



A woman cooks near her shelter in Mentao camp, Burkina Faso. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam

MALI'S CONFLICT REFUGEES

Responding to a growing crisis

Nearly 375,000 Malians fled the conflict in the north of their country in 2012. Over 145,000, the majority of them women and children, sought refuge in poor areas of neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. More are already following since the escalation in fighting in January 2013. Those neighbouring governments and humanitarian agencies have provided life-saving aid to refugees in difficult circumstances, but they are struggling to meet all the refugees' basic needs. In Niger's camps, up to 21 per cent of children are malnourished. Governments and aid agencies must urgently step up preparations to respond to rising needs in refugee-hosting countries, while all military forces and armed groups active in Mali must take all possible steps to avoid harm to an already distressed civilian population. Many of the refugees have repeatedly fled Mali over the last 20 years, and may well not return until the deep-seated social, political and economic drivers of the country's conflict are resolved.

SUMMARY

Since January 2012, nearly 375,000 Malians have fled the conflict in the north of their country.¹ Some 145,000, the majority of them women and children, have crossed into neighbouring countries, mainly Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. For many—including those interviewed by Oxfam—this was the latest of several flights from crisis over two decades. Not surprisingly, they say they will not return until a true, lasting peace in Mali is secured.²

Those neighbouring governments, local communities, the UN and aid agencies have delivered life-saving assistance to Mali's refugees, often in difficult circumstances. However, they are already struggling to cover all basic needs. With conflict escalating in Mali following the launch of Malian-French operations at the start of 2013 to counter a renewed offensive by armed groups, host governments and humanitarian agencies must urgently step up preparations to respond to any further refugee flows.

Moreover, Malian and French armed forces, and other armed forces engaged in Mali now or in the future, must take all possible steps to minimize harm to an already distressed civilian population. Armed groups in northern Mali must abide by their obligations under international law and refrain from committing human rights violations against civilians.

A humanitarian response falling short

The humanitarian response has met some, but far from all, of the refugees' vital needs. In Niger's refugee camps, up to 21 per cent of children are malnourished, 6 percentage points above the World Health Organization's threshold for 'emergency' levels—and malnutrition rates are also alarmingly high among child refugees in Mauritania.³

Malian refugees face many threats, including sexual violence, forced labour and forced recruitment by armed groups from northern Mali. The UN refugee agency (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR), as well as the broader humanitarian community, has so far done little to adequately analyze or respond to these threats.

Many refugees are pastoralists, but a 'one size fits all' humanitarian response has until now failed to meet their specific needs and address the impact of their livestock on local communities and the environment. In one camp in Burkina Faso, there are three animals for every person, which puts pressure on the local population and environment.⁴

Refugees are living among populations that are themselves struggling to get by in the face of poverty, food insecurity and limited basic social services. Impoverished host communities, still recovering from a region-wide food crisis in 2012, now have to share scarce food and water. At

My whole life has been changed. I do not like what happened to me. I do not want to stay here long because the conditions are not the same. I lived in good conditions, I was studying, I had hopes and plans. Here there are no studies, no activities, and no hope. There is nothing to do. I see around me children and young people—people that I knew before, working in NGOs; children were treated well but here they walk barefoot, they do not go to school they are not well fed. Just seeing this hurts me.

Bintou Walet Mohammed Ali, 21 years old, student, Refugee in the Menta camp (Burkina Faso)

some sites, refugees outnumber the host population: in Mauritania, for example, Bassikounou—a town of around 42,000 inhabitants—is now hosting 54,000 refugees at a nearby camp, leading to tensions with local residents.

In Mali itself, most of the estimated 229,000 people considered internally displaced are living in extremely overcrowded, difficult conditions in urban centres or rented houses, relying primarily on relatives for support.⁵ Men, women and children who remain in northern Mali are exposed to violence and serious violations of their human rights, and have limited access to humanitarian assistance. The current intensification in the conflict is putting civilians at further risk. While this paper focuses on the situation of refugees, future Oxfam briefing papers will include a fuller analysis of the challenges facing those affected by conflict that remain in Mali.

More refugees: Responding to increased needs

Prior to the current escalation in the conflict, the UN was anticipating the refugee population could double to 400,000⁶ in the event of a UN Security Council-authorized deployment of an African military force, known as the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).⁷ It aims at rebuilding the Malian security forces, supporting them to defeat armed groups and restore the country's territorial integrity.

The current Malian-French military action launched in the wake of the capture of a strategic government-controlled town by armed groups preceded the AFISMA deployment, which was not expected to take place until September. According to UNHCR, as of 17 January, seven days into the clashes, it had already led to the displacement of an estimated 10,000 people, with over 2,000 making their way to neighbouring countries.⁸ The situation in Mali and the region is more volatile and unpredictable than ever.

Most refugee camps in neighbouring countries are close to Mali's border, in insecure areas. Security for refugees and aid workers there had been deteriorating even prior to the January 2013 events, including a rise in actual or threatened kidnappings, which has made it difficult for agencies to provide aid.

Governments hosting refugees, the Malian authorities, and aid agencies must urgently improve their preparedness to respond to any further deterioration in the humanitarian and security situation, including by ensuring that host governments provide a safe environment for refugees.

At the same time, host countries, with support from donors, must strengthen their ability to co-ordinate the refugee response. UNHCR must continue to improve its leadership and coordination of the humanitarian response to refugees and host communities, not only to ensure they get equal access to aid, but also to help those refugees who may choose to integrate into local communities.

We are hungry [...] Before, we used to eat at least three times a day and drink lots of milk. Here, at the camp, what we eat [...] is not enough; [...] we eat twice a day. The children are not in very good health because they do not have enough food.

Female refugee in Damba camp, Burkina Faso

Avoiding harm to civilians

Malian, French and other military forces currently active in Mali, and any military forces who may be engaged in Mali in the future—including those from the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union Training mission (EUTM Mali)—must take every possible step to ensure harm to civilians and their assets is avoided, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2085, which was unanimously passed in December 2012. Those steps should include:

- France and all other forces in Mali deploying advisors in international humanitarian law (IHL) and applicable human rights law alongside regular and Special Forces;
- reporting by relevant military forces to the UN Security Council on steps taken to abide by IHL and avoid civilian harm; and
- the UN deploying human rights monitors to Mali as a matter of urgency.

Preparing for the future: Beyond military approaches

With few prospects for peace in Mali in the short term, the presence of refugees in neighbouring countries is likely to be prolonged. Supporting refugees' long-term livelihoods to increase their self-reliance and reduce the pressure on host populations is critical.

This support is necessary, but will only go so far, and is no substitute for lasting peace and a long-term resolution to the crisis. Malian authorities, African and Western governments, and multilateral institutions must continue to work towards building peace and security in Mali. They should take a comprehensive approach that seeks to address the deep-seated political, social, and economic drivers of the current crisis. This should involve continuing to work towards an inclusive political solution, moving beyond a sometimes narrow focus on counter-terrorism and military action. This will involve:

- rebuilding trust between communities;
- encouraging more inclusive politics and equitable development across the country; and
- ensuring effective participation in peace-building and reconciliation processes, including by women, refugees, and marginalized communities.

Addressing Mali's refugee crisis, both in the short and long term, requires a multi-track approach—one that is outlined in the set of recommendations for governments, regional organizations and institutions, and the international community at the end of this report.

This briefing paper is based on information gathered primarily between August and December 2012 through Oxfam's programmes in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger, including some 65 interviews with representatives of governments and aid agencies, and discussions with refugees in host countries and with civil society organizations and communities in Mali.

I want to return to Mali, but provided that there is a lasting and eternal peace. We want a government for the whole of Mali, not a government for Bamako only. In 1993 we were here, in 1994 we were here, and today we are still here. We are in a country where we are refugees all the time. We are forced to leave the city to take refuge in another city or in the bush where there is no network, no movement in order to be safe. We want the problem of Mali to be managed once and for all.

Bintou Walet Mohammed Ali, 21 years old, female student and refugee at Menta camp, Burkina Faso

1 INTRODUCTION

Northern Mali has suffered from insurrections and struggles for autonomy—fuelled by persistent problems of poor governance, broken promises on economic development, and inequality between communities—ever since the country gained independence. The crisis in Libya in 2011 and the subsequent influx of arms and fighters further fuelled such tensions. Starting in January 2012, armed rebels drove out government forces from the north of the country. The collapse of government authority in the north was the trigger for a coup d'état on 22 March which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré from power. In December, the interim prime minister resigned on state television and dissolved his government after he was arrested by soldiers linked to the March military coup.⁹ From April 2012, the entire northern region of Mali came under the control of a number of armed groups: the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (*Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad*, MNLA); Ansar Dine; the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (*Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest*, MUJAO); and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

In December 2012, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of an African military force known as the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)¹⁰ to train and support Malian armed forces in recovering northern Mali. AFISMA was not expected to deploy until September 2013. However, the New Year has seen a significant escalation in the conflict: on 11 January 2013, after the capture of the strategic government-held town of Konna by armed groups, the interim Mali government and French authorities launched a military offensive with the stated aim of preventing those groups from advancing further south. Airstrikes hit the northern towns of Gao, Lere and Douentza, reportedly leading to the death of at least ten civilians,¹¹ and sparking fears of a new wave of population displacement.

One of the most significant consequences of these overlapping, fast-moving political and security crises has been the displacement of nearly 375,000 civilians across Mali and neighbouring countries.¹² Over 145,000 people have fled to Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger,¹³ settling in the Sahelian belt, an area which is chronically vulnerable as a result of poor governance, limited access to basic services, scarce natural resources, a lack of jobs, and climate change-induced desertification.¹⁴ Aid agencies struggled at first to mount an effective humanitarian response to the refugee crisis due to logistical challenges, the limited experience of in-country humanitarian organizations in dealing with refugee emergencies, and a small UNHCR presence.¹⁵

This briefing paper looks at the plight and prospects for those 145,000 women, men and children who have taken the desperate step to flee their country, and who may be joined by many more in the near future. It looks at the quality of the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis and the need to take urgent action to respond to the likelihood that a further influx of refugees will result from the current escalation of the conflict and in the event of further fighting in coming months. It is based on

information gathered between August and December 2012 through Oxfam's presence in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger, including over 65 individual interviews with representatives of governments, UN agencies, and NGOs in Niamey (Niger), Nouakchott and Bassikounou (Mauritania), and Ouagadougou and Dori (Burkina Faso); and participation in humanitarian co-ordination meetings in these three countries, supplemented by seven focus groups held in two camps in Burkina Faso. Oxfam's programmes in Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso are currently helping 150,000 people from both refugee and host populations. Oxfam also works in both northern and southern Mali, and the report is informed by the organization's discussions with civil society and communities in the country.



Map of the region. Refugee sites marked in white, with permanent settlements in black. (Locations based on UN data.)

2 THE MALIAN REFUGEES

Reasons for fleeing

The men and women who fled their homes in northern Mali have done so for a number of different reasons. Experiences of inter-communal conflict during previous rebellions¹⁶ have left lasting mental scars among the communities of northern Mali. The first wave of displacement began in January 2012, following clashes between the Malian army and the MNLA.¹⁷ Many Tuareg refugees who spoke to Oxfam explained that they had left pre-emptively for fear of reprisals from the local population or the army.¹⁸ Other, non-Tuareg communities fled because they no longer felt safe in areas in which Tuareg armed groups were claiming autonomy.¹⁹

Further displacement followed the occupation of the towns of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu by the MNLA from late March 2012 and violent clashes in June between the MNLA and the MUJAO, which resulted in the latter's capture of Gao. Numerous human rights violations—including rape, child recruitment, and looting—were perpetrated by all parties to the conflict.²⁰

Prior to the current escalation in conflict, other common reasons given by refugees for their flight included:

- abandonment by local authorities and a lack of basic services in their home areas;
- fear of the imposition of a strict version of Sharia law by Ansar Dine, AQIM, and the MUJAO; and
- fear of possible international military action.²¹

Although the peak of arrivals in host countries was in February and March 2012, there has been a continued flow of refugees since then,²² with the renewed fighting of January 2013 expected to increase this flow.

Before this latest development, some refugees had been returning to Mali. Population movements are not only fluid and unpredictable due to the insecurity in northern Mali, but also because most of the refugees are semi-nomadic, moving with their cattle herds throughout the year.

Who are the refugees?

The refugees belong to various ethnic groups (Tuaregs, Arabs, Fulani, and Songhai), come from both towns and villages and have a variety of backgrounds (e.g. pastoralists, farmers, traders, and teachers). In Burkina Faso, Tuaregs account for most of the refugee population (76 per cent), followed by Arabs (12 per cent).²³ There are complex, hierarchal social relations both within and between groups that affect how refugees organize themselves in camps, with some groups refusing to share living space and facilities with others.²⁴ The majority of refugees are children;²⁵ women and girls account for half of all refugees, according to UNHCR numbers.²⁶

I told my family to leave [northern Mali] before it began, because they had already begun to pillage the property of light-skinned people in other towns before they attacked us.

Tuareg refugee in Mentao camp, Burkina Faso

For several months, official estimates of the number of refugees were inflated, complicating the planning and implementation of programs. A UNHCR-led individual registration process was finalized in Burkina Faso and Mauritania in September and December 2012, respectively, providing more accurate figures. Its development is ongoing in Niger.²⁷

Where they are

Refugees are located mostly in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania, which have all hosted refugees during previous armed conflicts in northern Mali. Other destinations include Guinea, Togo, and Algeria.²⁸

UNHCR and the host governments have taken differing approaches to decide where refugees should be located. In Mauritania, the 55,000 refugees were immediately directed to a single camp (M'bera) by the government.²⁹ In Burkina Faso and Niger, refugees initially chose freely where to settle, based on their livelihoods, community affiliations, or previous experience of camps in the 1990s.³⁰ Those who stayed close to the border, which is increasingly insecure, are now being relocated by UNHCR to other camps further away.

In Burkina Faso, more than 38,000 people have found refuge mainly in six officially recognized camps, but also in some ad hoc unofficial sites and in urban areas.

In Niger, 50,000 individuals³¹ are spread across three camps and 13 sites, with some also in the capital Niamey. The Government of Niger has stated that assistance should be provided only in official camps. However, humanitarian groups have received conflicting information from the government on the status of camps,³² hindering planning. Oxfam, for example, faces the dilemma of whether or not to invest in drilling boreholes and building latrines at sites that could soon be relocated, despite pressing humanitarian needs there.

Camps in host countries are located in the extremely challenging environment of the Sahel. Depending on the season, refugees endure extreme heat or violent wind and rain, which destroy flimsy shelters and cause flooding. There are few trees to provide shade, fuel, or construction materials; limited land for cultivation and pasture; and few underground sources for pumps to provide safe drinking water. The remoteness of the camps makes it difficult to transport supplies, particularly in the rainy season.

3 REFUGEES' UNMET NEEDS

Host countries, host populations, and humanitarian organizations have provided vital assistance to refugees, despite the challenging environment. However, scale-up has been slow: it took several months to reach accepted standards on the provision of food, water and shelter, for example. One year on, basic needs are still not uniformly covered, particularly with regard to nutrition, protection, and education. With the prospect of new refugee arrivals, the humanitarian situation is likely to worsen. Humanitarian programmes must also better support host communities and pastoralist refugees.

Tackling emergency-level malnutrition

Women in the camps have told Oxfam of their concerns about their children's health due to a lack of food or a different diet. Malnutrition rates in the camps—17 per cent in Mauritania³³ and up to 21.2 per cent in Niger³⁴—are well above the emergency threshold of 15 per cent set by the World Health Organization (WHO). High levels of malnutrition may in part be explained by the often incomplete and delayed food rations distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP)³⁵ or by changes in diet.³⁶ However, malnutrition is rarely caused solely by a lack of food. A range of complex issues must be considered, such as coverage and accessibility of health care and malnutrition treatment services, access to drinking water, and hygiene conditions. The causes of malnutrition should be accurately identified in each camp and nutrition monitoring should be made systematic to enable an effective response: for example, a WFP/UNHCR nutritional survey has been expected in Burkina Faso since September 2012, but has yet to take place.³⁷

We are hungry [...] Before, we used to eat at least three times a day and drink lots of milk. Here, at the camp, what we eat [...] is not enough; [...] we eat twice a day. The children are not in very good health because they do not have enough food.

Female refugee in Damba camp, Burkina Faso

A population at risk

Refugees are exposed to a range of threats, some of which are related to cultural practices that may have been exacerbated by displacement, or to new risks arising from living in camps in often insecure areas. For example, some refugees might be exposed to harmful traditional practices still prevalent in northern Mali, such as young girls being forced into early marriage.³⁸ Cultural barriers have made it difficult to collect specific information about threats faced by women because both women and men are reluctant to speak about issues they consider deeply personal.³⁹ Nonetheless, the absence of gender-disaggregated data—for example in assessing malnutrition rates—goes against best practice and prevents the development of a more nuanced gender analysis.

Marginalized groups

Certain ethnic communities are also at risk of marginalization and forced labour, with inter-group relations marked by racial stigma and the on-

going legacy of slavery.⁴⁰ In camps, humanitarian workers report cases of forced domestic work and discrimination in access to the services provided:⁴¹ for instance, certain communities carry out most of the domestic chores, or cannot share latrines with other communities.⁴²

Children

Children make up the majority of the population in the camps. Many have been separated from their families or are unaccompanied, and therefore face greater risks, such as abuse, forced labour or recruitment by armed groups.⁴³ In the Burkina Faso camps there are 1,200 children that are considered to be at particular risk.⁴⁴ Education could create a protective environment by providing a sense of normalcy, keeping children occupied and less vulnerable. There is currently, however, a significant shortfall in education provision—only 12 per cent of refugees of primary school age have been enrolled in M'bera camp in Mauritania,⁴⁵ and 21.5 per cent in Burkina Faso's camps.⁴⁶ Due to a lack of funding, few child protection programmes have been implemented.⁴⁷ Education, vocational training opportunities and recreational activities should be provided to help protect vulnerable young people.



Children in Menta camp, Burkina Faso. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam

Urban refugees

In Mauritania, around 15,000 urban refugees⁴⁸ have not been registered by UNHCR. While the Mauritanian government has recognized them *prima facie* as refugees, it has refused to allow the delivery of aid outside of camps and in effect considers them to be migrants.⁴⁹ The government and UNHCR should work together to register urban refugees in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance where needed and identify any additional support for potentially vulnerable individuals.

An insufficient protection response

Despite a clear mandate to do so,⁵⁰ UNHCR has not prioritized the analysis of threats such as forced labour and sexual violence faced by refugees, nor the implementation of humanitarian protection activities aimed at reducing refugees' exposure to, and improving their ability to deal with them.⁵¹

As a result, the most basic humanitarian protection activities⁵²—such as carrying out co-ordinated analyses of risk factors and current programme responses, guaranteeing secure access to education, and providing information about referral services—are not consistently in place in the camps. The humanitarian community does not have a strategy to ensure that the specific needs of vulnerable groups are taken into account in camps' emergency programmes. At a minimum, UNHCR, with support from donors and relevant NGOs, needs to urgently improve data collection and analysis, and the reporting of protection risks and trends.

Support for host populations

Refugees are now living close to host populations that were already suffering from chronic vulnerability to food insecurity and poor access to basic services. Only 26 per cent of people in Mauritania, for example, have consistent access to quality water,⁵³ and malnutrition rates in host areas are above the WHO's alert threshold.⁵⁴ As in so many parts of the world, women and girls are the worst off, since they must contend with the dual hardship of poverty and unequal access to land and employment. The deep-seated problems in host areas have been exacerbated by the 2011–12 Sahel food crisis.

The conflict in northern Mali has further knocked these impoverished communities. First, their livelihoods have been severely disrupted by a slowdown in cross-border trade and remittances, and by the disruption of seasonal livestock migration to summer pastures. In Mauritania, people living close to the border previously obtained food items such as millet and corn from markets in northern Mali; these items are now more expensive and difficult to come by.

Second, the presence of refugees is creating additional pressure on land and water, especially where refugees outnumber the local community. Tensions are beginning to emerge between refugees and host populations, some of whom feel that refugees are benefiting from international aid while their own needs are being ignored.⁵⁵ In Mauritania, in November 2012, groups of youths demonstrated in Bassikounou, a town of 42,000 inhabitants⁵⁶ that now hosts 54,000 refugees, demanding increased assistance and jobs. Supporting host communities is thus not only a matter of upholding equitable access to aid in line with core humanitarian principles,⁵⁷ but will also facilitate the integration of refugees into local communities (if refugees chose to stay in the area), and contribute to the safety of both groups. Host governments, UNHCR and a range of UN agencies share responsibility for supporting host communities—as such, they must work together to ensure host communities get the assistance they need and that both host communities and refugees are informed about refugee rights and host countries' obligations towards them.

Responding to pastoralists' needs

Many refugees in Burkina Faso and Niger are pastoralists, who fled mainly to areas with good grazing land located close to the Malian border. They have brought with them an estimated 100,000–200,000 animals.⁵⁸ In one camp in Burkina Faso, there are three animals for every person.⁵⁹

The humanitarian response has so far adopted a 'one size fits all' approach, which has not sufficiently taken into consideration the specific needs of pastoralist refugees. As pastoralists tend to keep their smaller animals with them (i.e. in the camps), programmes to provide livestock feed and to expand access to water for smaller animals are needed. Pastoralists also need to find pasture for larger animals, which is a particular challenge in camps further from the border—to which most refugees are being relocated for security—where grazing tracts are very limited. The agriculture and livestock ministries of host countries, with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and UNHCR, must urgently carry out an assessment of the environmental impact of these animals' presence and suggest solutions for safe access to grazing lands.⁶⁰

Pastoralists from Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger have also lost the use of pastures and water points in Mali on which they rely between harvests. They now have to remain in their countries and share scarce resources, which may increase conflict. Tensions could also rise between local farmers and pastoralist refugees if uncontrolled cattle movements destroy cultivated land, as has been seen so often in the Sahel.⁶¹ Local authorities and aid agencies must encourage dialogue between local populations and refugees to agree as a matter of urgency on a framework to share resources and on alternative migration routes.



A refugee family with a baby and camel arriving in M'bera camp, Mauritania. Photo: Charles Bambara/Oxfam

4 STRENGTHENING THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

With the Mali conflict escalating, the humanitarian response must be strengthened without delay to meet the needs of refugees and host populations now and in coming months. This will involve:

- preparing to respond to increased needs;
- increasing humanitarian capacity of host countries;
- more strategic planning under UNHCR's leadership;
- better communication between refugees and aid agencies; and
- preserving humanitarian access and the civilian nature of refugee camps in the face of growing insecurity

Responding to increased needs

Even prior to the renewed fighting in January 2013, UN agencies had anticipated a possible doubling of the refugee population—up to 400,000 people—if African-led military operations took place.⁶² While exact predictions are difficult to make, they also anticipated that Malians, as well as other migrants in the country, would seek refuge in a wider range of host countries, including Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. As of 17 January, seven days into the clashes, there were already reports of another 10,000 people fleeing their homes, with over 2,000 crossing into Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger.⁶³



Collecting water in M'bera camp, Mauritania. Photo: Charles Bambara/Oxfam

Host governments and international organizations have been preparing to respond to increased needs since mid-2012. Locations for additional camps have been identified, and UNHCR has launched a contingency planning process.⁶⁴ But for this process to lead to an increased level of preparedness on the ground, more sustained involvement by host country governments will be required, as will stronger analysis of aid agencies' capacity to respond to increased needs, for example, by assessing gaps in vital key areas, such as food and shelter.

In addition, UNHCR should urgently ensure that aid agencies identify the additional human, material, and financial resources needed to respond to an influx of refugees and the timescale required to obtain them and make them available.

Supporting the capacity of host governments

Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger are extremely poor countries, all wrestling with internal political, economic, and social problems. Niger, for example, ranked second-to-last on the 2011 Human Development Index,⁶⁵ and experienced a coup in February 2010. These countries are facing some of the same challenges that have caused the current crisis in Mali, such as unequal social and economic development worsened by climate change, disaffected local populations, and organized crime.

Host governments have provided refugees with both legal and physical protection in line with national and international legislation by immediately granting them *prima facie* refugee status and committing to making camps more secure. However, they have not put forward their own vision or policy on Malian refugees and have mostly 'delegated' the response to the international humanitarian community. Designated state structures dealing with refugees⁶⁶ lack the necessary human, financial, and material resources. The three governments and UNCHR have sought to address this by deploying additional civil servants to camps,⁶⁷ but their numbers are still insufficient to deal with the challenges and interact with multiple interlocutors. In addition, the governments' internal co-ordination and communication channels are sometimes unclear.⁶⁸ State authorities are thus not able to effectively co-ordinate such a large-scale humanitarian response and require much more support from UNHCR and donors.⁶⁹

Improving UNHCR's leadership and co-ordination role

At the start of the emergency, UNHCR was not able to effectively assume its mandated leadership and co-ordination role for the refugee response. The agency struggled to clearly communicate its mandated role and, even if it had managed to do so, it did not initially have sufficient staff in host country capitals to effectively co-ordinate the response and collect vital information on refugee needs. UN agencies and NGO staff in-country had limited experience in refugee emergencies and were confused about UNHCR's role. Many did not understand, for example, that a UNHCR-led co-ordination of the refugee response is separate from existing co-ordination mechanisms. As a result, valuable time was lost in

squabbles over who was responsible for co-ordinating different aspects.

The situation has now improved somewhat, with better communication of the UNHCR mandate, recent increases in staffing levels, and an improved data-collection capability.

UNHCR should now translate this data into informed analysis that can guide decision-making and, ultimately, improve the quality of aid for refugees. This is vital because the analysis of the challenges facing each sector, and the subsequent strategies to be adopted to address unmet needs, remains weak. For example, information is available on the number of refugee children in schools in specific camps, but not on how many are out of school or the quality of education for those who do attend.⁷⁰

The response was also hampered by uncertainty over funding needs. By August 2012, six months into the Mali refugee crisis, UNHCR had received only one third of the funding requested in its global appeal.⁷¹ Competition with other crises and uncertainty about the real number of refugees made donors understandably reluctant to fund budgets based on what were widely considered to be inflated figures.⁷² UNHCR in Burkina Faso and Mauritania has now revised downwards its budget requests after individual registration of refugees led to reductions in their official numbers of 70 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. UNHCR should ensure that needs assessments in each sector are available as quickly as possible to allow UN agencies and NGOs to present credible funding requests. Donors must stand ready to provide swift and flexible support on the basis of this analysis as well as in the event of substantial new arrivals of refugees.

Better communication with refugees

It is best practice for humanitarian agencies to include refugees in the design, assessment, and implementation of programmes. The promotion of humanitarian principles—above all, that assistance is impartial and provided on the basis of need alone—is particularly important.

To date, NGOs and the UN are still struggling to understand the cultural practices of refugee groups and to communicate humanitarian principles. This is leading to assistance not being adapted to refugees' customs: for example, Oxfam has been told that some refugees could not use latrines facing east (towards Mecca) for religious reasons. It has also led to dilemmas for humanitarian agencies when requests from refugees—for example that food rations be distributed to male rather than female heads of household, or to refugee leaders rather than individuals, or that ethnic groups should not mix in food distribution queues—can be difficult to reconcile with aid agencies' efforts to ensure that all groups have equal access to assistance and their goals of fostering gender equality and empowerment.

This lack of dialogue between aid agencies and refugees is aggravated by a feeling among some refugees that their interests are not being adequately represented by their leaders in the camps. Refugees in

Burkina Faso and Mauritania have told Oxfam that they do not feel that they are well represented by camp committees; women, in particular, have complained that they do not receive sufficient information about aid distribution.⁷³ In addition, aid agencies in camps are aware that some refugee leaders retain a portion of the assistance when it is distributed through them instead of directly to households.⁷⁴

In this context, increased involvement of refugees in planning and executing programmes, as well as dialogue on humanitarian principles, is necessary to restore refugees' sense of dignity and autonomy, and also to avoid creating or reinforcing unequal gender and power relations between social groups and individuals.

Preserving humanitarian access

Even before the events of January 2013, insecurity was increasing in host areas, leaving refugees and host populations at greater risk. Cross-border recruitment, including of children in refugee camps, by armed groups from northern Mali was being reported. The presence of armed groups in border areas had increased the security risks (including kidnapping) for humanitarian organizations,⁷⁵ and led to the temporary suspension of some humanitarian missions and the withdrawal of humanitarian staff from some locations.⁷⁶

To date, host governments have been able to provide a basic level of security for refugees. Burkina Faso deployed additional troops in October 2012 along the border;⁷⁷ Mauritania located refugees in a single camp where it could concentrate its security forces, while both Burkina Faso and Niger are currently relocating some camps further away from the border. However, the government in Niger had already declared in September 2012 that it could not guarantee the security of international organizations in one of the host regions.⁷⁸ In areas across the host countries, humanitarian access—that is the ability of refugees to receive assistance—is increasingly limited.⁷⁹

The intensification of fighting in Mali could lead to increased infiltration of refugee camps by armed groups, thereby endangering both refugees and host populations. This would also threaten the civilian and humanitarian nature of camps and the right of refugees to seek asylum (for instance if host countries decide to deny entry to refugees on the basis that they are suspected armed combatants). This may in turn make it even more difficult for humanitarian organizations to access refugees in a secure environment. A foreign ministry official from one host country admitted to Oxfam in August 2012 that it could be increasingly difficult for host governments to fulfil their basic obligations without support if there were a further influx of refugees.⁸⁰

Preventive measures must be taken urgently, both to ensure that host countries continue to respect the right of refugees to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement—that is, not sending back asylum seekers to places where their lives could be threatened—and to reinforce the capacity of these states to preserve the civilian and humanitarian nature of camps. This includes:

- ensuring that public order is maintained in the camps;
- curbing the movement of arms within camps and settlement areas;
- disarming armed individuals;⁸¹ and
- separating combatants from civilians, while respecting their rights.

Clear distinctions between humanitarian and military actors, and parameters for appropriate interaction with military actors when and where necessary, will need to be established.

5 PLANNING FOR THE LONG TERM

The situation in Mali remains dangerous and unpredictable. At the time of publication on 22 January 2013, the humanitarian, political and security implications of the current escalation of the conflict were unclear. Mediation efforts had been put on hold,⁸² while the nature of further military operations was uncertain, with reports that African troops from several nations could be deployed imminently.⁸³

Many refugees consulted by Oxfam explained that they had been forced to leave their homes several times over the past two decades. They spoke of being tired of having to flee every time there was a crisis in northern Mali, and that they would not return to their country until there is a true, lasting peace. With no immediate prospects for a sustainable resolution to the crisis, it is likely that at least some Malian refugees will remain in host countries for several years, as has happened during past waves of displacement. It is therefore critical that host governments and aid agencies start providing longer-term assistance to refugees aimed at supporting their self-reliance.

Supporting refugees and host communities in the long term

Refugees who fled over the course of 2012 were able to bring with them some of their belongings, including cattle, but most have left their livelihoods and sources of income behind, and can no longer meet their own needs. There is a significant risk that they will fall into a state of dependency on humanitarian aid and that some may resort to joining armed groups for financial gain.

Assistance to refugees should evolve from emergency response towards medium-term activities and a more participatory approach. Many refugees, in particular women, are already requesting support for income-generating activities.⁸⁴ In Mentao camp in Burkina Faso, women prepared a list of their skills (e.g. sewing, dyeing and small-scale commerce) to request help to restart their trade. Income-generating programmes—for leather and metal crafts, small-scale commerce, carpentry—could provide a useful supplement to more direct assistance, while helping to build refugees' self-reliance. For longer-term income opportunities, studies will be needed to bridge the gap between refugees' livelihoods back in Mali—livestock breeding, agriculture and commerce—and what is feasible in host areas, in terms of market opportunities, environment, agricultural potential, and land rights.

Access to essential services and basic infrastructure (in particular health care, drinking water and education) should also be enhanced so that host populations receive lasting benefits linked to the extended stay of refugees.

We want to study [...] or do manual work. People should be employed. Otherwise, they will either fight or steal.

Young male refugee, Mentao camp, Burkina Faso

The women here are skilled in trade, crafts, dyeing, sewing, and food preparation. They have many skills. We have already drawn up a list. We want help carrying out these activities.

Matata Walet Ali, 32 years old, chairwoman of women refugees at Mentao camp, Burkina Faso

We want support to work in trade, crafts, stockbreeding, and farming, and schools for our children.

Male refugee in Damba camp, Burkina Faso

Building a better future in Mali

Refugees with whom Oxfam has spoken have lost confidence in the Malian state's ability and willingness to protect them. They fear that the country's social fabric and communities' ability to live together have been damaged. Representatives of Malian civil society have expressed the same fears with regard to the erosion of social cohesion and growing inter- and intra-community tensions. The tension generated by the conflict and by acts committed by armed groups has led to a polarization of the population and has translated into mistrust between and within ethnic groups. Traditional customs that used to support social links between different populations based on alliances, neighbourly or family relations, business ties, and other forms of social mixing have been shattered.⁸⁵ Just as many Tuaregs left Mali pre-emptively in January 2012 for fear of reprisals from the local population or the army, early reports following the Malian-French offensive in January 2013 indicate that some Arab as well as Tuareg populations are leaving their homes pre-emptively for similar reasons.⁸⁶

We want everybody's rights to be respected. This time, going back will be very difficult, because we want serious negotiations that will guarantee definitive peace, with conditions that are acknowledged, applied, and respected.

Izoma, 76 years old, refugee at Damba camp, Burkina Faso



A woman sits in a tent in Mentao camp, Burkina Faso. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam

The Malian authorities, regional governments and institutions, and the international community must embark on a long-term political commitment to restore confidence and understanding both between and within communities, as well as between communities and government authorities. This must be part of an effort to contribute to more equitable and sustainable development in Mali, in order to tackle some of the underlying causes of the crisis which are rooted in poverty and injustice, poor governance and corruption, the marginalization of certain communities, the deterioration of the environment due to climate change, and unequal access to basic services and natural resources.

6 CONCLUSION

The crisis in Mali has forced nearly 375,000 men, women and children to flee their homes since January 2012. Among them, over 145,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The situation is extremely volatile and, with multiple risks looming, a much more strategic response from humanitarian agencies and host governments is critical to meet the needs of refugees and the communities among which they are now living. People need food and healthcare, the vulnerable need to be protected, and children need to be able to continue their education.

The escalation in conflict at the start of 2013 has already led to new displacements and arrivals in host countries. The humanitarian response must be strengthened without delay to meet the needs of refugees and host populations now and in coming months. Host governments must meet their obligations under international law to protect refugees and allow civilians free passage into their countries. Military forces and armed groups must take all possible steps to prevent harm to civilians and their assets, and be held accountable for any civilian casualties.

Whatever happens, those who have fled their homes are unlikely to be able or willing to return soon. Their prolonged presence will require long-term programmes to support them and host communities, which are already struggling to cope with poverty, malnutrition and insecurity.

Crucially, the Mali crisis and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people can only be resolved through a comprehensive, long-term approach that genuinely deals with the underlying causes of the conflict. This must include the effective participation of a broad range of Malians—including women, refugees, and marginalized groups—in conflict resolution and reconciliation processes and in dealing with the chronic poverty and marginalization which blights northern Mali.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The governments of Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger,⁸⁷ with close support from UNHCR, the UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator and UN National Humanitarian Coordinators, and donors, must:

- continue to ensure that refugees' rights are respected in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention and additional protocols, particularly the right to seek asylum, and uphold the principle of non-refoulement⁸⁸ and keep borders open even in the event of a major influx of refugees;
- preserve refugees' ability to access humanitarian aid by urgently deploying and having on standby additional police and *gendarmerie* forces that are trained in and comply with international humanitarian and human rights, and refugee law, to provide security within camps and around them, including by patrolling roads. This must include community

outreach, including via female security personnel, to better understand the threats faced by refugees and host communities;

- take steps to prevent militarization and infiltration of refugee camps by armed groups operating in northern Mali, including by curbing the movement of arms in camps, disarming armed individuals, and separating combatants from civilians, while respecting their rights;
- ensure that every refugee camp is located in an appropriate and safe area, that refugees and local authorities are involved in relocation plans, and that relocation is voluntary and takes place in safety and dignity;
- increase their capacity to co-ordinate humanitarian assistance by urgently recruiting more administrators with humanitarian expertise to the National Refugee Commission in Burkina Faso, the National Refugee Eligibility Commission in Niger, and the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization in Mauritania, to be deployed in camps and to participate regularly in humanitarian co-ordination meetings;
- given current uncertainty about the future status of some camps, such as Ayorou in Niger, and the recent sudden relocation of Fereirio camp in Burkina Faso, urgently provide clear and consistent information on the status and location of current and future camps, so that refugees can make informed choices, and humanitarian agencies can plan their activities and investment of resources accurately;
- ensure that the right to humanitarian assistance and protection of *all* refugees is upheld, including those living in urban centres, such as Nouakchott, who are currently not registered as refugees by UNHCR.

All military forces currently active in Mali, in particular those of the Malian interim government and France, and regional forces deployed as part of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), must act in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2085, including by:

- abiding by, and receiving training on, international humanitarian law, applicable human rights and refugee law. French and all other forces deployed to Mali must include advisors in international humanitarian law and applicable human rights law alongside regular and Special Forces;
- issuing and implementing specific directives to respect the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants, and the principle of proportionality in the conduct of hostilities; refraining from using explosive weapons in populated areas; and avoiding indiscriminate shelling;
- reporting to the UN Security Council on steps they have taken to abide by international law and avoid civilian harm. In particular, military forces should establish a transparent methodology to assess and track patterns of civilian casualties from combat in order to minimize the civilian impact of military operations, as has been done in other conflict situations.

Armed groups in northern Mali must:

- refrain from committing human rights violations in territory under their control, and abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law in the conduct of hostilities.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other relevant UN entities must:

- deploy human rights monitors to Mali as a matter of urgency in order to address human rights concerns arising during and in the immediate aftermath of any military action, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, gender based violence, risks of arbitrary executions and detentions that might arise following reprisals and settling of scores.

UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs, together with host governments and supported by donors, must:

- increase the level of preparedness for a possible influx of refugees by ensuring that Malian authorities, host governments, and local, national, and international aid agencies are fully involved in a well co-ordinated contingency planning process that analyses the capacity of these actors to respond to increased needs. The process should, as a matter of urgency—i.e. within weeks, not months—identify the full range of additional resources (financial, material, and human) needed and the timescale required to obtain them in light of the major logistical constraints in the Sahel;
- conduct regular nutrition monitoring surveys, in particular in Burkina Faso, where a nutrition survey should be conducted as a matter of priority;
- address high malnutrition rates through a multi-sectoral approach that includes timely distribution of full food rations to all refugees, including marginalized groups; expansion of income-generating programmes to enable refugees to diversify their food intake and meet other needs without selling rations; provision of safe water and adequate medical coverage; and working to address cultural and behavioural causes of malnutrition;
- ensure that the specific needs of pastoralist refugees are addressed by assessing the socio-environmental impact of their livestock on fragile host areas and identifying creative solutions in consultation with local authorities, host populations, and refugees, given the limited available pasture and water;
- ensure that all refugee children have access to education, with an emphasis on increasing the number of primary school teachers in camps and working with local authorities to integrate refugees into existing secondary schools, while also increasing and improving access to education for host communities;
- establish longer-term programmes that benefit both refugees and host populations, such as restoring critical small-scale infrastructure (e.g. water and sanitation facilities) and creating livelihood opportunities through training, income-generating activities, and education;
- mitigate tensions between host communities and refugees by training community leaders in conflict resolution related to access to, and management of, natural resources in the Sahel region, and by establishing mediation committees;

- improve consultation with, and accountability to, refugees in line with commitments related to accountability to affected populations defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee⁸⁹ and the HAP Standard,⁹⁰ so as to better understand cultural specificities and complex power dynamics in refugee communities and adjust programming accordingly.

UNHCR must:

- urgently improve analysis of gaps and challenges in each sector of the refugees response, in particular protection and education, and ensure that this analysis is used to inform and guide priorities;
- ensure that camp refugee committees consult with, and represent the interests of, all groups, especially women and marginalized groups, and distribute assistance equally to individuals. It should work with experts familiar with Mali's complex social make-up and structures to carry out assessments in the camps and develop common best practices with humanitarian actors to ensure equal access and use of assistance by marginalized groups, as well as their participation in decision-making processes;
- immediately prioritize addressing protection threats to refugee populations, including by developing better analysis of risks disaggregated by sex, age, and ethnicity. This should involve ensuring that co-ordination meetings on child protection and gender-based violence take place regularly and producing detailed strategies to address these threats, including establishing referral systems in each of the camps;
- ensure that budget requests are based on solid needs assessments and gap analysis, based on revised refugee numbers, to strengthen the case to donors.

Donors must:

- ensure that the refugee response is fully funded on the basis of revised refugee numbers in each country, and stand ready to provide swift and flexible support in the event of substantial new arrivals of refugees. This should include funding for longer-term programmes aimed at enhancing refugees' self-reliance;
- provide humanitarian funding for needs in Mali, as well as supporting peace-building activities.

The Malian government, the UN Special Envoy, the African Union Special Envoy, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), donors working with civil society, and communities must:

- take a broader approach to tackling the underlying causes of the Mali crisis beyond addressing immediate security threats and the threat of terrorism. This must involve improving governance in northern Mali, investing in development programmes that benefit the whole population equally, and supporting inter-community dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

NOTES

Unless otherwise specified, web links were last accessed January 2013

- ¹ OCHA (2013) 'Mali: Humanitarian Snapshot', 17 January, <http://reliefweb.int/map/mali/mali-humanitarian-snapshot-17-january-2013-enfr>. See also UNHCR (2013) 'Mali Operation', <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/regional.php>
- ² Focus groups with refugees in Burkina Faso and Mauritania, August and October 2012.
- ³ An MSF survey in the Mbera camp found a severe acute malnutrition rate of 4,6% and a global acute malnutrition rate of 17%, see MSF (2012) *Étude de la nutrition et de la mortalité retrospective*, November. The WHO emergency threshold for global acute malnutrition is 15%.
- ⁴ Vétérinaires Sans Frontières has carried out a more detailed census in Burkina Faso. It found that in Damba camp the more than 2,700 registered refugees had around 4,100 animals in the camp itself and almost 4,000 larger animals in the vicinity. Notes from UNHCR co-ordination meeting, Ouagadougou, 23 November 2012.
- ⁵ International Organization for Migration, 15 January 2013, private communication.
- ⁶ OCHA (2012) 'Mali +, scénario de planification pour la crise malienne', 10 December 2012, shared with Oxfam by email on 11 December.
- ⁷ Resolution 2085, 20 December 2012, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2085%282012%29
- ⁸ OCHA (2013) 'Mali: Humanitarian Snapshot', <http://reliefweb.int/map/mali/mali-humanitarian-snapshot-17-january-2013-enfr>, 17 January.
- ⁹ UN Security Council press statement on Mali, 11 December 2012, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2012/sc10851.doc.htm>
- ¹⁰ Resolution 2085, 20 December 2012, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2085%282012%29
- ¹¹ Human Rights Watch, quoted in BBC News (2013) 'Mali: France pledges 'short' campaign against Islamists', 12 January 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-21007517>
- ¹² UNHCR (2013) 'Mali situation update, number 14', 1 January 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=&comid=4f79b7eb9&cid=49aea93ae2&scid=49aea93a77&keywords=maliemergency>
- ¹³ On 14 January 2013, the official number of refugees was 146,324. See UNHCR website for latest figures: <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/regional.php>
- ¹⁴ See 'Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali', S/2012/894, 29 November 2012, paragraph 2, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/894
- ¹⁵ Interviews with representatives of UNHCR and NGOs in Ouagadougou, Nouakchott, and Niamey. See also the UNHCR website for details on programmes in West Africa: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e483de6&submit=GO>
- ¹⁶ Amnesty International (2004) 'Mali: Ethnic conflict and killings of civilians', 20 September 1994, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR37/008/1994/en>; International Crisis Group (2012) 'Mali: éviter l'escalade' ('Mali: preventing escalation'), 18 July, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/regions/afrique/afrique-de-louest/mali/189-mali-avoiding-escalation.aspx>
- ¹⁷ ICRC (2012) 'Mali: des milliers de personnes touchées par les combats dans le nord' ('Mali: thousands of people affected by fighting in the north'), 8 February, <http://www.icrc.org/fre/resources/documents/update/2012/mali-update-2012-02-08.htm>
- ¹⁸ Interviews with refugees in Burkina Faso, August 2012.
- ¹⁹ Oxfam discussions with refugees in Niger.
- ²⁰ Human Rights Watch (2012) 'Mali: Les rebelles du Nord perpètrent des crimes de guerre', 30 April, <http://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2012/04/30/mali-les-rebelles-du-nord-perp-trent-des-crimes-de-guerre>
- ²¹ UNHCR (2012) 'Niger, registration report', 7 October, <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=157>; UNHCR (2012) 'Mali Situation Update, Number 12', 1 November, <http://www.unhcr.org/50a35d509.html>; discussion with UNHCR protection staff, Ouagadougou, 22 November 2012; UNHCR (2013b) 'Mali situation update, number 14', 1 January 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=&comid=4f79b7eb9&cid=49aea93ae2&scid=49aea93a77&keywords=maliemergency>
- ²² Niger registered 5,348 new arrivals in August 2012, 2,986 in September, and 669 in October. Statistics from UNHCR (2012) 'Malian refugees in Niger', 22 October, <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=157>. In Burkina Faso, 982 individuals were registered in October (UNHCR Factsheet, 30 October 2012) and 1,503 in November (<http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=26>, accessed 3 December 2012). In Mauritania, 5,222 refugees were registered in September 2012 and 920 in October. There were 103,731 refugees in Mauritania on 19 August, 108,953 on 24 September (<http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=132>), and 109,873 on 5 November ('Compte rendu, reunion de coordination', 5 November 2011, <http://mali.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/document/compte-rendu-r%C3%A9union-de-coordination-du-cluster-eha-du-07-novembre-2012>).
- ²³ UNHCR (2012) 'Synthèse globale des données des réfugiés maliens au Burkina Faso', 30 December,

<http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=26>. Figures are not yet available for Mauritania and Niger, but previous estimates also indicated a majority of Tuaregs among refugees in Mauritania.

- ²⁴ Interviews with refugees and representatives of UNHCR and NGOs in Ouagadougou, Mentao, Nouakchott, and Bassikounou.
- ²⁵ In Mauritania, 58 per cent of refugees are under the age of 18; in Burkina Faso the proportion is 54 per cent. See UNHCR (2013) 'Mali operation', <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=132>.
- ²⁶ Women and girls account for 48 per cent of refugees in Burkina Faso (<http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=26>) and 55 per cent in Mauritania (<http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=132>).
- ²⁷ Previously, a 'Level 1' registration process was used, which counted new refugees based on their own statements and those of their representatives and local authorities. 'Level 2' registration, on the other hand, is an individual registration process that is more accurate, since it requires the physical presence of refugees. In Burkina Faso, this process has confirmed a total of 34,877 Malian refugees, a lower figure than the 107,000 registered previously. UNHCR press release, 'Le HCR ajuste les chiffres de réfugiés maliens au Burkina Faso à la suite de la seconde phase d'enregistrement' ('UNHCR adjusts Malian refugee figures in Burkina Faso after second phase of registration'), 1 October, available at <http://www.apanews.net/communiquart.php?id=20>.
- ²⁸ OCHA (2012) 'Mali +, scénario de planification pour la crise malienne', shared with Oxfam by email on 11 December.
- ²⁹ Interviews with representatives of UNHCR (6 September 2012) and the Interior Ministry (5 September 2012), Nouakchott.
- ³⁰ For example, pastoralists settled in sites close to the border with Mali, if their cattle had stayed there, or in sites that offered the possibility of pasture. Interviews with NGOs, Ouagadougou and Niamey, and with a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ouagadougou (23 August 2012).
- ³¹ Provisional planning figure, pending the completion of the individual registration process, <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=157>
- ³² Certain sites have become official camps (Abala and Mangaize), while some will have to be relocated (Banibangou), though it is not yet known when. Decisions are pending on the status of other sites (such as Ayorou).
- ³³ The severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate in the M'bera camp is 5.9 per cent and the global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate is 20 per cent, according to a nutrition survey by the Ministry of Health in July 2012. A more recent MSF survey found a SAM rate of 4.6% and a GAM rate of 17% ('Étude de la nutrition et de la mortalité retrospective', November 2012, shared by email with Oxfam in January 2013). According to the preliminary results of a post-distribution survey, 25.8 per cent of households in the camp are in a situation of food insecurity. (WFP, regional internal report, 31 October 2012, shared by email with Oxfam in November 2012).
- ³⁴ SAM rates range from 3.1 per cent to 7.2 per cent in different camps, while GAM rates are between 15.5 per cent and 21.2 per cent (survey at the Abala, Ayorou, and Mangaize refugee camps conducted by UNHCR and UNICEF, August 2012).
- ³⁵ According to WFP, this is due to pipeline and funding problems. Interviews with WFP representatives in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania between August and October 2012. See also: RFI (2012) 'Mauritanie : difficile, pour les réfugiés maliens, de fêter la Tabaski', 25 October, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20121025-mauritanie-difficile-refugiés-maliens-camp-bera-feter-tabaski>
- ³⁶ Interviews with refugees and representatives of NGOs, WFP, and UNHCR. A nutritional survey in Niger revealed other factors that may contribute to malnutrition, such as sharing rations with host communities in order to maintain good relations or out of solidarity, reselling rations to meet other needs, for example more varied food or firewood to cook with (the high cost of firewood limits the number of meals prepared and eaten). Report of the WFP/UNHCR joint mission at refugee camps in Niger, September 2012, shared by email with Oxfam in November 2012.
- ³⁷ The nutrition survey in Niger did not cover all camps and sites.
- ³⁸ A 2001 survey showed that 53 per cent of girls aged 15–19 years were married, divorced, or widowed. Of girls aged 15–19 who were already married, 19 per cent were married before they turned 15. In some regions, discriminatory or harmful practices relating to marriage persist, such as arranging a girl's marriage when she is born, giving a daughter in marriage to a witch doctor for religious reasons, or exchanging women between communities to strengthen bonds. ACAPS (2012) 'Northern Mali Conflict and Food Insecurity: Disaster Needs Analysis', 20 November, p.20, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mali_conflict_food_insecurity_nov_2012.pdf
- ³⁹ Women refugees in emergency contexts are generally more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation based on their sex, age, and dependence, as well as their limited power and participation in decision-making processes.
- ⁴⁰ ACAPS (2012) 'Northern Mali Conflict and Food Insecurity, op. cit., p.20.
- ⁴¹ Interviews with NGO representatives at camps in Burkina Faso and Mauritania.
- ⁴² Interviews with Oxfam teams in Burkina Faso and Mauritania.
- ⁴³ Cross-border recruitment of children has been reported in refugee camps in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. See 'Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali', S/2012/894, 29 November 2012, paragraph 26, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/894
- ⁴⁴ In Burkina Faso, at-risk children are estimated to account for 3.08 per cent of the total refugee population, while separated and unaccompanied children account for 2.57 per cent. Synthèse globale des données des réfugiés maliens au Burkina Faso, UNHCR, 30 décembre 2012, <http://data.unhcr.org/MaliSituation/country.php?id=26>.
- ⁴⁵ Mauritania Humanitarian dashboard, 15 January 2013, <http://reliefweb.int/report/mauritania/mauritania-humanitarian-dashboard-january-15-2013-enfr>
- ⁴⁶ UNHCR (2013) 'Mali Situation Update, number 14', 1 January, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=&comid=4f79b7eb9&cid=49aea93ae2&scid=49aea93a77&keywords=maliemergency>

- ⁴⁷ This is due to the funding deficit in this area at the beginning of the response. Interview with UNHCR representative in Nouakchott, September 2012.
- ⁴⁸ This number is an estimation provided by an organisation founded to represent malian refugees in Mauritania, the Association of Refugee Victims of Repression in Azawad (*Association des réfugiés victimes de la répression de l’Azawad*, ARVRA).
- ⁴⁹ Interviews with representatives of the Interior Ministry and UNHCR, Nouakchott, September and December 2012. See also: IRIN (2013) ‘Refugees: the urban challenge’, 9 January, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97203/REFUGEES-The-urban-challenge>
- ⁵⁰ Including through UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, September 2009, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ab8e7f2.html>
- ⁵¹ Protection has been limited to registration, physical security, and monitoring of some cases of vulnerable people and specific needs. Interviews with representatives of UNHCR, UNICEF, and NGOs specialising in protection in Nouakchott, Niamey, and Ouagadougou.
- ⁵² IASC (2005) ‘Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings’, [http://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/GBV%20Guidelines%20\(English\).pdf](http://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/GBV%20Guidelines%20(English).pdf)
- ⁵³ Compared with 28 per cent of the population in Burkina Faso and 49 per cent in Niger. Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) (2012) for Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger.
- ⁵⁴ In Mauritania, the GAM rate in the Hodh Chargui region (a host area for refugees) is 16.2 per cent, while the emergency threshold is 15 per cent (national nutrition survey using SMART methodology, Mauritania, July 2012, MS/ONS/UNICEF preliminary results). In Burkina Faso, GAM in the Sahel region is estimated at 11.5 per cent, while the critical threshold is 10 per cent (2011 SMART survey, 2011 national nutrition survey report, Health Ministry, November 2011). In Niger, the GAM rate is estimated at 12.3 per cent at the national level (CAP 2012).
- ⁵⁵ Discussions with host populations of refugees in the areas in which Oxfam is present in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania.
- ⁵⁶ Consolidated report of the May–June 2012 Rapid Assessment Joint Mission, United Nations, Mauritania, shared by email with Oxfam in September 2012.
- ⁵⁷ See: ICRC (1995) ‘Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief’, <http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/idrl/I259EN.pdf>
- ⁵⁸ The number of cattle brought from Mali is estimated at around 55,000 in Mauritania, 15,000 in Niger, and 30,000–50,000 in Burkina Faso, based on refugees’ declarations. OCHA (2012) ‘Mali +, scénario de planification pour la crise malienne’, op. cit.
- ⁵⁹ Vétérinaires Sans Frontières has carried out a more detailed census in Burkina Faso. It found that in Damba camp the more than 2,700 registered refugees had around 4,100 animals in the camp itself and almost 4,000 larger animals in the vicinity. Notes from UNHCR co-ordination meeting, Ouagadougou, 23 November 2012.
- ⁶⁰ In Burkina Faso, studies on the impact of animals on hosting areas and on land availability are reportedly underway, but results have not yet been shared. There are no ongoing studies in Mauritania and Niger.
- ⁶¹ Notes from UNHCR co-ordination meeting in Ouagadougou, 9 November 2012. See also: IRIN (2012) ‘BURKINA FASO: Prévenir les conflits entre les agriculteurs et les éleveurs’, 31 October, <http://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/prévenir-les-conflits-entre-les-agriculteurs-et-les-éleveurs>
- ⁶² OCHA (2012) ‘Mali +, scénario de planification pour la crise malienne’, shared with Oxfam by email on 11 December.
- ⁶³ OCHA (2013) Mali : Humanitarian Snapshot, OCHA, 17 January 2013, <http://reliefweb.int/map/mali/mali-humanitarian-snapshot-17-january-2013-enfr>
- ⁶⁴ Burkina Faso: inter-agency contingency plan, September 2012; UNHCR contingency plan, September 2012; Mauritania: contingency plan for the Malian crisis, UNHCR, June 2012.
- ⁶⁵ Niger came 186 out of 187 countries. Burkina Faso was ranked 181st and Mauritania 157th, see UNDP International Human Development Indicators, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data/profiles/>
- ⁶⁶ In Burkina Faso, the National Refugee Commission (Commission Nationale sur les Réfugiés, or CONAREF) reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Mauritania, responsibility lies with the Interior and Decentralisation Ministry. In Niger, the National Refugee Eligibility Commission reports to the Interior Ministry.
- ⁶⁷ Interviews with a representative of the Burkina Faso Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ouagadougou, 23 August 2012: five camp managers have been recruited and five assistant camp managers and transit centre assistants will be recruited with UNHCR funding. Interview with a representative of the Niger Interior Ministry in Niamey, 2 October 2012: two agents will be recruited per camp and in Niamey itself, with UNHCR funding.
- ⁶⁸ In Burkina Faso, for instance, the mandates and responsibilities of the national, regional, and departmental structures on emergency situations (CONASUR, CORESUR, CODESUR) in relation to CONAREF (responsible for refugees) and their working relationships on this specific refugee crisis need to be clarified.
- ⁶⁹ Interviews with local authorities, Burkina Faso, September 2012; UNDP (2012) ‘Report on the Assessment of the Initially Identified Needs of Communities Affected by the Malian Refugee Crisis’, April, Niger, shared by email with Oxfam in October 2012
- ⁷⁰ Notes from co-ordination meetings in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger.
- ⁷¹ Six months into the conflict, UNHCR has received only \$49.9m of the \$153m needed to help Malian refugees and IDPs. UNHCR (2012) ‘More aid needed for Mali’s hidden emergency, urge Guterres and U.S.’, 2 August, <http://www.unhcr.org/501a6d629.html>
- ⁷² Interviews with one of the main backers and a representative of a UN agency, Ouagadougou (22 August 2012) and Dakar (November 2012).
- ⁷³ Report of the Joint Mission on Refugee Sites, Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Burkina Faso. Interviews with

Oxfam public health promotion (PHP) teams in Mauritania, who claim that women in hygiene awareness raising groups have complained of this. Interviews with refugees and representatives of NGOs in Burkina Faso and Mauritania. Preparations are underway to elect new refugee representatives (interview with UNHCR staff, January 2013).

⁷⁴ In Mauritania, it is widely recognised by aid agencies interviewed by Oxfam that food rations distributed to chiefs of camp sectors have not been redistributed to individual households as they should, and that this situation has reinforced the influence of these leaders over refugee households.

⁷⁵ UNDSS security briefing, Burkina Faso, 9 November 2012. Six aid workers were kidnapped in Niger in October 2012.

⁷⁶ Special Sahel Humanitarian Bulletin, Sahel, 16 November 2012, <http://reliefweb.int/report/mali/special-humanitarian-bulletin-sahel-crisis-issue-06-16-november-2012>

⁷⁷ Agence France-Presse (2012) 'Burkina Faso deploys troops to region bordering Mali', 10 October, <http://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-deploys-troops-region-bordering-mali>; and Le Faso.net (2012) 'Région du Sahel au Burkina : Des soldats prêts contre toute menace suspecte', 13 September, <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article50152>

⁷⁸ The Tahoua area is not accessible to international organizations. The kidnapping of five humanitarian workers, though in a different area of the country, confirmed the vulnerability of humanitarian organizations.

⁷⁹ UNHCR (2012) 'Mali Situation Update, Number 12', 1 November, <http://www.unhcr.org/50a35d509.html>. In Burkina Faso, the Interior Ministry alerted all NGOs on 26 September 2012 about the security situation in Ouagadougou and the border area with Mali.

⁸⁰ Interview with a representative of the Burkina Faso Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ouagadougou, 23 August 2012.

⁸¹ In January 2013, 84 MNLA former combattants were allowed to enter Mauritania and go to the refugee camp after surrendering their arms to the Mauritanian army. See MaliJet (2013) 'La Mauritanie autorise les combattants du MNLA à entrer sur son territoire après avoir remis leurs armes', 5 January, http://www.malijet.com/actualite_dans_les_regions_du_mali/rebellion_au_nord_du_mali/60339-la-mauritanie-autorise-les-combattants-du-mnla-a-entrer-sur-son-.html

⁸² Some reports indicate that discussions between the Malian government, the MNLA and Ansar Dine, scheduled to take place in Burkina on 21 January, have been cancelled. See l'Echo Republicain (2013) 'La France, en guerre contre le terrorisme, bombarde le Nord', 14 January, <http://www.lechorepublicain.fr/france-monde/actualites/a-la-une/international/2013/01/13/mali-l-aviation-francaise-bombarde-les-bastions-islamistes-dans-le-nord-1403361.html> and Mali Actu (2013) 'Mali: les discussions à Ouagadougou ne sont plus d'actualité', 13 January, <http://maliactu.net/mali-les-discussions-a-ouagadougou-ne-sont-plus-dactualite-source-proche-presidence-burkinabe/>

⁸³ Le Monde (2013) '2 000 soldats africains attendus d'ici dix jours au Mali', 16 January, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/01/16/mali-les-forces-terrestres-francaises-remontent-vers-le-nord_1817490_3212.html

⁸⁴ Interviews with refugees, Burkina Faso. UNHCR (2012) 'Mali Situation Update, Number 12', 1 November, <http://www.unhcr.org/50a35d509.html>. During a participatory assessment in Niger, refugees asked for revenue-generating activities.

⁸⁵ Oxfam workshop with Malian civil society representatives, Bamako, September 2012.

⁸⁶ Interviews with Oxfam staff in Gao, January 2013. See also Rémy, P (2013) 'Au Mali, Bamako salue l'intervention des troupes françaises', *Le Monde*, 14 January, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/01/14/au-mali-bamako-salue-l-intervention-des-troupes-francaises_1816564_3212.html

⁸⁷ Other host governments include Algeria and Guinea. Although this paper focuses on Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger, these recommendations apply to all countries hosting Malian refugees.

⁸⁸ In accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

⁸⁹ IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP), http://aimstandingteam.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/iasc_caap_tools_v4_12nologo.pdf

⁹⁰ HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management (2010), <http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/2010-hap-standard-in-accountability.pdf>

© Oxfam International January 2013

This paper was written by Caroline Baudot. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Maya Mailer, Ilaria Allegrozzi, Stephen Cockburn, Madeleine Evrard Diakite, Noel Zigani, Lalla Aicha Ouedrago, Aimee Ansari, Ed Cairns and teams in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-245-5 in January 2013.

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in 94 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:

Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)

Oxfam Australia (www.oxfam.org.au)

Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)

Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)

Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)

Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)

Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)

Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)

Oxfam India (www.oxfamindia.org)

Intermon Oxfam (www.intermonoxfam.org)

Oxfam Ireland (www.oxfamireland.org)

Oxfam Italy (www.oxfamitalia.org)

Oxfam Japan (www.oxfam.jp)

Oxfam Mexico (www.oxfammexico.org)

Oxfam New Zealand (www.oxfam.org.nz)

Oxfam Novib (www.oxfamnovib.nl)

Oxfam Quebec (www.oxfam.qc.ca)

Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org. Email: advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

www.oxfam.org



OXFAM