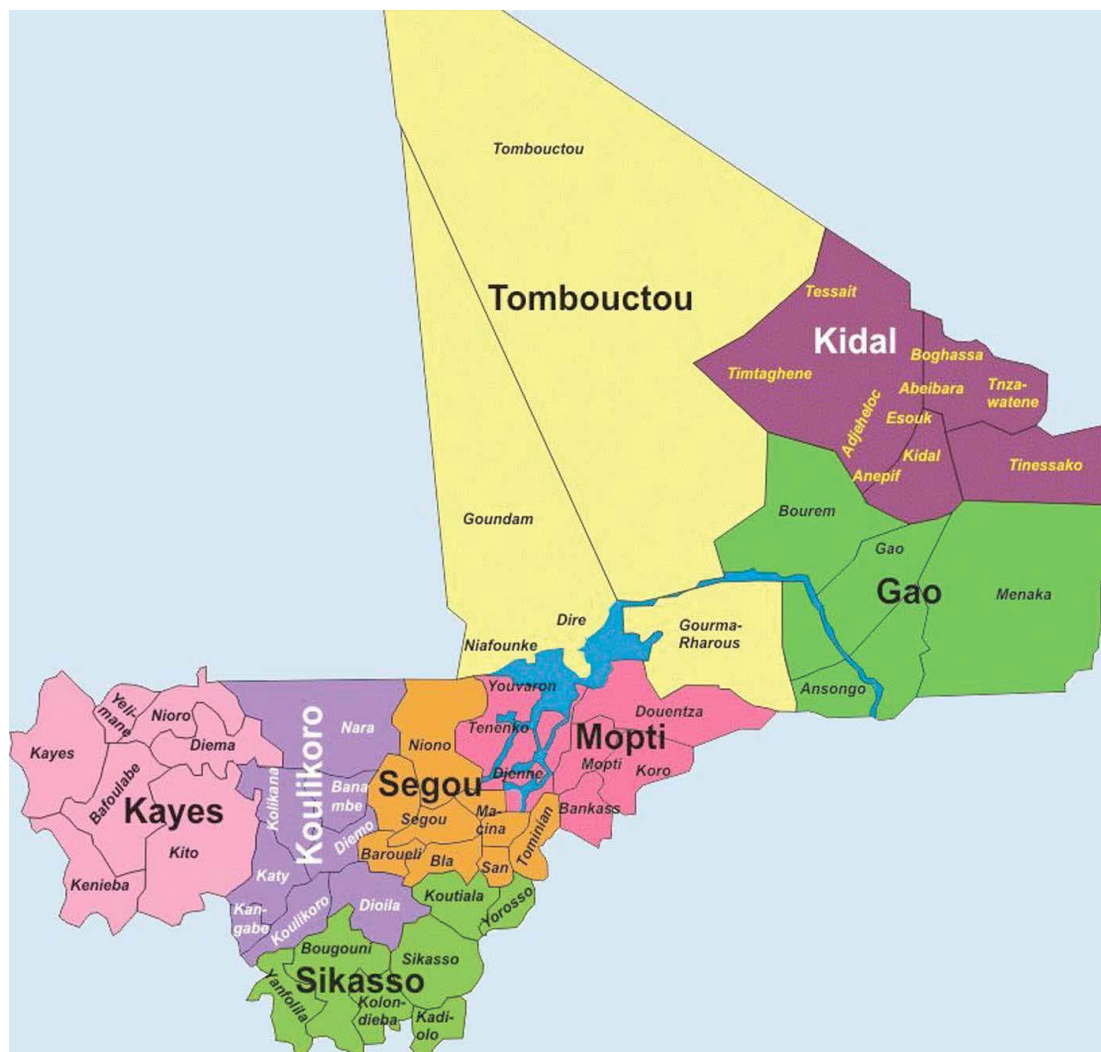


Source: https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2015/beyond_dichotomy/1_understanding_the_politics/

# Characteristics of our study target groups

Our study groups included children on the move now living in Gao and Timbuktu; parents, guardians, accommodation providers and employers of children on the move; community leaders; intermediaries who help the children move around; state officials; child protection agencies and national and international organisations working in child protection.

## Children on the move in Gao and Timbuktu

The cities of Gao and Timbuktu bring together many different children on the move – both girls and boys, but mainly boys. They include *talibé* children (boys who study at traditional Quranic schools and are often

forced to beg on the streets); migrant child workers; fostered children; children accompanied by their parents returning from refugee camps; children in transit to neighbouring countries; street children; and children displaced by conflict. The latter include unaccompanied and separated children, who are generally fleeing from areas of direct conflict and are often temporarily settled before they continue south to Mopti and Bamako to escape situations and violence related to clashes, enlistment by armed groups and new radical systems.

Our study found that talibé-beggars represent the largest group of children on the move in Timbuktu and Gao. Their ages vary from 4 to 17 and they generally come from the surrounding areas or the region of Mopti.

We found both girl and boy migrant workers. Some were accompanied; some unaccompanied. Gao's regional director of social development told us that these children come from southern Mali (Bamako,

Ségou and Mopti), Guinea Conakry and the areas around Timbuktu and Gao and that their ages range from 12 to 17. Some are in transit to Kidal, Mauritania, Algeria and Niger, while for others, this is their final destination. This was the case for girls from Bambara-Maoudé and Douentza. Girl migrants are mainly from the Dogon ethnic group from Douentza or other regions of Mali. Gao is often their final destination, though some are in transit to Kidal city or Algeria. These migrant children are generally unaccompanied and come seeking a job or to learn a vocation to earn some money. Many young migrant workers who travel to Timbuktu do so to learn a vocation or work for a given period. Many child migrants in Timbuktu are travelling with their parents, having abandoned their homes for reasons of poverty and insecurity.

> *"A lack of work and poverty have mobilised children. Some have travelled from Ségou, Bamako, Mopti and San to come here. They heard that they could get a job here after the peace agreement had been signed; that there is funding for that."*
> Source: Individual interview with woman hosting children on the move, Timbuktu 2016

We found that the majority of children accompanied by their parents returning from refugee camps in Mauritania, Algeria, Burkina Faso or Niger were in Timbuktu city. Community leaders did mention a few cases in Gao during interviews, but fewer were reported than children in other categories.

## Parents, guardians, accommodation providers and employers

We were also able to interview or survey the parents, guardians, accommodation providers and employers of some of the children on the move, depending on whether the children were still in transit or had reached their final destination.

**Parents or guardians:** Guardians are generally very close relatives – uncles, older brothers or brothers-in-law – and play a trusted role in the process: housing, feeding, caring for, educating, advising and providing work to the children, and keeping or looking after their money for them.

> *"When I arrived in the city, my uncle met me at the station. When we got to his house, he gave me food and a place to sleep. He then entrusted me to an employer and gave me advice. Every month, he makes sure that my wage has been paid and that I have sent something to my mother, his sister. My uncle, he is everything to me, he's my insurance."*
> Source: Individual child interview, Gao 2016

**Accommodation providers and employers:**
When parents do not travel with them, they entrust their children to intermediaries to deliver them to accommodation providers or guardians from their own home area or village. But this generally does not happen because children often look for their own housing opportunities, shelter or protection based on the experiences of other children.

Employers usually take children on as wage labourers or apprentices. For girls, this is often a placement arranged by their guardian or host parent; while boys in Timbuktu tend to make their own arrangements to find employment and learning.

Many respondents told us of a traditional saying in Timbuktu city: *"Four ni idjé ma kamba idjé wani"* (leave your own child for the benefit of other children). In other words, according to tradition, parents have a duty to integrate or look after other people's children above their own.

While this tradition to protect and integrate other people's children has existed in the past, the crisis has had a definite impact on the practice. But it can be reactivated in another intervention context that combines informal and formal approaches, through complementarities in interventions between community actors and institutional partners.

## Community leaders

Community leaders include traditional chiefs, neighbourhood chiefs, band chiefs, sector leaders, imams, local figureheads and caste men. They are identified through their status and play a central role in social cohesion.

It is important to note that the traditional chieftainship is a highly developed practice in Mali, especially in the north. In this area – and in our study areas in particular – there are some noteworthy ethnic groups, including the Sonrais, the Arabs, the Fulani and the Tuareg (Bâ and Dajet 1962 and 1984).

In the child protection process, traditional leadership and community leaders can play a fundamental role in establishing and ensuring the functionality of protective devices and mechanisms.

These leaders tend to form the basis of a community's social organisation. Their influential social status makes them important development partners (Amore 2010), but can also create obstacles in the process (Olivier de Sardan 1995).

## Intermediaries

Intermediaries are people who are involved in the child mobility process at the time of travel, providing safe transport for children under their supervision. Parents may contract the services of these intermediaries (Massart 2012) or sometimes it is the children who entrust themselves to them.

Intermediaries include people from the same home village or locality, transport drivers, vehicle conveyors, people smugglers and work placement facilitators.

People smugglers or intermediaries are very visible in Gao, where they have a premises for this purpose. They were reluctant to exchange information about their role in the child mobility process, and even resorted to violence. A group of smugglers threatened one of our researchers, who had to make them believe that she had destroyed the recordings.

## Protection actors

This category includes state officials, international and national NGO staff and other agencies that are active in the field of child protection.

**Decentralised state services:** These state actors – including social services (the ministries of social development and for the promotion of women, children and the family); defence and security forces (police, gendarmes, civil protection agencies); the justice services; and the Ministry of Education – are normally the designers and directors of any national policies for development and the protection of persons. As such, they are the first guarantors of child protection.

**Town councils:** These are the extension of the state at commune level and are an interface between the state and the people. These decentralised structures can play an important role in mobilising and involving community leaders in child protection actions and can provide direct care for children in need of protection.

**International agencies and NGOs:** These include UN agencies such as UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and international NGOs such as Save the Children in Gao, Plan Mali, Red Cross, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Tdh, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and International Rescue Committee (IRC). These organisations intervene directly or indirectly in child protection and have developed specific actions since the beginning of the Malian crisis to take into account protection requirements in the emergency situation.

**National NGOs and local associations:** These are usually facilitated by experienced and committed social workers to work for and with vulnerable persons. As organised structures, they do not have much experience in child mobility issues. They lack resources and expertise and many need orientation and guidance to work on protecting children on the move.

# Perceptions of child mobility and the risks involved

Our study probed the collective imagination to get an insight into different actors' perceptions of and attitudes towards children, children on the move, childhood and child mobility and to understand local practices that have been or are being implemented in our study areas.

Respondents' definitions of a child include: a little man, a vulnerable person and someone who needs accompaniment and protection. Respondents variously put a child's age at 0–17 years, 0–7 years, 0–15 and 0–18.

Our second central question aimed to understand community actors' perceptions of the possible risks of child mobility and whether this would lead them to stop child mobility or take precautionary measures for the child. Parents and the wider community tend to support the motivations and causes of child displacements, which are rooted in Malian and West African reality. The answers we collected show that all actors are aware of the risks and dangers of mobility.

*"Of course there are risks linked to child mobility. For example, when children leave home to study the Quran, more often than not, their Quranic master, rather than teach them the Quran, sends them out begging with a compulsory daily quota, which could drag them into small theft, delinquency and giving up learning the Quran, turning instead to living on the street. As for girls, they are often exposed to sexual assaults and the risk of prostitution as a result of a lack of supervision by any authority."*
Source: Institutional actor, Tdh survey, Gao 2016

While parents, community actors and children are aware of the risks that children face in mobility, it does not prevent them from letting them go. This contrast between risk awareness and acceptance of the act seems to be part of a risk-and-benefit calculation, with the potential benefits usually outweighing the risks.

This reasoning applies for almost all categories of child mobility, including: children who migrate for work, education or training; those who are fostered by a guardian or other third person; nomadic or street children; those associated with armed forces and groups; refugees; and displaced children.

## Challenges of protecting children in emergency contexts

It would be difficult to identify endogenous child protection practices without first identifying which are about protection for children on the move in general and which are considered to be covered by the communities themselves.

It is clear from the data we collected that child protection focuses on safety, vulnerability to hazards, nutrition, healthcare, education, abuse, sexual violence and so on. But the concepts of child rights and child exploitation at work are less clear.

Communities tend to adopt child protection practices in response to issues that are relevant in their communities. In our study's urban context, children and their families face the following protection or self-protection challenges as a result of conflict:

• Vulnerability due to forced displacement

• Specific support needs of separated or unaccompanied children

• Coping with new situations, including the sudden loss of access to education and healthcare

• Difficulty in accessing child protection services, due to a lack or poor quality of services, geographical, financial, language or cultural barriers, a lack of accountability and so on

• Direct trauma due to loss of parents or siblings, gender-based violence and so on

• Being enrolled by armed groups, and

• Weakened community-based organisations.

# 3

# Study findings

## Main endogenous child protection practices identified

Our study gathered a range of responses, attesting the existence of a variety of endogenous child protection practices responding to children on the move, in emergency and non-emergency situations. We found national and sub-regional similarities (UNICEF and Terre des Hommes 2013; Boursin-Balkouma and Sidibé 2014).

An in-depth analysis of these protective devices and mechanisms revealed the following types or categories of child protection:

• Magico-religious practices

• Social networks

• Fostering

• Provision of food, financial and material resources

• Neighbourhood or village councils

• Accompanied displacements or peer protection

• Village committees for crisis management

• Informal groupings of homogeneous groups

• Peer groups, age groups or *cafo*, and

• 'Wise mums'.

## Magico-religious parental or community practices and safety advice

This category includes blessings, sacrifices, *grigri* (a type of amulet), talismans, rings, bark or tree root powders, *nassi* (verses from the Quran written on a wooden slate and washed with a special liquid believed to offer protection), educational advice presented in the form of warning and practical advice to be vigilant and prudent. These elements all arose spontaneously from our interviewees, suggesting that these practices are real and very present in the mind of local actors.

*"They are given powder, a protection ring. Sheep are slaughtered to make sacrifices to ensure the angels watch over these children, guaranteeing a successful mobility."*

*"Sacrifices are made for the children, along with blessings to drive out evil spirits."*

*"As with anything important in our lives, we first consult the marabout (holy man). If he concludes that the road is good, he tells us the sacrifices we need to make to ensure we can go and return safely and get what we seek. If he concludes that the road is not good, we would normally abandon the project or delay it until the moment is right."*

Source: Individual interviews, Gao 2016

These practices include parental advice to be alert and practice caution when dealing with situations, unknown places and individuals as well as warnings

about temptation, robbery, delinquency and resisting the desire to stay in the city. It is a good idea to use former or returning migrants to reinforce these messages, as they will carry more weight than awareness raising by external actors.

> "Everyone meets on the eve of the children's departure at the village chief's house, including parents and travel companions, to give them safety advice – to work together, stay together, return to the village together, resist the temptations of the city and not forget their village."

> "I comply with my mother's advice to always stay with the people I have been entrusted to, not to follow people I don't know and to keep out of things that are not my business while I'm in the city."

> "I believe very much in these pieces of advice and have complied with them. They have kept me safe to date."

> "When we leave our village, we are advised not to wear clothes that provoke men and not to approach boys. These tips have been helpful because none of us have got pregnant."

> Source: Individual interviews, Timbuktu 2016

Institutional actors could include advice and recommendations for children in training modules and use these existing practices to raise awareness about personal development and empowerment.

## Social networks

This category of endogenous child protection practices encompasses all practices that use an intermediary. This includes travelling companions, peer groups, guardians, accommodation providers, trainers and employers. An intermediary can be a relative from the same village or, more frequently, a trusted fellow national from the same local area. This group also includes drivers and co-drivers who might transport the children for remuneration or because they know the parents.

This practice has the advantage of ensuring the child is part of a group and will benefit from the mutual protection such a group can offer. It is common practice among young Dogon girls from Gao and Bella girls from Bambara Maoudé as well as boys coming from areas close to Gao and Timbuktu cities. These practices are particularly effective when travelling (at police checkpoints) and when children arrive at their destination.

> "The best way to protect and ensure the safety of a child on the move is to put them under the supervision of someone travelling in the same direction who will take them to their destination and hand them over to the right person."

> "I don't know what all parents of children on the move do, but the children who arrive at my house are under the guidance of an adult – an older sister or aunt – who guides and monitors them in case of problems, helps them find employment and looks after their interests (wages, rights)."

> "I was with my brothers and relatives. Thank God, we didn't experience any difficulties during our trip."

> "Children on the move are always in a group to protect each another against the aggressions of bandits and to share food."

> Source: Individual interviews, Gao and Timbuktu 2016

Many respondents in Timbuktu also mentioned mentoring and apprenticeships, whereby children entrust themselves or are entrusted to a tutor who is in charge of their professional training.

> "I hosted two boys who are learning the Quran and tailoring. The first was entrusted to me by his parents as part of his Quranic instruction and the second came to me himself."
> Source: Individual interview, imam and honorary member of the Association for the Safeguarding and Development of Quranic Schools (ASDEC) Timbuktu 2016

There are cases where the employer also provides accommodation for the child. In these cases, children sell their services for cash or in kind and benefit from accommodation, food, healthcare and protection from aggressions.

If integrated into the intervention process through training and awareness-raising among various actors, this practice can play an important role in child protection.

> "I employ a Dogon girl for a wage. I feed her and look after her. She is with many of her compatriots and friends from her village; they all live with me. My only condition is that men do not come to house at night, because the girls need to get on with their work in the morning. So far, they have complied with this condition and everything has been fine."
> Source: Individual interview with woman, Gao 2016

## Fostering

Fostering is an ideal setting for protection, solidarity and sharing goods. The African view of children as a 'common good' who are everybody's responsibility ensures orphans are protected and encourages childless and elderly adults to care for children.

Fostering is based on an educational theory or the consolidation of kinship ties and follows the rationale of giving a child opportunities when his or her parents are absent or temporarily or permanently incapable of providing protection, supervision and care.

Fostering was a widespread practice during the humanitarian crisis in Mali, when separated and unaccompanied children were welcomed into families and provided with alternative family protection. The practice is based on the principles of hospitality to others and the customary practice of looking after other people's children more than your own.

This practice allowed Mali to avoid the creation of camps for displaced persons during the crisis. Child protection organisations have valued this approach to community protection by supporting host families and using them as representatives or people responsible for monitoring protection measures taken in favour of child victims.

Fostering is one of the main endogenous child protection practices, which has important protective factors and should be valued more highly.

## Provision of food, financial and material resources

Parents usually provide their children with food (biscuits, couscous, cakes) for the journey and cover their travel expenses, paying transit fees, police checks, river crossings, group fees and so on.

This support covers the first few days of mobility for children on the move while they wait to find a host family or a job. Parents also regularly send food – for example, a bag of millet –to a child on the move whose address is known. The child can share this type of support with the other children in their host family, earning them favour and contributing to their upkeep during their stay.

*"In our country, mobility of children is a fact of life, and children on the move need money for transport fees, a small amount to buy food while they travel and to pass through police checkpoints. This is the hardest part of their trip, because when they arrive at their destination, their elders will be expecting them and will be there to support them."*

*"All we can do for children on the move when they leave is to help them with money, food (couscous) and even a visit to a marabout to guarantee them good luck. This will make life easier for children on the move."*

Source: Interviews with community partners, Timbuktu and Gao 2016

## Neighbourhood or village councils

Composed mainly of representatives of heads of family, religious leaders, women and youth, village chiefs and traditional neighbourhood chiefs, village or neighbourhood councils are important bodies who ensure the smooth running of a community.

These committees deal with specific child protection issues, providing guidance to resolve any problems and a forum to discuss and decide on solutions for child victims or perpetrators of violence. This protection mechanism was the main basis for the creation of local protection committees (see 'Practices that institutions have adopted' below).

## Accompanied displacements and peer protection

The importance of belonging to a group for individual protection and security is well established. At a sociological level, the group's interests come above the individual's and being part of a group offers children on the move support and solidarity.

By travelling in a group, children on the move share risks and dangers and help each other overcome them. Children can join forces and negotiate for others to facilitate their passage at crossings and checkpoints, and when they change means of transport.

*"I travelled with people who protected me very much against police officers and intermediaries."*

*"I was with friends, brothers and relatives from my village. Thank God, we didn't have any problems, especially at the checkpoints."*

*"We travelled together as a group. We never travelled individually, so we had no problems."*

Source: Child interviews, Gao and Timbuktu 2016

The group they travel with remains important for children on the move when they arrive at their destination, as it can help protect them against attacks and abuses. As well as offering solidarity, they can get help if a problem is beyond their capacity to resolve. The other advantage of being part of a group is that it provides motivation to

succeed quickly so children can travel back with rest of the group. Dogon girls from Douentza, Koro and Bandiagara and Bella girls from Bambara Maoudé told us they use these mechanisms.

*"We form a group and in case of danger, we defend ourselves. If there is a situation or emergency that goes beyond our capacity, we call our parents here or in the village by telephone. Children need to stay in groups to protect themselves, share ideas about their protection and encourage each other to succeed and return together."*

Source: Focus group discussion with Dogon girls, Gao 2016

Child protection actors can encourage his kind of practice by raising awareness of such practices among children, families and communities. Groups also provide an ideal framework to promote training on child rights and teach group members a vocation.

## Village crisis management committees

There are community-level crisis management committees throughout the municipality, composed of elders, imams, local figureheads, youth and neighbourhood leaders. These committees play an important role in the community, settling conflicts, acting as mediators and consulting local people on their needs.

The issue of children – orphans, abandoned children, separated children, victims of violence or abuse – is often raised in these committees, which take decisions to solve or manage conflict situations, usually between several families.

## Informal networks of homogeneous groups

Quranic masters from Gao and Timbuktu described informal networks of homogeneous groups, who provide mutual reinforcement, aid and solidarity. These religious leaders come together to discuss and organise the lives and protection of talibé children under their care. Talibé children are extremely mobile and therefore at high risk of coming across unexploded remnants of war.

In Timbuktu and Gao, for example, these people have been increasingly involved in child protection practices, often through ASDEC or via volunteers working for the rights of talibé children by training Quranic teachers. But despite their gradual formalisation, NGOs have not worked much with these groups.

## Peer groups, age groups or gender

It is common to find groups organised by age or gender for discussions under the guidance of young or child leaders. This strategy allows children who receive accurate information and have a good understanding of a specific theme to pass on their knowledge to other children. In this case, 'peer' means children of the same age or status.

But peer educators can also pass information on to their parents at home and to other adults, including through face-to-face discussions. In emergencies, peer and child-to-child approaches are used to share information on health, health systems, water use, food aid distribution, protection and many other subjects.

This approach is very useful for quickly communicating accurate information. Children participating in peer education activities can also engage with younger children, coaching in a classroom setting or other gathering spaces for children.

## "Wise mums"

Each neighbourhood in Timbuktu has a mechanism for protecting children in distress and in need of protection led by influential women called *mamans sages* or wise mums. Universally recognised in their neighbourhoods as mothers who are always ready to protect and/or help other people's children, they investigate problems when they arise, listen to children and refer the more complicated cases to the NGO Plan Mali. Every neighbourhood has its influential women who protect young girls and boys.

This strategy has had considerable results in supporting children in the aftermath of the crisis and has provided NGOs such as Plan International and Save the Children with regular information and data on child protection.

## Other endogenous child protection practices

Our research identified other interesting community practices, including: the migrants' hut, run by the Direyben Association and supported by the IOM, which aims to offer emergency hosting; and collaboration with community representatives or monitors to identify and register child victims.

# Endogenous child protection practices that institutions have adopted

## Local protection committees

Operating under the leadership of community leaders, local protection committees provide an appropriate and authorised framework for child protection. Institutional community actors (members of village or neighbourhood councils) value these committees because their approach is relevant and adds value. Supported by NGOs such as Save the Children, Gao-based NGO *Groupe de Recherche, d'Étude, de Formation Femme Action* (GREFFA) and Plan Mali, they were important in finding solutions during the crisis.

We observed that local protection committees in each city shared information, coordinated referrals and identifications and worked together to find solutions for children's problems. With formal and informal actors working together in this way, they have laid the foundations for joint action on mediation, awareness-raising, social dialogue and care.

This approach has made it possible for communities help children who are directly affected by the crisis – displaced children, victims of gender-based violence, refugees, returnees, children affected by explosive remnants of war and those enrolled in the armed forces and by armed groups.

> *"Our target group is children affected by the crisis and we have a comprehensive emergency programme that encompasses several projects. We have adopted a community approach, which involves using local protection committees. The members of these committees are generally influential people from the community: traditional leaders, opinion leaders, women leaders and so on. They deal with case identification and referencing, awareness and advocacy. We use teachers, midwives and 'wise mums'. We provide protection from child abuse and vulnerability, [help children] return to school and so on. We train the wise mums, who take care of identification, and midwives who take care of cases of rape."*
> Source: Representative from Plan Mali's office in Timbuktu

Local protection committees work within a framework that also encompasses a local association and support from formal structures including NGOs and state-run services.

These committees, led by traditional chiefs,[4] have systems and mechanisms that are ideal for protecting children in situ. They have long existed as an informal intervention mechanism to resolve any issues of community concern and have recently taken on a new direction, integrating child protection under the guidance of formal child protection agencies.

In particular, they intervene in cases of lost children or children in conflict with their families. In these circumstances, the child is usually taken in by the head of the family and entrusted to one of his wives (Amore 2010). This gesture of welcoming a child into a family is the start of the child protection process. The committee leader or chief then mobilises members of his or her council or traditional leaders (caste men) to escort the lost child or invite the child's parents to a reconciliation, which is usually successful.

Respondents and interviewees indicated that agencies such as UNHCR, Environment and Development Action in the Third World (ENDA) Mali, NRC, Plan and Save the Children and as others working in partnership with government departments have revitalised this type of mechanism, adding value in terms of participation, accountability and sustainability.

But there is a risk in formalising these practices that used to be informal, particularly with regards to durability and sustainability. ENDA staff working on the FabaTalibés programme expressed regret that some successful experiences have come to an end or are coming to an end.

> *"In the Sud-Extension neighbourhood, Save the Children helped set up a local committee for child protection. The committee's role was to raise awareness of child protection. Their tasks included identifying children in vulnerable situations, finding accommodation for them and referring those who had specific needs that were beyond the capacity of the local committee to agencies such as Save the Children, GREFFA, Oxfam and the Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family. But once the Save the Children project ended, a lack of motivation among local committee members means it no longer functions today."*
> Source: Focus group interviews with community leaders, Timbuktu

> *"With the support of technical partners, villages are being organised to cope. We work together with various leaders, marabouts and others to find agreement on a solution to avoid new difficulties for children."*
> Source: Focus group interviews with community leaders, Gao

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[4] The role and importance of traditional chieftainships in all community interventions has been widely recognised (de Saridan 1995). West African countries pay particular attention to local development actions (in 2016, Mali adopted laws in the parliament recognising and valuing their role).

## Community gathering areas: hope spaces and child-friendly areas

One of the most important areas of protecting children in crisis situations is creating community spaces where they can gather, learn and be safe. Drawing on the peer or gender-based groups strategy, institutional actors such as Tdh and UNICEF have supported community gathering areas called hope spaces or child-friendly spaces, which provide:

- An opportunity for children on the move to meet regularly for information sessions, psychosocial activities, awareness raising and to learn life skills

- A link between children and the protection services – including the justice service, the police, social services, NGO staff, community partners – allowing the latter to identify severe cases that need a targeted and individual response, and

- An opportunity to monitor children under protection.

In general, these spaces allow children to meet other children who are in their same situation and face the same difficulties. Each group is organised according to local needs – for example, they may meet daily or once a week. They allow children to form and maintain friendships and bonds with other children, to get to know each another, grow together and face the harsh realities of work. They offer a space for sharing and exchanging experiences with other children.

> *"NGOs such as Plan have contributed to the establishment of child-friendly spaces. There are 22 in total in the Timbuktu region. In these spaces, facilitators use play to identify – and then refer – vulnerable children."*
> Source: Focal point for the promotion of women, children and the family, Timbuktu

Institutional actors remarked on the importance of this practice. By providing financial and technical support and facilitating activities at these spaces, they have given children on the move and other children the opportunity to strengthen their capacity for self-protection.

## Host families: housing and monitoring vulnerable children or child victims

Institutional actors highly value the practice of fostering, firmly rooted in traditional Malian customs. Indeed, Mali has not experienced IDP camps, as vulnerable children and victims have simply been welcomed into host families either spontaneously or in response to requests from IDP committees.

> *"During the occupation, those who stayed behind took care of vulnerable persons – particularly lost children, children who were vulnerable in their own families or unaccompanied children. They fed them, cared for them and protected them. Those who fled from communities within and around Timbuktu and Gao cities for Mopti and Segou in central Mali or Bamako, Sikasso and Kayes in the south entrusted their houses to their neighbours, to those who stayed behind, and then moved quietly back in once the crisis was over. This explains why there were no camps for displaced persons or refugees in Timbuktu or Gao, the large cities of the north.*

> *"During the occupation, formal institutions were evacuated for fear of retaliation from the jihadists. People made do with what they had and helped vulnerable people and children with the support of neighbourhood leaders and the district leaders who advise them."*
> Source: Focal point of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family in Timbuktu

Building on these foundations, institutional actors directly involved in reducing the effects of the crisis have supported families by rehabilitating houses (NRC) and distributing food and survival kits (IOM, UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross).

## Community monitors: identifying and supervising children at risk or child victims

Involving people at grassroots level is essential because they know the vulnerable people, local leaders and community members. Community monitors are the direct interface between vulnerable children and the protective measures developed to care for them. These monitors supervise children and report back to partner organisations.

Organisations such as UNHCR, DRC and NRC have strongly supported this approach in Timbuktu and Gao cities, which has enabled community representatives to be effectively involved in identifying and monitoring children.

> *"We work with refugees, reaching children through their parents. We work with at least 50 community monitors in 24 municipalities. Within the sphere of child protection, we help children whose rights have been abused, referring them to specialist agencies. We also work with local protection committees on community protection monitoring. They provide information on and intervene in cases of abuse or conflict within the community. We also work in collaboration with IEDA Relief. We map children in vulnerable situations and run a repatriation scheme for displaced people or refugees. We supported more than 4,000 people in 2014, 8,000 in 2015 and nearly 10,000 in 2016."*
> Source: UNHCR staff member, Gao

*"With regards to children on the move, we support children who are out of school with a school kit. As the National Solidarity Fund has stalled, humanitarian agencies are responsible for 80 per cent of the work: in the case of talibé children, it is mainly the Directorate for the Promotion of the Family and the Protection of the Child. Before the crisis, nearly 5,000 children had been identified in total. During the crisis, we sent 200 girls from Timbuktu to Mopti to escape the jihadist threat… The concept of child protection is very complex: there are many difficulties in identifying and monitoring children."*
Source: Staff member from the Timbuktu Directorate of Social Development and Economic Solidarity

## Collaboration with 'wise mums' to protect children on the move

*"When implementing its Wise programme, Mercy Corps used the strategy of 'Safe space for migrant and non-migrant teenage girls'. We run this programme together with the Organisation of women's associations and NGOs of Mali (CAFO) in Timbuktu and Gao. These are spaces for girls aged 7 to 16, managed by a mentor from the community itself, where they can learn about sexual and reproductive health and skills for the workplace."*
Source: Mercy Corps project manager, Timbuktu and Gao

Mercy Corps has strengthened girls' capacity for – and knowledge of – protection in general and sexual and reproductive health in particular. A project assistant also offers girls technical support. Mercy Corps safe spaces are based on a traditional practice whereby children and young people gather under a tree or in a leader's house to share ideas and experiences.

Another strategy Mercy Corps uses is where girls (especially girls on the move) sleep in the house of a woman known as *gnagna* ('the mother of the children' in the Sonrai language). She acts as mother to all of the girls under her care, sharing her wisdom and values that are important to women and protecting them from bad luck and abuse. To strengthen this traditional practice, Mercy Corps meets with the *gnagnas* once a week to find out how the girls are coping, to help them and to offer solutions to any difficulties they are facing.

Mercy Corps has used safe spaces and *gnagnas* in its 'Resilience, conflict management and teenage girls' programmes since 2014 in Timbuktu and Gao, helping girls improve their knowledge and skills about sexual and reproductive health. Plan Mali's protection focal point believes that this mechanism has been instrumental in protecting migrant girls in particular, and told us that organisations have relied on this practice to support girls who are isolated or victims of gender-based violence.

*"In 2015, Plan Mali's emergency programme for children in crisis used 'wise mums' – influential women from local neighbourhoods – to support children with protection problems in Timbuktu. This mechanism for protecting child victims of violence and other problems is led by influential women called 'wise mums' in each neighbourhood of Timbuktu. Long before Plan Mali [was on the scene], each district had its influential woman or leader who dealt with women's and children's issues. Plan has built on and strengthened this [traditional] system."*
Source: Interview with Plan Mali's protection focal point

Plan Mali's focal point in Timbuktu explained how Plan had come to Timbuktu after the occupation in 2013. It relied on neighbourhood leaders to set up its emergency response project, which focused on vulnerable children and child victims of the crisis, including girls who had been raped (some of whom were pregnant), girls forced into early marriage and children who were lost or living alone. Plan called a general meeting with the support of neighbourhood and sector leaders, where they identified and drew up a list of contacts and resource persons, who were then trained and organised to identify potential beneficiaries. Middle-aged women – midwives, traditional midwives, members of RECOTRAD (Network of Traditional Communicators for Mali's Development) and 'wise mums' – formed an important part of this group.

One of the most famous wise mums told us that their status in their local community and their age are two factors in the intervention's success, allowing them to identify children at risk, raise awareness, monitor children and refer them when needed, in collaboration with other actors in the process, including Plan Mali.

These examples illustrate how institutional actors – NGOs and the state – and community actors can collaborate effectively. More importantly, they demonstrate the need for NGOs to work closely with local protection systems. Communities and community-based organisations can be an extension of NGOs' interventions, helping them identify potential beneficiaries, providing quality monitoring, involving the children themselves and drawing resources from the community.

## Collaboration with other community leaders

It is clear from our analysis that the traditional chieftaincy plays a central role in community child protection structures. Through their status and legitimacy, their audience and authority, traditional leaders bring about social cohesion.

Imams and *marabouts* can also be very useful in raising awareness and training people on the rights of children on the move. ASDEC has established a premises in Timbuktu equipped with tables and benches where talibés can learn the Quran and Quranic teachers can learn about the rights of the talibés.

RECOTRAD is a national entity with branches at all peripheral administrative levels. They have a presence in both cities and in some community-level interventions. They have played an important historical role in social cohesion and conflict prevention and management. They will certainly prove to be effective in raising awareness and reconciliation.

From our analysis, we can agree that "these groups are a vital means of mobilising communities around children's protection and wellbeing. Organised with care and in a contextually appropriate manner, they make it possible to: identify, prevent and respond to significant child protection risks; mobilise communities around child protection issues; and provide a basis for support and action that can be taken to scale through links with other community groups and with national child protection systems." (Wessells 2009)

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# Lessons learned and recommendations

## Main lessons to be learned

We draw the following lessons from our study.

1. Mobility is a hard reality in Gao and Timbuktu. And although some children migrate voluntarily in these areas, many are victims of the humanitarian crisis. These include unaccompanied or separated children, victims of violence or abuse and conscripts in armed conflicts.

2. The Malian crisis and poverty are impacting on children's mobility and eroding certain traditional practices such as mentoring.

3. Endogenous child protection practices are well established, diverse and varied. They are driven by the community, parents, kinship ties, other actors involved in child protection and by the children themselves in some circumstances, to help them face the challenges of mobility and the crisis situation in Mali.

4. There are examples of good practice where institutional actors – including NGOs and public services – have strengthened or used endogenous child protection practices in both Timbuktu and Gao.

5. The conditions are there for a possible collaboration between the informal (community protection, family) and formal (NGO, government) systems.

6. Endogenous child protection practices are not always immediately visible in a community. Ongoing observation, recognition of their positive effects and documentation will improve support for these approaches.

7. Mobility is a coping mechanism used by children, their parents and by extension entire communities. The absence of some public services has emphasised the effects of the crisis, but is also a sign of the rejection of – or resistance to – the central state.[5]

8. Despite their motivation and the central role they play, community-based organisations lack the technical means and resources to carry out their mission. They need support that is commensurate with the ambitions and expectations of institutional actors. Existing emergency projects need to be adapted to become development actions, allowing them to respond to ongoing social problems.

This study reinforces existing research on endogenous child protection practices. It has been more than a decade since some of these studies proclaimed them as essential, without formally identifying the different types. For example, Save the Children's PACTE project in 2006 set up a network of community and institutional actors to protect migrant children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea. This approach already reflected the evolution of their anti-trafficking strategy towards a more

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[5] In Gao, since the events of 2012, young people have led several movements of discontent against authority. The absence of the state in Gao is obvious in its minimal law and order service.

comprehensive approach to protecting migrant children in the sub-region.

By highlighting endogenous child protection practices, our study supports existing findings on the systemic approach in this area (UNICEF *et al.* 2012). Guided by a new international trend, this approach favours a broader intervention framework that includes legal and policy contexts, institutional capacity, community contexts and planning, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation subsystems.

Communities – and their endogenous practices, which can be very effective – are at the heart of this system. The key determinants to consider in this approach are: community ownership; support from leaders; and using existing knowledge, know-how and resources related to formal and non-formal structures. By encouraging participation and focusing on the situation of children, this approach will help address and manage issues of power and diversity.

# Main recommendations

We have several recommendations to help a number of actors recognise the value of endogenous child protection practices and other community mechanisms to improve the humanitarian response to child protection issues in Mali. These actors include:

- NGOs, national associations and international organisations that are working on the ground with children and their communities

- National government

- Local authorities, structures and representatives, and

- The academic and research community, to help them carry out specific works to consolidate our results through arguments and evidence from the field.

We recommend that:

- NGOs, international organisations and the academic world continue to research and publish studies and other knowledge products on endogenous child protection practices in Mali to improve our understanding of the contexts of intervention and identification of endogenous child protection practice. This will help improve all actors' (and in particular institutional actors') knowledge and recognition of endogenous child protection practice through mapping, research, anthropological studies, publications and recording good practice on experiences of strengthening existing endogenous child protection practices.

- NGOs and local associations strengthen their advocacy capacity to influence all development actors to ensure they integrate endogenous child protection practices into their programme documents and intervention strategies.

- NGOs, state and international organisations systematically complete an exhaustive map of actors in each intervention context (prefecture, region and community level), fully integrating all community actors, to better understand and value existing opportunities, resources and dynamics that to improve child protection.

- NGOs and international organisations strengthen their advocacy capacity to influence the Malian state to continue efforts to integrate community-based child protection mechanisms into national policy and reference documents. This will have the advantage of guiding various stakeholders and harmonising different collaborative approaches.

- NGOs, the state and international organisations recognise and empower community actors in different contexts related to the protection of children's needs. They should continue to strengthen community actors' operational capacity to identify vulnerable children and support the provision of community protection services by linking them with their own responses.

- NGOs, the state and international organisations ensure that community leaders are better integrated into the case management process (at different stages) of individual children. This includes monitoring situations and reporting any new vulnerabilities in the event of relapse or aggravation of the situation of children accompanied by various partners.

- NGOs, the state and international organisations build baseline and tracking mechanisms that clearly involve and empower communities, especially parents, families and community leaders. This will involve strengthening links at central, devolved and decentralised levels between community mechanisms and institutional protection services, particularly in conflict or emergency zones. At the same time, they should continue share, consult and collaborate on a warning, reporting and referral system for children in need of protection.

- NGOs, national associations, the state and international actors work directly with communities to identify risk and protective factors at child, family and community levels for children in emergencies in different sociocultural contexts.

- NGOs, the state and international organisations support the creation of protection networks in each intervention context that link formal and non-formal actors to establish an ongoing dialogue and sustainable opportunities to collaborate to improve the quality of child protection via rapid, concerted, integrated and holistic responses to children's concerns.

- Municipalities and decentralised structures support community partners to develop and implement community action plans for protecting children in sensitive areas (conflicts), restoring to them the main role of supporting children.

- NGOs, national associations, the state and international actors ensure a good understanding, appropriation and integration of community leaders in standard operating procedures, to ensure quality interventions. Because community leaders organise interventions and coordinate actors in emergency contexts, it is important to clearly define the roles and contributions of community partners in different processes.

- NGOs, the state and international organisations identify host families up-front, preparing them and strengthening their capacities (through training and material support) so they are ready to receive and provide emergency accommodation for children on the move and victims of violence and exploitation.

- Different child protection services support the creation and functioning of child gathering spaces, which provide an opportunity to access children on the move for the deployment of services and accompanying measures.

- Institutional actors capitalise, document and disseminate good practices and lessons learned around integrating endogenous child protection practices to generate interest and support from all stakeholders.

- Institutional actors take care not to systematically generate or impose a formalisation of endogenous child protection practices when recognising them, including them in protection mechanisms or collaborating with communities. Deep change risks distorting these practices and disrupting the logics, motivations and interests of community actors, including children themselves.

# Conclusion

Our study attests the existence of endogenous child protection practices in Timbuktu and Gao and a strong commitment by children, families and communities to make child protection a reality.

Endogenous child protection practices are numerous, varied and involve individuals and specific community groups, and studies can show their added value, ensuring they are to understood and recognised. Endogenous and exogenous protection practices can coexist. An integrated approach has many advantages, including establishing close links between endogenous child protection practices developed in a child's departure area and the actors involved in their transit and destination area. Such an approach will help both external organisations and the state achieve their intervention objectives, particularly in the context of protective support for children on the move.

Providing local-level support to actors on the ground, strengthening practices developed through collaboration with services offered by institutional actors, and a clear and unequivocal integration of endogenous practices and community actors in protection arrangements will help add value to community involvement.

Our study has shown that endogenous practices and community protection mechanisms are a fundamental asset that humanitarian and development organisations must continue to identify, strengthen and value. For grassroots projects and interventions, these links will play a major part in achieving good results in child protection. This was also the main message at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, which reaffirmed the relevance and necessity for all actors to act according to this logic.

Unfortunately, our literature review shows that endogenous child protection practices in Mali remain poorly documented and rarely covered by university or other research. We therefore recommend that all actors take this into account and prioritise it in their action plans.

Despite our emphasis on Timbuktu and Gao, our study offers a comprehensive view of the protection of children on the move in Mali, revealing a variety of horizontal endogenous child protection practices that can be strengthened as they are, but can also be integrated into interventions that adopt a vertical approach. Regardless of whether we talk about endogenous protection practices or community mechanisms, the issue at stake is linking their efforts with the formal institutional system.

Community-based approaches are an effective way of restoring the wellbeing of children affected by conflict or natural disaster by enabling communities to regain control over their own lives. They restore basic social services such as schools, health facilities and recreational activities and help restore or create other community support structures, enabling people to address the problems they face. This is fundamental for community resilience, particularly in the emergency context, where the challenges of protecting children are higher.

Generally, we found that national child protection systems and their formal components remain weak, particularly outside of major cities. Social services are limited and rarely specialise in integrating cultural factors and specific emergency needs into child protection.

Child protection actors also struggle to adapt a development approach to an appropriate emergency response. In an emergency situation – when children are often identified, documented, referred and monitored without the involvement of their families and without coordination with community actors – child protection is less efficient.

Our study shows that the children themselves, their families and their communities play a major role in child protection. The challenge remains for organisations to commit to putting endogenous child protection principles into practice and to share both good practice and lessons learnt. This is the main challenge, particularly in the context of the emergency situation in Mali in recent years; and every child – regardless of their situation – deserves the best level of protection.

# Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ASDEC | Association for the Safeguarding and Development of Quranic Schools |
| CAFO | Organisation of Women's Associations and NGOs of Mali |
| CMP | Commission Mouvement de Populations (Population Movement Commission) |
| DRC | Danish Refugee Council |
| DTM | Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM) |
| ENDA | Environment and Development Action in the Third World |
| ERW | explosive remnants of war |
| FCFA | West African francs |
| GREFFA | Groupe de Recherche, d'Étude, de Formation Femme Action (Women's action, research, study and training group) |
| IDPs | internally displaced persons |
| IIED | International Institute for Environment and Development |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| NGO | non-governmental organisation |
| NRC | Norwegian Refugee Council |
| OCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| RECOTRAD | Network of Traditional Communicators for Mali's Development |
| Tdh | Terre des Homes |
| UNHCR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |

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This study by Terre des Hommes in Mali aims to identify endogenous protection practices of children on the move in Gao and Timbuktu (Mali), analyse the relevance and use of these practices by humanitarian actors when developing child protection responses, and identify the challenges and approaches to integrating these practices into the national humanitarian response. Drawing mainly from Mali's emergency context, we make recommendations to help child protection actors improve their strategies while taking into account local context, field actors and any protection practices developed by the communities themselves.

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