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'THE ROLE OF
MANDATES'

MALI REPORT
THE LIMITS OF LABELS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Framing aid response simply in terms of a humanitarian-development nexus fails to acknowledge the variety of different approaches that are to be found within each category – 'humanitarian' and 'development'. Already those organisations who may fall within a humanitarian label either because of their mission or the role that they have taken up in a specific context will present a large variety of interpretations in terms of how they go about their work. An organisation may go broad and superficially, or narrowly and deep. Organisations may have similar activities but starting from very different or even opposite premises. It is not because organisations are labelled humanitarian that they are all the same. How they interpret humanitarian principles and how they prioritise needs will also translate differently. The framing of the humanitarian-development nexus requires nuancing.

Few contexts better than Mali can exemplify the different external challenges that confront aid agencies. When designing their response, they have to factor in significant geographical disparities both in terms of developmental progress and humanitarian needs, the conflict in the country's north and centre, increasing intercommunal violence, the regional and international fight against terrorism, and the presence of a UN integrated mission. Considering the multi-layered aspects of the humanitarian situation in Mali, different organisational approaches need to be leveraged to address the needs of the most vulnerable people. Because the needs of crisis-affected people in Mali are of structural origin as well as the result of peaks in violence or natural hazards, aid responses span from more traditional humanitarian approaches to long-term development-related investments. From the perspective of NGOs however, it appears that there are challenges in establishing clear boundaries between what may be defined as humanitarian or development approaches respectively. This leads not only to a loss of focus, but also to a dilemma as regards the role that NGOs are called upon to play, especially in

THERE ARE LIMITS TO THE USE OF LABELS.

the absence of a space for strategic dialogue. The result is that NGOs tend to adapt to the current funding context rather than trying to shift the balance. Overall, the Mali example indicates that there are limits to the use of labels.

Labels are generally helpful in informing expectations about a particular product or issue. In Mali, the labels of 'humanitarian' and 'development' provide valuable guidance as to an organisation's purpose (why they deliver aid) and in informing their prioritisation efforts (what type of aid and for whom). The principles of impartiality and neutrality are indeed essential qualifiers for humanitarian action. The labels reach their limits, however, in illustrating how organisations actually carry out their activities. How do organisations operationalise their humanitarian mission in such a multi-layered environment? What if organisations cannot use their NGO/humanitarian identity visibly because being perceived Western makes them a target? How do organisations manage the relationships with non-state armed groups when these pursue both ideological and criminal intents? How can organisations ensure that they do not do State substitution if there is no State to take over?

Mali was chosen as the pilot mission in the framework of HERE's so-called 'Mandates Study' because it presents a complex context of overlapping and sometimes conflicting issues that make the research questions of that project all the more significant. Exploring the priority-setting of organisations with varying 'mandates' – broadly understood here as their goal or mission – and against external parameters such as institutional funding, becomes particularly relevant in a context where they have to work around conflicting labels of humanitarian and development needs, emergency and long-term impact, and issues referring to the integration, stabilisation, and counter-terrorism agendas of a number of military operations.

ACRONYMS

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
DCA	DanChurchAid
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid
FONGIM	Forum des ONG Internationales au Mali
GTAH	Groupe Technique Assistance Humanitaire
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HERE	Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre
HQ	Headquarters
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICRC	The International Committee of the Red Cross
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NFI	Non-Food Items
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHH	Welthungerhilfe

1 — INTRODUCTION

Few contexts better than Mali can exemplify the different external challenges that confront aid agencies. When designing their response, they have to factor in significant geographical disparities both in terms of developmental progress and humanitarian needs, the conflict in the country's north and centre, increasing intercommunal violence, the regional and international fight against terrorism, and the presence of a UN integrated mission with a stabilisation mandate. How each organisation addresses these challenges may be different, however. Considering the multi-layered aspects of the humanitarian situation in Mali, different organisational approaches will need to be leveraged to address the needs of the most vulnerable people. And indeed, practitioners have long been advocating for greater complementarity between humanitarian and development approaches.

Delivery of humanitarian response in armed conflict situations can be highly politicised and is often hindered by insecurity and capacity restrictions. In such contexts, little effort, however, has so far been spent to understand whether operational 'mandates' enable organisations to deliver humanitarian response in armed conflicts or not. Humanitarian discourse frequently distinguishes between 'multi-' or 'single-mandate' organisations, depending on whether they define their purposes broadly, or whether they focus exclusively on life-saving assistance in emergency settings (Wendt and Hiemstra, 2016). Nevertheless, there is a lack of evidence and common understanding of the practical opportunities and limitations that would arise from the different ways in which organisations set priorities and make strategic choices. The research behind this report was carried out as part of HERE's so-called 'Mandates Study', which looks into precisely these issues. Mali was chosen as the pilot field case-study because it presents a complex context of overlapping and sometimes conflicting

BACKGROUND

The research behind this report was carried out as part of HERE's broader study on "The role of 'mandates' in humanitarian priority setting for INGOs in situations of armed conflict". This so-called 'Mandates Study' takes a look at organisational decision-making, and how it impacts effective aid delivery on the ground. The term 'mandate' is therefore understood broadly as an organisation's goal or mission and not in its legal meaning. The aim is to clarify what differences there are between organisations in terms of how they set priorities and come to strategic choices, and what the advantages and disadvantages of different 'mandates' are. This analysis will benefit operational organisations as well as donors, as it will improve the understanding of the different approaches and their implications, and suggest ways to build on such differences for a more effective humanitarian system. Eight organisations are participating in the study: DanChurchAid, MSF-Spain, Concern Worldwide, NRC, ACF, IRC, Welthungerhilfe, and the ICRC.

The research for the Mandates Study is carried out from two angles. Firstly, it explores the strategic orientation of the participating organisations from the point of view of their headquarters (HQ), with regard to policy thinking, relations with donors, and public positioning. The findings from the HQ research phase will be published in a separate report.

Secondly, the research focuses on the field, looking at how organisational policies and values translate into practice. Mali was the pilot case-study, and this report provides an overview of how the participating organisations work to provide aid in that context.

A final report will combine the findings from the HQ and the field research, drawing linkages between the ways in which organisations perceive their 'mandate' (broadly interpreted), and the ways in which they approach their work in practice.

issues that make the research questions of the Mandates Study all the more significant. How do organisations make decisions when they have to work around conflicting labels of humanitarian and development needs, emergency and long-term impact, and issues referring to the integration, stabilisation, and counter-terrorism agendas of a number of military operations?

In order to lay part of the groundwork towards answering the broader questions of the Mandates Study,[1] the sections below delve into some of the elements characterising the humanitarian response in Mali, from the angle of the particular experience of DanChurchAid (DCA), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Barcelona Operational Centre of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF-OCBA), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and Welthungerhilfe (WHH). As such, the findings discussed in this report will need to be taken at face value as they provide only a glimpse into some of the trends underpinning the work of aid agencies more broadly in Mali.

After an outline of the methodological approach taken for this case-study, and a reminder of the contextual elements of the current humanitarian response in Mali, this report will examine how organisations are responding to the external challenges of their work and what factors are enabling or hampering their programmes. It will also look into whether aid agencies display certain complementarities and if so how these can be best leveraged. This will be done in three sections looking in turn at *why* organisations are working in Mali, *what* activities they prioritise, and *how* they go about implementing them.

▬▬ 1.1
Methodological approach

In the framework of HERE's Mandates Study, a Research Team of two visited Bamako between 29 April and 8 May 2018, aiming to analyse how organisational policies and values translate into practice in a country affected by armed conflict. In line with the

THE FOCUS IS ON THE CONTEXT, AND NOT ON THE TYPE OF NEED.

overall methodology of the Mandates Study,[2] the approach taken by the Research Team in Mali was exploratory rather than evaluative: the intention was not to answer the normative question of "which type of 'mandate' is best", or to find which organisations fall into which category,[3] but rather to clarify what differences there are between organisations in terms of how they go about their activities in the field. This study does not intend to look at how organisations address emergency needs specifically, but rather to look at how they are able to work in complex settings. The focus is on the context, and not on the type of need.

In Bamako, the team carried out semi-structured interviews with an average of 5-6 members of staff from each of the organisations that participate in the study.[4] The types of staff met with varied, but tended to include the Country Director, the Director of Programmes, Programme Coordinators, Finance Coordinators, and staff in charge of emergency, access, and security management.

To gather a multifaceted picture of the Mali context, additional interviews were also held with representatives from non-participating organisations,[5] UN agencies,[6] and donors.[7]

The aim of the research was to look at the five aid agencies and their decision-making in the context of their own organisational frameworks and values, rather than assessing whether the five organisations are doing the 'right thing' in view of the overall context of Mali. The questions posed to the staff of the participating organisations concerned

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1 The Mandates Study addresses three main questions: (1) Is it helpful to talk about mandate distinctions? What does it mean? (2) In regard to humanitarian organisations' capacity to work in situations of armed conflict, what opportunities and/or limitations arise from different 'mandates'? (3) Where do these opportunities and/or limitations appear to allow for complementarity between organisations? Where do they engender competition or tensions, such as policy differences, incommensurable priorities, and different target groups?

2 See the Concept Note for the project, available at http://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HERE-Mandates-Study-Concept-Brief-Sep-2016.pdf.

3 The appropriateness of the expressions 'multi-' or 'single-mandate' organisations in general, and the extent to which they pertain to the organisations participating in this study in particular, will be discussed in more detail as part of the findings from the headquarters research phase.

4 The team primarily interviewed staff from DanChurchAid (5 staff members), IRC (9 staff members), NRC (5 staff members), MSF-Spain (4 staff members), and Welthungerhilfe (4 staff members). Insights gleaned from a meeting with the Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have also been included in the analysis. ACF-France and Concern Worldwide are also participating in the Mandates Study, but as they do not have a presence in Mali they are excluded from the analysis pertaining to this case.

5 Première Urgence, MSF-France, and ACF-Spain.

6 OCHA, and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus Advisor hosted by WFP.

7 ECHO and USAID's Office of Food for Peace.

ongoing activities at the time of the visit, but also the different staff members' definition and understanding of the 'mandate' and values of their organisation, as well as what they would argue that their organisation does particularly well or less well in Mali. The Research Team was further interested in knowing in general terms for example how the organisations work to operationalise the humanitarian principles, how they decide upon and prioritise activity areas in Mali, and how to characterise their relationships with donors, local and international partners, and affected populations and host communities. To seize the ways in which individual staff members frame their organisation and its work in regard to some of these issues, all interviewees were also asked to complete a 2-page Perception Study (see Annex 2). Throughout the data analysis, the Research Team has borne in mind that the findings from the Perception Study essentially speak for the persons who were consulted. To triangulate or complement the insights gathered through the interviews and the Perception Study, the Research Team has also carried out a desk-based literature review of publicly available annual reports and strategies from the five participating organisations.

1.2
Limitations

The Mali case-study was designed as a pilot case-study, and as such, the Research Team time was able to test certain methodological approaches and angles of research. The findings from Mali also provide an opportunity to adjust the methodology as appropriate for the following case-studies. Overall, the research in Mali may have benefited from greater interaction with a larger range of staff in the different organisations. Furthermore, due to the operational specificities of Mali, and the constraints of access to field locations, the Research Team could not visit programmes in person to gather the views of implementing staff and affected populations. Where possible, the Research Team was instead in remote contact with field coordinators from the different organisations.

As regards the limitations of this study, it is also important to highlight that it is largely based on the perceptions that key interviewees have of the work of the humanitarian community in Mali in general, and of the work of their own organisation in particular.

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH IS TO LOOK AT AGENCIES' DECISION-MAKING.

Finally, while the study focuses on the work of a few international organisations, interviews with local authorities and beneficiaries may provide with additional insights as to how aid agencies are perceived by a larger group of stakeholders. Despite attempts at gathering as many details as possible as to humanitarian funding flows, not all information was readily available, and the analysis is therefore partial.

1.3
The humanitarian context of Mali

In 2012, violent conflict broke out between insurgent groups in the north of Mali and the central government, displacing half a million people in a country that was already an important transit point for migratory flows. One of the poorest countries in the world,[8] mutual distrust between Bamako and the North had been fuelling instability for decades. The ethnic divisions and the gradual withdrawal of the Malian state over the years also offered an opportunity for insurgent groups[9] to settle and gradually gain influence in the north (Chauzal and Van Damme, 2015, chap. 2). The 2012 insurgency reinforced what was already a fragile humanitarian situation. Arguably, there is not one single crisis in Mali, but an overlap of crises that add up to a chronic crisis-situation (MSF, 2017): urgent needs stemming from climate-related vulnerabilities and the conflict added to structural needs linked to poor governance, lack of social cohesion, generally poor economic indicators, and persistent food insecurity (STAIT, 2017).

In 2015, a peace agreement was signed between the Malian government, and the two main armed coalitions. Albeit as a tokenistic presence in some cases, Malian authorities have since been able to gradually return to the

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8   The 2018 Human Development Index ranks Mali 182 out of 189 countries (see http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI), and almost 50% of the population live below the poverty line of USD2 per day (OCHA, 2018a).

9   This term is used broadly to refer to a number of different groups present in Mali (cf. https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2018/02/19/shifting-relationships-growing-threats-who-s-who-insurgent-groups-sahel). Throughout the text, this terms will be used alongside "non-state armed actors".

north,[10] but many remote areas are still lacking basic services. Armed violence involving both signatories and non-signatories to the 2015 Peace Agreement, as well as ethnic tensions and communal conflicts, have since been further spreading to the central regions of the country.

The Malian government and armed forces are supported by a number of international and regional military forces. These include Barkhane, a French military operation authorised by the UN Security Council, and the G5 Sahel task force set up through a coordination framework of five West African countries. Barkhane and the G5 Sahel task force both have a counter-terrorism focus.[11] The Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union also has a number of missions in the Sahel, which aim to provide training and advice on fighting terrorism and organised crime.[12] The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), present since 2013, aims on the other hand to support political processes and provide protection of civilians.[13]

Today, approximately 4.3 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in Mali (OCHA, 2018b). The 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) projects that USD 263 million are needed to support a target of 1.56 million people. Humanitarian aid dedicated to Mali peaked at USD 265 million in 2013 (56% of the requested funds that year). As of October 2018, USD 111.2 million, or 34% of the now requested USD 329.6 million, have been received. The HRP highlights that humanitarian assistance is to be guided exclusively by needs, and that the particular vulnerabilities of the northern and central regions are hence to be prioritised. Without clearly indicating how funds are to be distributed between them, the HRP forwards three strategic objectives: providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people, reinforcing vulnerable people's access to social basic services, and strengthening means of subsistence and resilience of vulnerable populations, as well as emergency preparedness (OCHA, 2018a, p. 12). The HRP further emphasises that its strategic objectives

KEY EVENTS

2012		
Jan.	Fighting breaks out in northern Mali	
Mar.	Coup in Bamako	
Mar.- Apr.	Rebels capture Kidal, Gao & Timbuktu	
2013		
Jan.	The Malian army, supported by the French Operation Serval, retakes parts of the north	
June	Ouagadougou cease-fire agreement between Mali's interim government and rebels	
July	Deployment of MINUSMA	
July-Aug.	Presidential elections	
2014		
May	Renewed fighting in northern Mali.	
Aug.	Operation Barkhane succeeds Serval	
Nov.-Dec.	Legislative elections	
2015		
June	Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation	
2016		
July	Resumption of fighting in Kidal	
2017		
Feb.-Mar.	Authorities established in Ménaka, Gao and Kidal	
Mar.	Motorcycle restriction in Mopti/Segou	
Apr.	Authorities established in Timbuktu	
Dec.	MINUSMA supports the G5 Sahel force	
2018		
July-Aug.	Presidential elections	

are to be seen in light of the urgent situations generated by the violence, but that any context analysis will need to consider "chronic and structural vulnerabilities of the populations in the emergency-development framework advocated by the New Way of Working strategy" (OCHA, 2018a, p. 12, See also OCHA, 2017).

The increasing number of protracted crises[14] aid agencies are working in has brought some renewed urgency to calls for greater collaboration, and the Mali HRP does emphasise that the humanitarian-development nexus[15] laid down in the Grand Bargain is an opportunity to be seized in Mali, in particular for "conflict-affected areas where structural investments are essential to enable people to move out of the emergency phase and gain

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10   See https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/mali-returns-interim-authorities-to-last-northern-cities-idUSKBN17M2ZA

11   See https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/operations/barkhane/actualites/lancement-de-l-operation-barkhane.

12   For example the EUTM Mali mission launched through Council Decision 2013/87/CFSP (see http://eutmmali.eu), and the EUCAP Sahel Mali mission approved through Council Decision 2014/219(CFSP) through (see https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eucap-sahel-mali_fr).

13   See Security Council Resolution 2423 (2018), adopted on 28 June 2018, renewing MINUSMA's mandate.

14   The term "protracted crises" is meant to refer to their longevity and intractability and should not be read as a synonym of 'inactive conflicts'. More as to the current characterisation of the conflict in Mali in section 4.3 below.

15   The nexus can also be read as including a peace component bexond a development and humanitarian one.

greater autonomy" (OCHA, 2018a, p. 19). In delivering on the nexus, there is however a need for evidence on what it could look like on the ground, and for suggestions of how roadblocks could be overcome and the necessary humanitarian independence maintained. To gain some insight, it is helpful to understand to what end five different international NGOs work in Mali (section 2), what type of activities they have chosen to implement (section 3), and how they go about doing this (section 3).

2 — THE WHY OF AID

Because the needs of crisis-affected people in Mali are of structural origin as well as the result of peaks in armed and criminal violence, the current situation warrants a variety of different, yet complementary responses spanning from more traditional humanitarian approaches to long-term development-related investments. The Mandates Study originates in a recognition that a majority of international NGOs that are active in humanitarian response define their purposes broadly, to include both short-term emergency response and long-term development engagement. In contrast, a small minority of organisations set out to focus exclusively on life-saving assistance in emergency settings. Looking at the organisations' overall goals and the reasons why they chose to work in the country in the first place helps better understand the way in which the five participating organisations frame their work in Mali in terms of 'humanitarian' and 'development' approaches.

2.1
'Humanitarian' or 'development' rationale?

Prior to the 2012 coup, Mali was hailed by many multilateral and international NGOs as a development success, despite largely questionable results (IRIN, 2013). With the crisis, many new international NGOs established their presence in the country to respond to the most immediate emergency needs, and in doing so they found themselves working alongside others who had been there for decades. The table in Annex 1 to this report

provides an overview of the types of operations of the five organisations part of this research. As can be seen in the table, four of the five established a presence in Mali either in 2012 (IRC and MSF-Spain) or 2013 (NRC and DCA). The fifth organisation, Welthungerhilfe, had on the other hand been working in the country since the late 1960s.

For the organisations that came to Mali in 2012 or 2013, meeting the humanitarian needs directly resulting from the 2012 insurgency was the driving factor. However, the four took slightly different trajectories, reflecting the differences in the way they frame their purposes and articulate their approach. With an overall objective of preserving lives and alleviating suffering through medical care, the Spanish section of MSF argues that it does "not aspire to transform a society, but to enable it to overcome a critical period" arguing further that "this is why our interventions are limited in time."[16] Thus, when the Spanish section of MSF began its operations in Mali in early 2012, it was with the specific aim of providing emergency support in a part of the country directly touched by the crisis (MSF-Spain, 2013, p. 72).[17]

Like MSF-Spain, IRC's primary aim in Mali in early 2012 was to respond to humanitarian needs resulting from the conflict. Taking a more multisectoral approach however, the organisation did not focus only on providing emergency relief but came in also with the longer-term ambition to strengthen services and economic wellbeing. This fit with IRC's relatively broad aim of "help[ing] people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control over their futures".[18]

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN MALI WARRANTS A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT, YET COMPLEMENTARY RESPONSES.

16   Translated from the Spanish on MSF-Spain's website, see https://www.msf.es/conocenos/quienes-somos.

17   It should be noted that the French section of MSF had already been present in Mali since 2009 but with work geared mainly towards medium/long-term projects.

18   https://www.rescue.org/what-we-do.

With an overall goal of protecting the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons during crises, NRC – like IRC – sets out to meet immediate humanitarian needs at the same time as it works to prevent further hardship and contribute to durable solutions.[19] This is done through an integrated approach, based on six core competencies.[20] NRC first responded in 2012 by supporting refugees through a programme in Burkina Faso. In early 2013, the organisation then set up a country office in Mali "to provide lifesaving short-term and long-term aid to displaced people in Mali, as well as the most vulnerable among those host communities in areas of displacement" (NRC, 2018).

While the three above-mentioned organisations set up work in Mali at their own initiative, DanChurchAid responded to a more direct request for assistance by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), in 2013 (DCA, 2014a). Smaller than the other three, DCA works "to help and be advocates of oppressed, neglected and marginalised groups in poor countries and to strengthen their possibilities of a life in dignity."[21] This work involves working through partners to provide emergency relief in disaster-stricken areas as well as long-term development assistance in poor regions, all in view of creating "a more equitable and sustainable world".[22]

Unlike the other four organisations, the German organisation Welthungerhilfe was present in Mali long before the 2012 insurgency. Since 1968, the organisation has been working closely with national partner organisations to develop their and the population's capacities with a focus on food security and nutrition. Welthungerhilfedone opened its own offices in 1999 and is working towards an ultimate goal to eradicate hunger by 2030 (WHH, 2016). WHH's emergency aid activities in Mali have become closely linked to whether the outcomes of their development projects would be threatened by the crisis. In this case as well, the implementation of project activities is ensured through the close collaboration with national non-governmental partner organisations.

ORGANISATIONS' OVERALL GOALS ARE WELL REFLECTED IN THE WAY THEIR WORK IS PERCEIVED.

2.2
Perceptions of the organisations' purposes

On the whole, it appears that the reasons why the five organisations have set up work in Mali, and the way they articulate their overall goals in terms of providing only short-term humanitarian relief or also longer-term development assistance are well reflected in the way their work is perceived – be it by their own staff or by staff from other organisations. As part of the research in Bamako, all interviewees were asked to complete a Perception Study, indicating among other things where they would put their own organisation – as well as other organisations they were familiar with – on a grid (see Annex 2). One axis of the grid ranged from more traditional humanitarian approaches to long-term development and peace-related investments, and the other axis indicated the level of independence from donor or host governments. Figure 1 provides the combined average results from this study, with the coloured-in circles indicating where staff from a particular agency placed their own organisation, and the outlined circles showing where representatives from other organisations would place that same agency.[23] While the question of how organisations see themselves and others is an issue that will be discussed in much more detail in the report highlighting the findings from the headquarters phase of this research project,[24] it is worth noting that the findings from Mali already indicate that staff from different organisations clearly see themselves as having different starting points in regard to how they frame their activities in terms of development or humanitarian focus.

The organisation where the self-perception and the perception of others is the closest

19   See https://www.nrc.no/who-we-are/mission-statement/.

20   NRC's six core competencies are camp management, food assistance, clean water, shelter, legal aid, and education (NRC, 2017).

21   See https://www.danchurchaid.org/articles/the-abc-s-of-advocacy.

22   https://www.danchurchaid.org/about-dca.

23   Figure 1 only provides the self-perception circle for DCA, because staff from the other participating organisations were not familiar enough with DCA to place it on the grid.

24   The headquarters research phase specifically concerns the strategic orientation of the participating organisations, looking at issues such as policy thinking, relations with donors, and public positioning.
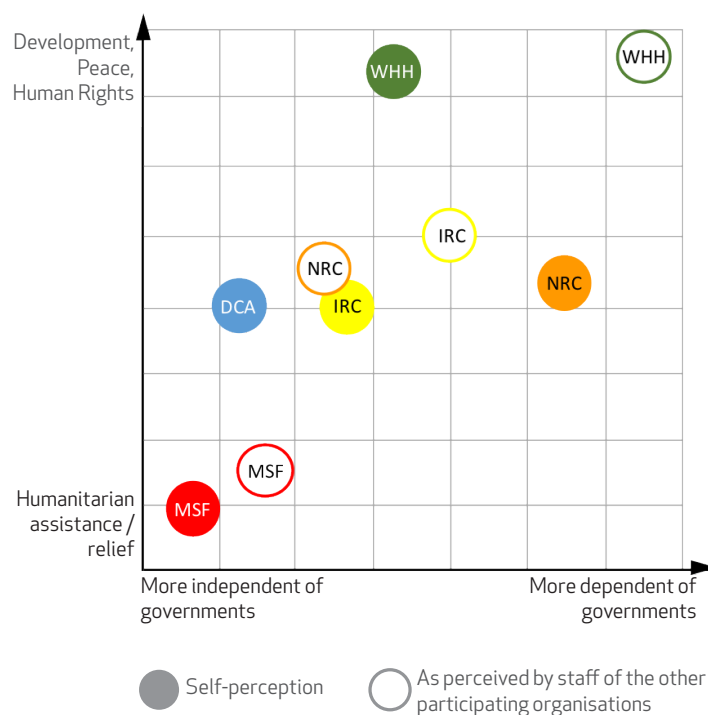
Figure 1: Combined average results of perception study grid in Annex 2 (views of approx. 5-6 Mali-based staff members per organisation, in May 2018)

is MSF-Spain.[25] Frequently given – together with the ICRC – as a type-example of a 'single-mandate' organisation (Slim and Bradley, 2013; Krause, 2014; Hilhorst and Pereboom, 2016), interviewees did not hesitate to place MSF-Spain in the bottom-left corner of the grid, as the organisation that is most focused on traditional humanitarian emergency relief activities. It is also the organisation out of the five that is seen to be the most independent from governments – be they host or donor. The argument that interviewees gave in this respect was overwhelmingly MSF's high percentage of private funding. For MSF, on the other hand, it is their commitments to operationalising the humanitarian principles that accounts for the organisation's degree of independence: the priority given to the principles precedes and explains their funding model.

Three organisations can be found in the middle of the grid in terms of their purposes, with DCA, NRC and IRC all being seen as engaging more or less equally in view of providing humanitarian emergency relief, and longer-term development-type aid. This clearly also fits with their stated goals, as discussed above. Views differed however in regard to the relationship with state structures, and interestingly, while NRC saw itself as more dependent on

governments than how other organisations saw them, it was the other way around for IRC. Like for MSF-Spain, the discussions around independence for NRC and IRC were also linked to funding, with interviewees from both organisations explaining that when it is necessary to specify whether it is humanitarian or development funds that are required, the scope of independent action on behalf of the organisation suffers.[26] It is interesting to note in this regard however that staff from DCA, an organisation which also works with humanitarian and development goals, found that the organisation is rather independent in Mali. The interviews clarified that they base this argument on the fact that the Danish government funding they rely on is very flexible.

In regard to its type of activities, WHH was placed at the opposite end of MSF-Spain, fitting the idea of an organisation that has been working through a development lens in Mali since decades. Interestingly, while the other participating organisations tended to perceive the work of WHH as very closely linked to state structures precisely due to this development focus, staff from WHH saw themselves as more independent, highlighting primarily that while they are reliant on funding from donor governments, and work in close connection with national authorities, the organisation is flexible when it comes to setting priorities.

25   It should be noted that in the Perception Study, the staff from the other organisations placing MSF on the grid tended to not distinguish between MSF-Spain and MSF-France in their perceptions, and the results in Figure 1 have therefore merged the two.

26   For further discussion on the link between the operations of the five organisations and the funds available in Mali, see section 4.2 below.

3 — THE WHAT OF AID

At first glance, it is consequently possible to draw a rather stereotypical picture, with MSF-Spain at the one end as the quintessential 'single-mandate' humanitarian organisation, WHH at the other end as the organisation that is more traditionally geared towards development, and NRC, IRC, and DCA in the middle, as so-called 'multi-mandate' organisations.[27] At the same time however, the differences that can be observed in Figure 1 between how organisations view their own work, and how other organisations view it indicate that there is no commonly negotiated understanding of what activities belong in what category, or how relationships to state structures should be categorised. How then does the "stereotypical" picture translate in reality, when it comes to the aid that these organisations actually provide?

What is clear both from the interviews carried out in Bamako, and from an analysis of the country strategies of the different organisations, is that they all formulate their response in Mali based on needs. As just discussed however, their entry points and ultimate goals vary, making it important to take a better look at the actual activities that they carry out, and the way in which they set their priorities in a context where humanitarian and development needs are increasingly blurred.

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27   The appropriateness of the expressions 'multi-' or 'single-mandate' organisations in general, and the extent to which they pertain to the organisations participating in this study in particular, will be discussed in more detail as part of the findings from the headquarters research phase.

THE WAY IN WHICH AN ORGANISATION INTERPRETS ITS 'MANDATE' IMPACTS ON ITS APPROACH TO NEEDS ASSESSMENTS AND PRIORITISATION.

Figure 2: Map of Mali

3.1
Where to respond

The way in which an organisation interprets its 'mandate' – broadly understood here as the organisation's goal, or mission – impacts on its approach to needs assessments and prioritisation. In the absence of a common agreement on which needs should be prioritised, and where, it follows that each organisation will use their own _raison d'être_ when deciding where to respond.

When MSF-Spain came to Mali in direct response to the 2012 crisis, it targeted the areas most affected by the conflict, where it felt that the most critical needs were. It began therefore by providing emergency aid in three primary care centres in Gossi, Wabaria, and Chanaria, all in the region of

	DCA	IRC	MSF Spain	NRC	WHH
Bamako		Health			
Gao		Education Food Security Protection	Health	Education Protection Shelter/NFIs WASH	Food Security
Kayes					Food Security
Kidal		Education WASH	Health		Food Security
Koulikoro	Mine Action Food Security	Health Nutrition WASH			
Mopti	Mine Action Social Cohesion (Armed Violence Reduction), Food Security	Health Nutrition WASH	Health	Education Food Security Protection Shelter/NFIs	Food Security
Segou	Mine Action Social Cohesion (Armed Violence Reduction), Food Security	Protection			
Sikasso					
Timbuktu		Protection		Education Food Security Protection Shelter/NFIs	Health Nutrition Food Security

Figure 3: Types of activities in Mali per organisation and region as of mid-2018 (Source: Mali Who does What Where (3W) August 2018 dataset, complemented by information provided by organisation staff)

Gao (see map in Figure 2). After the French military operation began, and with MSF-Spain's presence in Mali more firmly established, the strategy was redefined to focus on a reference health centre with minimum hospitalisation services in Ansongo, also in Gao (MSF-Spain, 2013). The choice of working in Gao was informed by an assessment that there was an acute humanitarian crisis in the region, and an enormous gap in health services, with insecurity preventing transport of medical supplies and the return of local authorities (MSF-Spain, 2013). MSF-Spain has a Sahel Emergency Medical Team (EMUSA), which is based in Niger, but also present in Mali according to needs. It is interesting to note that in 2016, while continuing its emergency work in Ansongo, MSF-Spain extended its activities to include also primary health care in Kidal, a region where the Malian government was completely absent (MSF-Spain, 2016). One respondent in Mali highlighted that for MSF, arriving in Kidal only in 2016 was considered late, but that the delay was due to the important clashes in the area at the time.[28] Because of the increased insecurity in the centre, MSF conducted an assessment mission in Mopti at the beginning of 2017, with a focus on Doeuntza.[29] It then initiated a project in the cercle of Doeuntza in mid 2017, focusing initially on supporting the town's hospital, later expanding to Boni, Hombori and Mondoro by mid 2018.

While MSF-Spain focused on the northern part of Mali and subsequently on the centre as the conflict/insecurity expanded there, both NRC and IRC set up programmes across the country at an early stage. IRC launched integrated programmes in education, nutrition, WASH, and child protection in Gao in the North, as well as in Koulikoro in the South, in April 2012. The reason IRC also focused on the south was that the organisation wanted a nutrition positioning, and Koulikoro was included for the prevention of acute undernourishment. By 2016, IRC had also established a presence in the centre, in Kidal and Mopti, again with integrated and multi-sectoral programmes, following the spread of the crisis. IRC still remains in the north, but focuses less on Gao, where they feel they have less of an added value, and more on Kidal and Ménaka. Ménaka is a region that is newly autonomous from Gao and which is still lacking state services. IRC finds that here the needs are higher, but there are fewer aid agencies present. The current strategy prioritises improving health, education, and economic wellbeing, specifically targeting

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28   For MSF, this meant negotiating access with non-state armed groups in the area and better understanding the local context. From mid 2015 to end 2016 MSF worked through remote management, which delayed programme implementation as well.

29   Considering the very limited presence of humanitarian organisations despite urgent needs and MSF-France's presence in Ténenkou.

IDPs, returnees from Niger and Burkina Faso, rural host communities, and marginalised communities (IRC, 2016, p. 3).

When NRC's country office in Mali was set up in early 2013, it primarily focused on the centre, supporting IDPs in Bamako, Ségou and Mopti with legal assistance, shelter, distribution of relief supplies, education and improved sanitation. At the end of the same year, NRC established a presence in Timbuktu and Gao however, to assist returnees (NRC, 2013, p. 2). Until 2017, NRC also had a small education programme in Kidal. It chose to withdraw from that region both because the programme was deemed too costly for its size, and to better manage existing resources. NRC is working in a consortium with IRC, with IRC covering Kidal, and NRC covering Timbuktu.

Coming to Mali in 2013, DCA directly established Mine Action programmes in Kidal (DCA, 2013, 2014a). The purpose of the programme was to protect and assist vulnerable populations and humanitarian workers in northern Mali through mine clearance and mine risk education. DCA left Kidal for security reasons in 2014 but continues to do explosives training in Timbuktu with UNMAS. Building on its initial programmes, DCA has over time also expanded its activities, now working through local partners to build community resilience, for example via community safety planning and livelihoods initiatives, focusing primarily in the centre of Mali, in Mopti and Ségou (DCA, 2014b, p. 27).

Since beginning its work in Mali in the 1960s, WHH had been engaging in various types of projects, all with the aim of eradicating hunger, primarily in the south. By mid-July 2013, when the other four participating organisations had also arrived in Mali, WHH was already conducting what they categorised as development projects in Sikasso, Ségou, and Mopti, rehabilitation/resilience projects in Koulikoro and Kayes, and humanitarian aid projects in Ségou and Timbuktu (WHH, 2013, p. 2). WHH are now present in most regions of Mali, conducting projects that include activities such as economic wellbeing of youth, prevention of malnutrition of women and children, rural rehabilitation, and resolution of conflicts linked to natural resources (WHH, 2018). Having worked in Mali for decades, WHH has developed several meaningful partnerships with local organisations, which since 2013 have also been able to carry out emergency work in

THE EXERCISE HIGHLIGHTED THAT THERE MAY BE DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS AROUND THE CONCEPT OF 'LOCALISATION'.

some of the areas which are most difficult to access. The table in Figure 3 gives an overview of the areas in which the five organisations work as of mid-2018, and the types of activities they engage in there.

In the absence of a space for strategic discussion on how to address the multiple layers of needs, it follows that organisations naturally revert to their institutional priorities when deciding where to respond. For example, it was logical that an organisation like MSF-Spain that aims to help with emergency health care in a critical period would target the areas of Mali most affected by the conflict. Similarly, it made sense for NRC for instance, to begin its operations in the more southern parts of Mali, as it was primarily aiming to assist IDPs.

3.2
Whom to prioritise

In a situation such as Mali, where needs of both structural and conjunctural origin are high in all sectors, everyone can say that they are addressing the most urgent needs in the areas where they are working. And indeed – all organisations that the team met with argued that this is precisely what they do. Through the above-mentioned Perception Study, interviewees were asked to indicate where they would place their own organisation and their humanitarian work in regard to certain characteristics (see Annex 2). Figure 4 provides the average results of this exercise, for all five organisations. As can be seen, the degree to which the interviewees found that their organisation ensures that operations target those *most* in need (as opposed to those who are simply *in need*), was relatively similar for all five, with most arguing very strongly that they are indeed targeting those most in need.[30]

While the principle of impartiality – as a tool to prioritise and allocate resources according to actual humanitarian needs[31] – was thus

30   Notably, one respondent argued that organisations need to ensure the principle of "do no harm" when distinguishing between people in need and people most in need as a difference in treatment may cause tensions within a community.

31   As commonly understood, the principle of impartiality entails both the degree to which an organisation's programme strategy ensures that aid is distributed on a non-discriminatory basis, and to which it aims to address those people *most* in need.
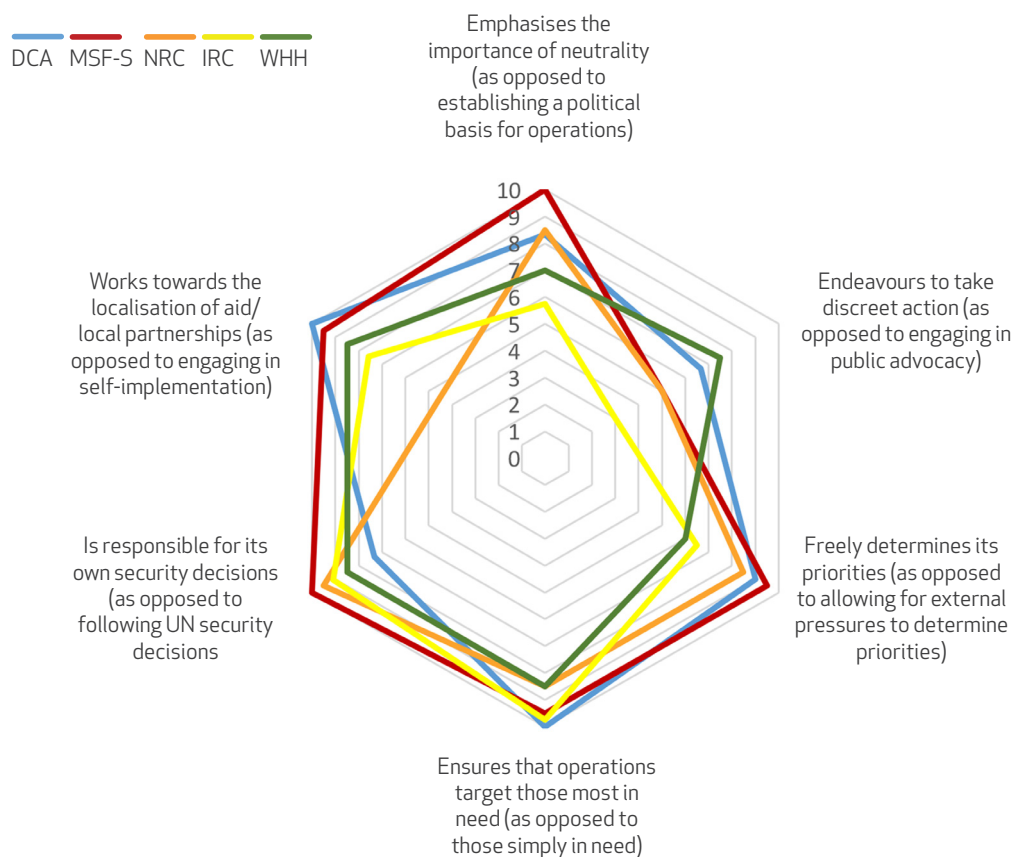
Figure 4: Combined average results of perception study identity exercise in Annex 2 (views in May 2018 of approx. 5-6 Mali-based staff members per organisation, with data corrected for outliers)

at the forefront of most individual agencies' concern, the research in Mali highlighted the absence of a common terminology, for example on what constitutes life-saving programming.[32] The lack of space to discuss such questions within the HCT and the lack of meaningful exchange between the HCT and the clusters in Bamako and the field have also contributed to little progress in commonly identifying and prioritising the *most* urgent needs.[33] As one respondent noted: "we don't have a common overall methodology, criteria for analysis, a reading grid" of the different micro-contexts and their needs. In view of the funding constraints in Mali, this becomes all the more significant, as choices need to be made. When looking at how impartiality is then implemented in practice, organisations also mention the importance of the principle of neutrality. As can be seen in Figure 4 above, all organisations emphasised the importance of neutrality for their humanitarian work, albeit to different degrees. Notably, what the exercise also highlighted is that there may be different understandings around the concept

of 'localisation'.[34] For some organisations, promoting localisation is understood as a policy objective per se, while for others, as in the case of MSF, localisation can be simply understood as working with and along local partners, such as the Ministry of Health.[35] Interestingly, in terms of perceptions, whether an organisation works through partners or through direct implementation did not seem to affect their views on their organisation's stance vis-à-vis neutrality and impartiality. Clearly, neutrality and impartiality appear as important qualifiers[36] for humanitarian action.

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32   The concept of life-saving can also be interpreted by some as preventive measurefor interventions implemented to prevent deaths.

33   For further discussion on the impact of the (lack of) humanitarian coordination in Mali, see section 4.3 below.

34   The research generally found that respondents were not familiar with the term "localisation", which tends to be used in global discussions.

35   It should be noted in this respect that while the respondents for MSF found that the context of Mali meant that the organisation has to work with and along local partners, albeit that MSF does not have a policy objective of « *localisation* » per se.

36   The principles of impartiality and neutrality are generally seen as slightly different as the first tends to be characterised as a substantive principle while the other as an operational one (Pictet, 1979). Here, however, both are being considered from an operational perspective based on the discussions held in Mali. Equally, this report does not intend to diminish the importance of the principle of independence but just to highlight the most relevant findings.

4 — THE HOW OF AID

Labels are generally helpful in informing expectations about a particular product or issue. As seen above, the labels of 'humanitarian' and 'development' provide valuable guidance as to an organisation's purpose (*why* they deliver aid) and in informing their prioritisation efforts (*what* type of aid and for whom). A majority of the respondents that the research team met with however – from all organisations – highlighted that in practice, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between humanitarian and development related needs and activities in Mali. For Welthungerhilfe's, emergency relief activities have become a necessary tool to ensure their target groups have durable access to food and are more resilient in the face of recurrent crises (WHH, n.d.). Conversely, with the crisis evolving over the years, those organisations that arrived in Mali in 2012-2013 to provide an immediate response to the conflict have had to adjust their programming to adapt to the changing needs. This has meant also undertaking activities that are targeting more structural issues. The end result is that organisations that originally set out to work with different goals, and through different types of approaches have seemingly ended up engaged in relatively similar activities.

While different organisations may implement similar programmes, however, *how* they do what they do can often be used to explain in what way an organisation is different

from another. Humanitarian actors need to accommodate both internal tensions deriving from their organisational set-up (Slim and Bradley, 2013) and external ones intimately linked to specific contextual elements. How they are able to approach and manage these tensions if at all can be an indication of the overall capacity of the humanitarian system to address humanitarian needs in a given context. From the perspective of the NGOs in Mali, it appears that there are challenges in establishing clear boundaries between what may be defined as 'humanitarian' or 'development' approaches respectively. This can lead not only to a loss of focus, but also to a dilemma as regards the role that NGOs are called upon to play. The labels reach their limits in illustrating how organisations actually carry out their activities.

The limits of labels are particularly evident when organisations need to navigate challenges as they can be a source of dilemmas as well as exacerbate existing tensions. While the principles of neutrality and impartiality retain their significance as qualifiers for humanitarian work, their operationalisation needs to be nuanced against contextual considerations. This involves a weighing of interests between "saving lives today [...] and maintaining the organisation's ability to save lives tomorrow" (Labbé and Daudin, 2016, p. 200; Schenkenberg and Wendt, 2017), which creates tensions between short- and long-term goals. The interviews pointed to four areas as particularly challenging in this regard.

WHILE DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS MAY IMPLEMENT SIMILAR PROGRAMMES, *HOW* THEY DO WHAT THEY DO CAN OFTEN BE USED TO EXPLAIN IN WHAT WAY AN ORGANISATION IS DIFFERENT FROM ANOTHER

▬▬ 4.1
Working in a state vacuum

Organisations operating in northern Mali and combining humanitarian programming with more longer-term objectives especially in the education and food security sectors, but also in health, stressed the challenge of operating in an environment where the State is entirely or mostly absent. As it has been noted in the literature (Carter, 2013), temporary state substitution can be a step towards state-building as foreseen in stabilisation agendas as restoring service delivery is also meant to consolidate trust in formal political processes. For organisations that arrived in Mali with a clear humanitarian goal, finding themselves progressively taking on a service provider role that is more in line with the function of the State raises tensions. Implementing programmes in a way that resembles state substitution and can thus further a state building goal is clearly at odds with a more humanitarian one. The risk is also to jeopardise an organisation's neutrality especially as non-state armed actors perceive the State as the enemy. At the same time, even for an organisation like Welthungerhilfe, who has been working through a development lens for many years, supporting the State in its functions requires an unrelenting commitment when there is a crisis of governance. Not having an interlocutor for the implementation of the programmes means endangering both the sustainability of aid programmes and any possible exit strategy.

For the reasons above, state substitution is not the strategy of choice for any of the organisations that the research team met with. Tensions are however evident when different organisations adopt different approaches in the same areas. For example, respondents from two different organisations highlighted the long-standing debate between free healthcare and cost-recovery options (Poletti, 2004), with each taking a different view on the matter – one arguing that humanitarian health care should be provided for free under any circumstances, and the other arguing that with time, it is important to work through cost-recovery for reasons of sustainability. Such differences in approaches can lead to confusion as to what beneficiaries can expect - especially if implemented in the same area - and call for better informed collective discussions between agencies and donors.

SUPPORTING THE STATE IN ITS FUNCTIONS REQUIRES AN UNRELENTING COMMITMENT

In the case of MSF, as time has passed, their strategy has evolved mostly because vulnerabilities have changed and it has been possible to implement other mechanisms. The organisation provided free health care in Ansongo for five years before it adopted a new strategy in partnership with the Ministry of Health, in which the free care would specifically target the most vulnerable groups of the population: children under the age of 5, pregnant and injured women and other victims of the conflict (MSF-Spain, 2017, p. 80). This new approach was the only way MSF could expand to other areas in the periphery where greater vulnerabilities and needs were to be found.

When it comes to balancing between what can be seen as purely life-saving activities, and activities which *de facto* become state substitution, the research in Mali brought two main aspects to the fore. On the one hand, staff from three organisations explained that one risk of engaging in activities that the state should carry out itself is that they somehow condone a government that is happy to discharge itself of some of its numerous tasks. On the other hand, it was also an issue of needs. Most interviewees – from all organisations – agreed that in Mali today, there is a relatively small scope for front-line purely humanitarian life-saving activities, mainly because there is no clear frontline, but rather unpredictable clashes. Staff from different organisations interpreted this situation differently however. Some of them would argue that the activities that they are carrying out in Mali are perhaps not typical emergency relief activities, but that this does not mean they are any less humanitarian or life-saving. Staff from one organisation explained for example that working to provide vaccinations or running a maternity ward in conflict prone areas is a life-saving activity, albeit an indirect one. Similarly, interviewees from another organisation argued that providing education programmes to teach people not to pick up unexploded war remnants is a life-saving activity, as they may die if they do. Staff from some other organisations would on the other hand argue that their work in Mali is not necessarily directly life-saving *per se*, because it is a context which demands another type of investment. Because the needs in Mali are as much structural as they are conjunctural

Humanitarian aid to Mali (US$)
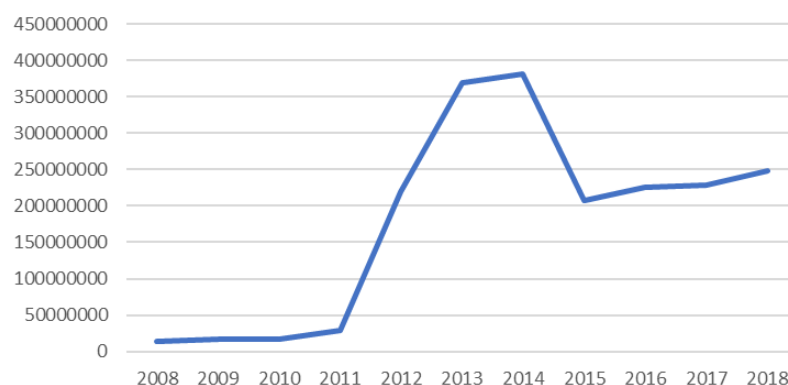Both towards HRP and outside

Figure 5: Humanitarian aid to Mali. Source: OCHA FTS

in origin, the response to them also has to combine short-term and long-term approaches. And while such long-term approaches would ideally be shaped to *support* state services rather than to substitute them, this cannot be properly done where there are no such state services to support.

▬▬ 4.2
Navigating funding constraints

Funding constraints were the second most mentioned challenge to carrying out humanitarian action in Mali. There does not seem to be an overall funding vision for Mali but rather a patchwork of different programmes being funded through a variety of different donors and funding mechanisms. Some envelopes have annual negotiations, others multi-year budgeting approaches and they overlap in different geographical areas. In some cases, this may be done on purpose by individual donors. Sida, for example, implemented internally concerted efforts to include resilience in development strategies resulting in funding for food security programmes from both humanitarian and development budget lines (Mowjee et al., 2016, p. 44). No common strategy, however, seemed to be in place. While ECHO has tried to promote some coordination among humanitarian donors, such attempt did not prove successful. The Mali HRP also went back to single-year planning in 2017 after a multi-year one in the context of the Sahel humanitarian response plan between 2014-2016 (Development Initiatives, 2018).

Generally, as can be seen in Figure 4 above, the staff of the different organisations highlighted their financial independence in terms of being able to decide on their operational priorities independently of those of their donors, or other external pressures. At the same time, however, they all acknowledged that Mali is an extremely difficult context in terms of the limited humanitarian funding envelopes. Except for 2012, in fact, humanitarian response plans for Mali have been funded year on year for half or less of the amount requested.[37] Humanitarian aid to Mali has been decreasing steadily (see Figure 5). All those interviewed highlighted their expectation that this trend will continue despite a small increase between 2016 and 2018. One respondent emphasised how these numbers are even starker if taken in conjunction with the budgets allocated to stabilisation and counter-terrorism activities.[38] *De facto* the limited humanitarian funding has been influencing how agencies have been providing aid. One respondent highlighted, for example, how the reprioritisation by ECHO of different geographical areas of intervention to the benefit of central and northern regions, has meant they have to disengage from two districts in the south despite the need to reinforce the outcomes achieved thus far. For this reason, all organisations highlighted the importance of having their own funds, especially to start new operations and to be able to intervene where and how they felt it was most needed. For organisations who are part of an NGO alliance, it provides an opportunity to free emergency funding quickly on an ad hoc basis. The overall acknowledgment, however, was that those organisations who have large envelopes of private funding have a clear comparative advantage as they do not have to 'depend' on institutional donors. Figure 4 above illustrates

THERE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE AN OVERALL FUNDING VISION FOR MALI.

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37   https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/535/summary

38   Close to 1 billion MINUSMA, 450 mill G5 and >30 mill EU training mission.

how each organisation feels they are able to freely determine their own priorities, with significant differences between WHH, NRC and IRC on the one hand and MSF on the other.

The tensions linked to available funding envelopes are even more apparent when looking at specific sectors. The typical example in Mali are WASH programmes, for which aid agencies have reportedly found it difficult to find funding, despite them being very highly needed. For humanitarian donors, WASH needs are considered structural and therefore outside of their remit. For development donors, conditions in the north are not conducive to implementing development activities because of continued insecurity and the absence of the State. Staff from two organisations hence explained that they would "graft" WASH components onto other programmes because they felt WASH was highly needed. Donors have not, however, disengaged entirely from the north. For other sectors like food security and education, for example, two organisations were receiving funds both through traditional development donors such as NORAD or emergency funding mechanisms such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The process of sectoral prioritisation is therefore also linked to the question of whether humanitarian needs originate in systemic and structural deficiencies or whether they are more directly the result of shocks derived by the conflict or localised natural disasters.

Trade-offs can also be seen between geographical and sectoral priorities. The interviews in Mali revealed that the challenge of assisting those *most in need* (who and where) overlaps with the question of how to address *the greatest needs* (what type), as these two do not always coincide. For example, interviewees from most of the organisations that the research team met with explained that they found it challenging whether to prioritise the more sparsely populated areas in the northern part of the country, where people are greatly affected by the conflict, or the more populous groups in the centre, who are relatively better off, but where needs are also high. All five of the organisations highlighted that working in the more populous south was relatively easier than in the north. This not only because of the more significant logistical and security challenges, but also because of the available funding. It is interesting to note that for organisations who clearly set out to assist populations touched directly by conflict, the dilemma of where to focus its activities was

TRADE-OFFS CAN ALSO BE SEEN BETWEEN GEOGRAPHICAL AND SECTORAL PRIORITIES.

not perceived as strongly as for organisations who are operating in a wider focus, and who therefore more directly needed to come to decisions in regard to where resources will be primarily allocated.

In the absence of appropriate funding envelopes and without a clear common guidance on prioritisation, the five organisations participating in the study have mostly implemented one of two approaches. They have either used a qualitative lens and gone deep in a few selected areas, or they have adopted a quantitative lens by addressing fewer needs but in a larger geographical zone. The choice has largely been influenced by an operational interpretation of their 'mandate' – whether organisations have a sectoral specificity or not – and based on the resources available. According to the interviews, this difference in approach has largely resulted in either greater flexibility and the ability to adapt to a changing context by going broad, or a very detailed understanding of the specific needs and the context in a designated area by going deep. As highlighted by one of the respondents however, where such different approaches are applied in the same geographical region, there is a risk that affected populations receive aid in different quantity and quality depending on the organisation providing it. That is also the case where emergency aid may be provided through different channels, be it as direct distribution from the organisation, or through local partners and local community leaders. Staff from the organisations that the Research Team talked to were aware that the consequence of such differences may be diminished trust in humanitarian actors and were trying to address it by working through consortia to manage the risks. From the experience of one of the organisations, consortia are generally brokered between organisations who feel closer in terms of values and approaches. De facto however, consortia seem to have become mostly a funding channel. As the lead agency may have to focus mostly on the administrative requirements of managing the funding contract, opportunities to discuss strategic questions are very few and far between.

The Research Team noted a certain resignation among the staff of the different organisations as to the current funding landscape in Mali.

The donors interviewed spontaneously raised how little if at all organisations pushed back against institutional donors' funding strategic objectives. Organisations seemed to try to adapt to the funding context rather than trying to shift the balance. There is a certain understanding that humanitarian and development funding streams were being used interchangeably in order to address humanitarian needs. As one respondent put it: "we look at needs holistically and it is only when we look for funding that we label them humanitarian or development needs".

▬▬ 4.3
Tackling insecurity

Staff from most of the organisations that the team met with in Mali described the impact of insecurity on their organisational capacity as a significant challenge to their ability to operationalise their neutrality and reach those most in need in a timely fashion. Mali is undoubtedly an extremely complex context for humanitarians to work in. While the reference to Mali as a situation of *"ni guerre ni paix"[39]* can be debated,[40] it is true that the conflict varies in intensity across the country, and it includes a series of different types of actors, with different motivations. Uncertain gains in the implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement, the fragmentation of non-state armed groups, increasing inter-communal tensions and the presence of criminal elements with transnational links make navigating the context all the more difficult for humanitarians. There are no official restrictions of movement of personnel and supplies in Mali, but with most airstrips in the centre and north occupied by military forces, and the use of motorcycles and pickups being banned in some areas for security reasons,[41] the infrastructure needed to deliver aid is significantly hampered.

INSECURITY IS A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE TO OPERATIONALISE NEUTRALITY AND REACH THOSE MOST IN NEED.

Until recently, humanitarian actors have had no collective access strategy.[42] Generally, the research in Mali highlighted a difference between organisations who are present in the most insecure areas via long-standing partners, and those who are present with their own staff. Figure 4 above breaks down the perception of each organisation's staff as to their operational approaches. The organisations whose operational modalities are geared towards working with local partners argued that they find the lack of access less of a problem, since they have trusted interlocutors on the ground. An organisation that has been working in Mali from a development perspective for a longer period of time is able to develop a long-standing relationship with local organisations even in some of the most insecure areas. The organisations that arrived in Mali around or shortly after the crisis erupted in 2012, on the other hand, insisted more on the principle of neutrality as a tool for security and access, emphasising that they preferred not to work with partners where they were not fully confident of their level of neutrality. Where timeliness has been the overarching priority, these organisations have also resorted, however, to local partners. MSF, for example, not having sufficient contacts or local knowledge, chose, however uncomfortably, to collaborate with a local NGO based in Kidal to facilitate MSF's remote support to health centres outside of Kidal village (Pozo Marín, 2017, p. 31).

Neutrality has also been invoked by the same organisations in order to distance themselves from the work of the UN Mission and the international counter-terrorism agenda. The majority expressed concerns as to the potential threats posed by the blurring of the lines between the work of MINUSMA and the Barkhane force and humanitarian objectives especially in the form of quick impact projects (QIPs) and fear that this will increase further since humanitarian assistance is included alongside the counter-terrorism focus of the G5 Sahel task force. Reaction to these concerns was mostly in the form of preventive measures. One organisation had for example agreed

39   See for example https://news.un.org/fr/story/2016/06/338492-le-mali-traverse-une-situation-qui-nest-ni-la-guerre-ni-la-paix-selon-lenvoye; https://www.ohchr.org/FR/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15672&LangID=F; and http://maliactu.net/mali-ni-guerre-ni-paix-ni-post-crise/.

40   In view of the repeated armed confrontations in the country, involving both signatories and non-signatories to the 2015 Peace Agreement, the context of Mali should arguably more correctly be deemed as a non-international armed conflict.

41   See https://www.jeuneafrique.com/526549/politique/mali-interdiction-de-circulation-des-motos-et-pick-up-dans-certaines-zones-du-nord-et-du-centre/.

42   A collective access strategy is currently being formulated but its status of adoption is still unclear.

with one of its partners on QIPs being a red line. No concrete examples of where these two objectives openly clashed were however mentioned.

Operationalising the principle of neutrality is particularly difficult to do in Mali. Firstly, because of logistical and resource constraints. Most aid agencies do not have a consistent physical presence in many areas of the north, especially if they cannot rely on the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights. Secondly, because of security risks, organisations need to hide their identity. The large majority of organisations operating in central and northern Mali see themselves constrained to using unmarked vehicles – i.e. without logos – from local suppliers to deliver the aid.[43] There is also general agreement that only non-white staff – so-called 'invisible' staff - can work in certain areas where Westerners are deemed to be at a particularly high risk of kidnapping for financial gain.

Overall, an organisation's appetite for risk will influence their operational strategy in the north. Visibility, for example, is a risk. As it may not be that easy to draw a line in terms of boundaries in practice, certain aid agencies have tried to be more vocal as to the importance of applying the humanitarian principles to strategic decisions. If principles are not respected, the implication is a transfer of risks onto humanitarian organisations. For example, in August 2018 a group of international NGOs, including some of the ones participating in the study, distanced[44] themselves from what they found was a hasty decision of the Humanitarian Coordinator to use MINUSMA to deliver emergency food aid, following a so-called "mysterious disease" (later reported to be malnutrition) in Mondoro, in the Mopti region (Mali Ministère de Santé, 2018).[45]

At the same time, however, there was a widespread recognition from the representatives of all the organisations that it is not possible to use neutrality as an argument with all stakeholders. Some interviewees highlighted that criminal gangs tend to merely seek financial gain, thus not recognising or even understanding the neutrality of

COORDINATION SHOULD BE SEEN AS AN ENABLER.

humanitarian actors. Many also pointed out that the mere presence of a Western organisation in Mali is frequently interpreted as a political act, and as such, the insistence on neutrality needs to be looked at in relative terms from the start.

Overall, the research carried out in Bamako also highlighted the need to complement the use of the principle of neutrality with reliance on personal networks and quality programming. Indeed, the discussions made clear that those organisations who are present in the most insecure areas of the country insist on the principle of neutrality, but also rely heavily on ensuring that the quality of their work is high. Firstly, they find that high quality work leads to higher levels of acceptance among the local communities, which in turn allows for better access and security.[46] Secondly, it appears that by ensuring high quality outputs, they safeguard the reputation of their access negotiator/ security coordinator, who is frequently called upon to make use of his personal network to allow access. Generally speaking, these organisations argued that they manage to talk to most groups and to deliver aid in most areas, provided that they keep a strong network, and continuously emphasise their neutrality by providing the assistance directly to beneficiaries.

4.4
Filling gaps through coordination?

Coordination is instrumental in the operational implementation of the humanitarian-development (and peace)[47] nexus. Yet, a space to hold a strategic dialogue, to share analyses on the challenges faced in the delivery of aid and to develop a sense of complementarity seems sorely missing in Mali. Based on the interviews held, humanitarian coordination does not appear to have fulfilled its promise.

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43   Using their own vehicles provides an additial security risk for NGOs as they are likely to be targeted (e.g. hikacking, thefts, kidnapping,...)

44   Letter on file with HERE.

45   See https://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/magazines/16546-le-magazine-du-04-aout-2018-region-de-mopti-une-maladie-inconnue-fait-40-morts-a-mondoro and https://maliactu.net/mali-la-maladie-de-mondoro-sur-la-voie-de-la-demystification/

46   One respondent also highlighted how the quality is equally influenced by the sector of work. There is still a difference between high quality emergency health and nutrition programmes vs. high quality education programmes, for example, in terms of how they are perceived by those groups granting access.

47   There is a common understanding among policy practitioners that the nexus needs to be discharged across humanitarian, development and peace actors. In the context of the research for this report, however, most of the conversations focused on the humanitarian-development nexus.

Coordination should be seen as an enabler. In Mali, it was mostly referred to as an obstacle to effective humanitarian action. Humanitarian coordination around service delivery suffers from the lack of a strong humanitarian leadership and a common strategic vision. At the same time, there is no clear coordination with development and peace actors.

Several weaknesses identified in the findings from the audit of OCHA's operations in Mali (OIOS, 2017) and following a mission of the then Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT)[48] in 2017, were still reportedly unaddressed at the time of this research.[49] Respondents highlighted, in particular, the disconnect between discussions at coordination meetings in Bamako and the day-to-day reality of organisations on the ground especially in central and northern Mali. While Bamako should provide strategic vision and support to the local coordination structures in the field, respondents overwhelmingly noted the limited depth of the discussions held particularly within the HCT. A geographical divide, compounded by access restrictions of certain staff – especially from UN agencies – to the more insecure areas, has de facto morphed into a policy and operational one. As one respondent lamented, caught in a vicious circle, coordination structures – HCT and clusters both at capital and field level – have witnessed a progressive disengagement from INGOs, as they either no longer consistently attend meetings or are represented by more junior staff, which significantly impacts the quality of the discussions. The lack of a pooled fund mechanism was also highlighted as another reason for INGO disengagement from UN-led structures. While recognising the coordination challenges in the field, another respondent from one of the five organisations, however, also noted how it was part of their organisational approach to engage in and try to improve international humanitarian coordination structures.

The question of whether existing mechanisms are well placed to be used in the context of the piloting of the nexus was approached by a joint – UN, donor (Spanish cooperation) and NGOs – mission to Timbuktu in February 2018 (OCHA, 2018c). While finding that the current structures were in part used by both humanitarian and development actors, the

THE NEXUS WILL BE ABOUT ALIGNING OUTCOMES AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT INDICATORS, BUT NOT ONLY.

mission concluded on a need for a temporary ad hoc mechanism while identifying the most suitable option. The Commission pour la rehabilitation des zones post-conflit (CRZPC), co-led by MINUSMA and France, is already tasked with ameliorating the coordination between humanitarian and development interventions and overseeing the humanitarian-development nexus in Mali.[50] In light of the conversations held in Bamako however, for any structure to be successful in this context, it is important that it be streamlined and offer guidance on how to manage the tensions between humanitarian, development, and peace-related activities. This appears even more crucial in view of the choice of leadership for the CRZPC. It is extremely troubling that two political actors are tasked with overseeing the coordination between humanitarian and development organisations. The nexus will be about aligning outcomes and choosing the right indicators, but not only. It will also be about building on comparative advantages and managing tensions that may result from a misalignment in the short and long-term objectives of each actor. A successful nexus, in fact, can only be built on a solid humanitarian component. The risk is that political faultlines and military interventions will leave many people and places out of reach.[51]

In the absence of formal coordination structures meant to address the tensions arising from working in such a specific context, INGOs have tried to collaborate more informally to address needs through complementary interventions. It is possible to highlight also two formal examples of attempts at better coordination outside the traditional institutional mechanisms. The first, pushed for by ECHO, has reportedly led to better opportunities for coordination and synergies among the different actors in the eyes of two of the respondents in the health and nutrition sectors. How much it was simple harmonisation of operational approaches in these two technical sectors – e.g. at the level of indicators – or truly

48   STAIT has since been renamed Peer2Peer Support., see http://www.deliveraidbetter.org.

49   Based on feedback received from four of the participating organisations and external key informants.

50   Through the French Embassy in Mali.

51   For more thoughts on this, cf. F. Schmitz Guinote, A humanitarian-development nexus that works, available at https:// blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/06/21/humanitarian-development-nexus-that-works/

enhancing cooperation and supporting good practice on the ground was however not clear. The second example came about following the INGOs' own realisation of existing gaps in the humanitarian response and in an attempt to address the issue of the prioritisation of needs. Financed by ECHO and led by NRC,[52] the Rapid Response Mechanism was born to tackle a lack of standby humanitarian capacity ready to deploy quickly when necessary in a coordinated manner (NRC et al., 2018b). While normally RRM mechanisms are not a coordination mechanism *per se*, this is the role that the RRM in Mali has *de facto* taken on, in the absence of more effective ones. The project acknowledges in particular the presence of different emergency actors with different intervention strategies and the lack of holistic multisectoral responses. As mentioned above, if there is no agreement, everyone can say that they are addressing the most urgent needs in the area where they are. The strength of the RRM mechanism is double: it involves organisations already operating in any given area for a joint or at least coordinated needs assessment; and it is meant to reinforce existing coordination structures and it thus communicates with OCHA and the regional sub-clusters (NRC et al., 2018a).

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52   Members include ACF, IRC, Solidarités, UNFPA and UNICEF. Other organisations were also reportedly joining. There is a second RRP mechanism financed by OFDA and led by CRS, witness to the lack of coordination among donors.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS
THE LIMITS OF LABELS

Depending on the context, it may be difficult to draw the lines between different organisational 'mandates'. In Mali, there seemed to be a lack of a common understanding around what constitutes life-saving interventions and a conflation of what may be defined as humanitarian or development approaches, conflicting at times with an organisation's overall global strategic direction. The research has shown how the main challenge for humanitarian and development organisations alike in Mali is to ensure a continued support for the same beneficiaries, who present a combination of both short-term and long-term (conjunctural vs. structural) needs. This requires flexibility and better coordination, both from the organisations themselves, and from donors. Most of all, Mali shows how complex contexts cannot simply be looked at through dichotomic lenses.

- The Mali example indicates that there are limits to the use of the labels of 'humanitarian' and 'development', especially when looking at how different aid agencies can work across the humanitarian-development divide. Labels are generally helpful in informing expectations about a particular product or issue. In this case, they provide valuable guidance as to an organisation's purpose (why they deliver aid) and in informing their prioritisation efforts (what type of aid). Labels however do not allow for enough nuancing, failing to articulate the richness of what can be found to be humanitarian or development respectively. They reach their limits therefore in illustrating *how* organisations actually carry out their activities

- Framing aid response simply in terms of a humanitarian-development nexus brushes over the variety of different approaches that are to be found within each category – 'humanitarian' and 'development'. Already those organisations who may fall within a humanitarian label either because of their mission or the role that they have taken up in a specific context will present a large variety of interpretations in terms of how they go about their work. An organisation may go broad and superficially, or narrowly and deep. Organisations may have similar activities but starting from very different or even opposite premises. And while humanitarian principles remain essential qualifiers for humanitarian action, aid agencies may operationalise them in different ways. Faced with common external dilemmas organisations showcase differences in the way they preserve their humanitarian identity and implement the principles in practice. If humanitarian organisations address external tensions in different ways that may in itself create new ones.

- Because the needs of crisis-affected people in Mali are of structural origin as well as the result of peaks in violence or natural hazards, aid responses span from more traditional humanitarian approaches to long-term development-related investments. The risk for NGOs when operating in these contexts is to be faced with an identity crisis as organisations are called to respond to an ever increasing diversity of needs. In the absence of a strong humanitarian leadership and a common agreement on which needs should be prioritised, conflict-affected people and communities risk being the recipients of an unequal response.

- The questions being addressed by the nexus are the right ones. Who does what? Who decides? Finding ways

COMPLEX CONTEXTS CANNOT SIMPLY BE LOOKED AT THROUGH DICHOTOMIC LENSES.

for humanitarian and development actors to work better together in fragile environments is a decades-old evidence. The answers, however, require more than commonly agreed outcomes and indicators. A technical approach needs to be accompanied by a strategic reflection on how to achieve these outcomes. How to manage the relationship with the State? How to be mindful of cultural sensitivies while upholding the principle of impartiality? How to appear neutral when visibility is a risk? Comparative advantages are not to be framed only between organisations that display a humanitarian and those that display a development goal. It is not because organisations are labelled humanitarian that they are all the same. How they interpret humanitarian principles and how they prioritise needs will also translate differently. The discourse requires nuancing.

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7 ANNEXES

Annex 1
Operations in Mali of the participating organisations (mid-2018)

	DanChurchAid[53]	IRC[54]	MSF Spain[55]	NRC[56]	Welthungerhilfe[57]
In Mali since	February 2013	April 2012	Early 2012	Early 2013	1968 (partners); 1999 (own office)
Mission statement	To help and be advocates of oppressed, neglected and marginalized groups in poor countries and to strengthen their possibilities of a life in dignity.	To help people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control over their futures.	To assist people threatened by armed conflicts, violence, epidemics or forgotten diseases, natural disasters and exclusion from medical care.	To protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable people during crisis; provide assistance to meet immediate humanitarian needs, prevent further displacement and contribute to durable solutions.	To work with its partners to end hunger for good in all the countries where it is active by 2030.
Rationale for first entering Mali	Provide Mine Action in the north-east, at the request of UNMAS.	Respond to emergency humanitarian needs in the areas of health and nutrition, WASH, education, child protection, and economic wellbeing.	Providing emergency aid in primary health care centres.	Supporting IDPs with legal assistance, shelter, distribution of relief supplies, education and	To reinforce local capacity towards food security.
Current key goal in Mali	Supporting livelihoods and reducing armed violence and safety risks faced by communities, primarily in the centre.	Improving health, education, and economic wellbeing of IDPs, returnees, and host communities, focusing especially in north/centre.	Ensuring that the most vulnerable people receive more and better medical care.	Providing lifesaving short-term and long-term aid to displaced people in Mali, as well as the most vulnerable of those who stayed.	Reinforcing local capacity and ensuring target groups' nutritional needs are more resilient
Local implementing partners	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Staff	4 international staff, 26 national staff.		23 international staff, 283 national staff (2017)	12 international staff, 113 national staff	61 national staff, 6 International (as of January 2019)
Budget	USD 673,151 (2016 income)		4.7 million Euros (2017 income)	USD 6 million (2017 budget)	13.7 million Euros (2017 income)
Donors/Financing	General consulate of Denmark; UNMAS, MFA NL	ECHO (USD 3.5 million 2018; EUR 2.750 mill assistance to vulnerable people in Mopti, Ménaka, Koulikoro + EUR 735,000 Children & Youth education, 2017)	40% MSF Norway; 52% MSF Spain; 8% MSF Canada (2017)	Sida, MFA N, UNICEF, WFP, FFP/USAID, ECHO (USD 2.7 million 2018; EUR 1.3m mill RRM + EUR 735,000 education, 2017), AFD, NORAD	GIZ, BMZ, German MFA, PAM, KfW

53   https://www.danchurchaid.org/where-we-work/mali

54   https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/740/maliexternalsap-final.pdf and https://www.rescue.org/country/mali#how-does-the-irc-help-in-mali and http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/agreements/agreements_2017.pdf

55   https://www.msf.es/sites/default/files/attachments/informe_de_misiones_ocba_2017_esp_final.pdf and https://www.msf.es/conocenos/proyectos/mali

56   https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/fact-sheets/2018/june/mali/fact-sheet-mali-q2-2018.pdf and https://www.nrc.no/countries/africa/mali/ and http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/agreements/agreements_2017.pdf

57   Fact Sheets provided by organisation staff and https://www.welthungerhilfe.org/our-work/countries/mali/

Annex 2
Perception Study Tool

Where would you place your organisation in terms of the following characteristics?[58]

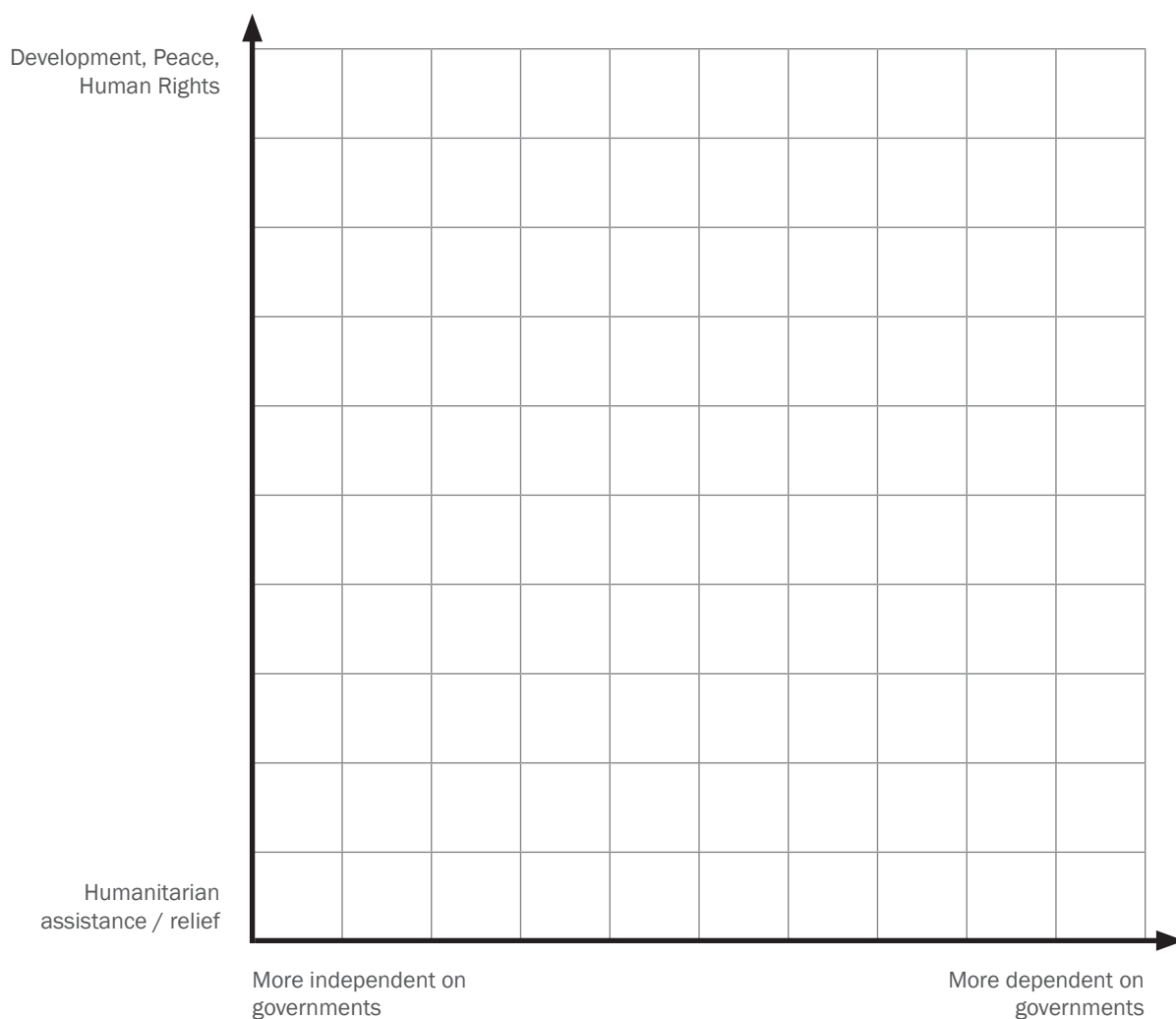|	
The political reasons behind the suffering do not drive the humanitarian work	Establishes a political basis to guide humanitarian work
Takes discreet action, eschews public confrontation	Engages in public advocacy
Freely determines priorities	External pressures determine priorities
Operations for people most in need	Operations for people in need
Fully responsible for security decisions	Follows UN security decisions
Works towards the localisation of aid	The localisation of aid is a solution of last resort

58   Interviewees in Bamako were given this Perception Study exercise in French.

If you were to place your organisation on the grid below based on your personal perception, where would you put it?

Please also add other organisations to the grid, both those which you would put closely to your own organisation, and those which you see further away. This could be for example any of the participants in the Mandates Study (ACF France, Concern Worldwide, ICRC, IRC, MSF-Spain, NRC, Welthungerhilfe), or any other organisation that you can think of.

Development, Peace, Human Rights

Humanitarian assistance / relief

More independent on governments

More dependent on governments

Comments?

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