

Towards Gender Equality in Mali



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Eva Evers Rosander

Abbreviations

ASSWLM	Analytical Study of the Status of Women and Law in Mali
CAFO	Coordination des Associations et Organisations Non-Gouvernementales
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GP	Gender Profile
MPWCF	Ministry of the Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
ONG	Organisation Non Gouvernementale
PAP	Policy and Action Planning (for the Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family 2002–2006)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RPP	Reduction of Poverty Project
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases

1. Introduction

“C’est l’homme qui fait la dignité de la femme” (“Man gives woman her dignity”)
(Bambara: *muso kòni danbe ye cède yè*)

This Mali Gender Profile (GP) is a desk study, based on documents such as the Mali Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)¹ and the papers and strategies of the Ministry of the Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family (MPWCF). I have also used documents of development agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and women’s associations and books and articles on gender issues in Mali. Material has been included from the interviews made in Bamako in February 2003 with representatives of ministries, women’s NGOs and women’s associations. No empirical fieldwork has been carried out in Mali.

This GP completes other existing papers on Mali produced by Sida with the ambition to facilitate the spreading of knowledge about the country and to prepare the ground for future explorations of development aid domains involving gender issues in Mali. A certain overlapping with other Sida documents is inevitable, as the gender theme in isolation lacks meaning in a study of the position of men and women in society. It is gender *and* – poverty, equality, law, land, environment etc – that reveals such aspects of gendered domestic and public life in Mali, that are of importance in a development context. Moreover, gender is just one factor among many others, such as race, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, social status and age, which together constitute the conditions for the progress – or the stagnation – of development efforts.

The disposition of the paper is the following: after some clarifying words on gender, I take up the Mali PRSP, commenting on it from a gender perspective. I go on with a short account of the most essential background data about Mali, including an overview of the largest ethnic groups and the hierarchical social system, which is important for an understanding of the socio-political framework and the gender system. Hereafter I turn to an overview of gender and law with special reference to national, customary and Islamic laws.

I give a more detailed picture of the legal domains, which have caused a debate about women and equity² in Mali. Particular attention is

¹ Final PRSP; Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. May 29, 2002. The Government of Mali.

² In Mali, “equity” is the preferred term, because it is said to be less provocative than “equality”. In a Swedish development context, “equality” is generally used.

awarded family law issues and the female civil society. I want to draw attention to the fact that the ratification of the family law is delayed without any plausible explanation, and also to underline the importance of a reformed family law to promote equality, democracy and women's rights.

In the chapter on socio-economic characteristics I make an outline of rural, urban and migratory livelihoods, including a shortened version of a case study from central rural Mali. The political and institutional framework for the promotion of women's status is displayed and followed by some important data about women and sustainable development and demography and health, collected from official Malian documents.

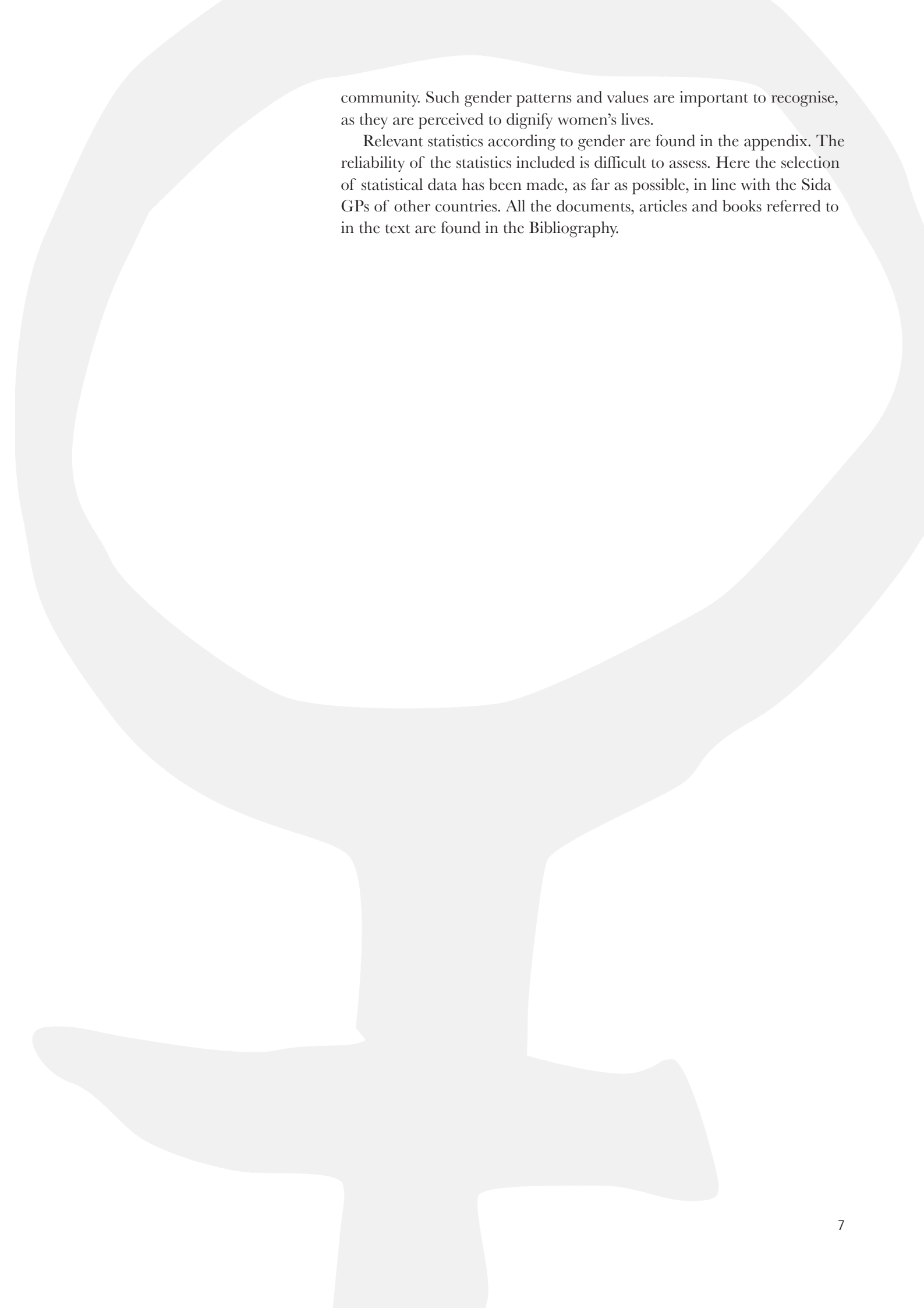
The proposed improvements of women's status from 2002 to 2006 by the MPWCF are presented in an abbreviated version. The conclusion of the proposals is that women's "passivity"³ due to ignorance, illiteracy, lack of time and a heavy workload are the greatest obstacles for women's participation in development. The gender system is contributing to this state of matters and men, to put it drastically, as the privileged gender and power holders, are to a certain extent a constraint for women's improved life conditions.

As most chapters of this GP are rather short, covering various topics, I have not made conclusions for each of them. Instead, the Summing Up (chapter 13) contains short accounts of the themes treated in the twelve chapters, ending with a final comment. In the comment I underline that people in Mali do not necessarily consider themselves poor and miserable, which is the dominating impression one gets from most of the documents referred to in this paper. The younger generations take part in what modernity offers in Mali but also through migration and visits to other places. The older people selectively choose what they consider good for them from among the available innovations and leave the rest with a reference to tradition, religion and custom. Also the gender relations change over time. With women's increased economic responsibility and the family patterns in transition, this process will accelerate.

That gender cannot be ignored in the fight for poverty reduction is thus well manifested in this paper. It is no exaggeration to say that equal and just gender relations are decisive for a democratic development of the society, for economic growth and for human wellbeing. At the same time it is important to underline that the so called socio-cultural factors, which serve to maintain the unequal gender relations, also contribute to offer women an autonomous sphere and a "female only" space for the construction of successful female life strategies. Female autonomy sometimes risks being lost in nuclear husband-wife units where *sharing* everything is the prevailing ideal, especially as male ideas about sharing are based on men's traditional rights as head of families to decide how and what to share.

Autonomy or sharing – I see a pattern of gender relations as a mixture of *both-and*, with many regional and individual variations. Men and women in contemporary Mali are united in dependency patterns of status and prestige, which are essential for their individual life careers as honourable and respectful members (married and with off-spring) of the

³ "Passivity" is MPWCF's expression.



community. Such gender patterns and values are important to recognise, as they are perceived to dignify women's lives.

Relevant statistics according to gender are found in the appendix. The reliability of the statistics included is difficult to assess. Here the selection of statistical data has been made, as far as possible, in line with the Sida GPs of other countries. All the documents, articles and books referred to in the text are found in the Bibliography.

2. Gender and Women in Development

Gender is defined as the social and cultural construction of male and female, while *sex* is referring to the biological aspects of male and female. By *gender relations* are meant relations between men and women, seen in a wide socio-cultural perspective.

Gender and development is an approach focusing on the relations between men and women with the aim of achieving an equitable and sustainable development, which implies the participation of men and women in the decision making. This approach pays much attention to power relations. Inherent is the ambition to investigate possibilities for women's increased influence on society at all levels. In this GP the Malian woman and her socio-cultural role and position in society is investigated both in relations to men and women. The main focus is on women-men relations. In the selection of the themes for the GP a preference is given to the Gender and Development approach.

Male domination in its different socio-cultural and ideological forms and its negative consequences for the alleviation of poverty and the promotion of equality and democracy constitutes the "red thread" of this paper. There are of course other factors of importance, such as the hierarchical caste-like social system, the dry and erratic climate, and economic crises, contributing to Mali's current state as one of the poorest countries in the world. Illiteracy, a deficient health system, low wages and unemployment are other factors worth mentioning. In this paper particular attention is paid to the gender aspect in relation to resources, distribution of resources and power or control over them.

In Mali, as in many other countries in Islamic Africa, the segregation of the sexes and the adherence to religious or traditional family law are dominant characteristics of the society. The ideological and normative system makes men and women dependent on one another for the realisation of their social selves. Men need women to confirm their role as Muslim husbands and fathers. Women need men even more as husband, legitimate fathers of their children and sources of female prestige. For women, professional roles or identities can not outweigh the importance of the wife and mother roles as sources of respectability, status and prestige. So the proverb, cited above, which says: "Man gives woman her dignity" has its actuality also in contemporary Mali. That is also why change in the gender system is difficult to achieve. Ideas and values attached to sexuality, religion, tradition and



gender relations are of long duration. Besides, for the majority of the women there exist no attractive alternative female life careers besides marriage and motherhood.

3. Poverty and Poverty Reduction

Mali is said to be one of the poorest countries in the world. But what does it mean to be poor in Mali? The Mali National Direction of Statistics and Computer Science has given a financial dimension to poverty. The threshold is 137.000 francs CFA in annual income.⁴ According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of May 2002 (PRSP), poverty strikes almost two thirds of the population in Mali, out of which one third lives in extreme poverty. The highest percentage is found in the rural areas – almost 76 percent – compared with 30 percent in urban milieus. What is measured in percentage here is the “depth of poverty”.⁵

PRSP stresses other dimensions as well. Poverty is characterised by illiteracy, malnutrition, reduced life expectancy, poor health, noxious environment, reduced participation in economic and social life. The three risk factors most commonly cited by the poor themselves relate to shortage of food, illness and a lack of jobs.⁶

In Bamako, with a total of thirty percent poor people, the percentage for “very poor” is fixed to 0,2. Everywhere, however – in the countryside as well as in town – women are poorer than men, as they have less control over and access to the existing resources, and are more limited by societal or socio-cultural constraints.⁷

According to Sida’s definition, *poverty* means lack of power over resources. Sida stresses the lack of accessibility to social, economic and political resources.⁸ Poverty comprises multi-dimensional forms of deprivation, leading to low levels of social, natural, physical, human and financial capital. The many dimensions associated with poverty require that it be considered within a broader livelihood context, which helps identify not only some of the attributes associated with being poor, but also the way in which certain structures and institutions make it very difficult for poor people to escape their condition.⁹

⁴ 1 euro=655 FCFA

⁵ This measurement of poverty is used by PRSP. Living conditions was derived from the basis of a poverty index, calculated for each locality on the assumption that poverty can be assessed in terms of the provision of basic social services (health, drinking water etc) to the communities. The index varies from 0 points for the poorest locality to 20 points to the least poor locality (PRSP 2002:12).

⁶ Gouvernement du Mali, PRSP 2002:1

⁷ Gouvernement du Mali, PRSP 2002:13

⁸ Sida 1997:169

⁹ Gouvernement du Mali. 2002. *Politiques et Plans d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille 2002–2006*. 29 mai 2002:60. For an informative account of the poverty situation in Mali, see Toulmin et al. 2000: 59–71.

In the PRSP 2002, the long-term strategic vision of Mali's future and its poverty reduction in the period up to 2025 has been developed with the intention to reflect the aspirations of the people. The main objective is to reduce poverty from 63.8 percent in 2001 to 47.4 percent in 2006.¹⁰ The main themes of the strategy rest on three "pillars":

1. Institutional development and improved governance and participation;
2. Human development and strengthening of the access to basic social services;
3. Development of infrastructure and support for key productive sectors.

The third strategic pillar aims at improving the environment for productive activities in order to increase productivity and economic growth. The emphasis is on actions in three areas:

- a plan for balanced regional development and a policy of suitable infrastructure;
- a new vision of rural development and a multi-dimensional approach to food and nutrition security;
- a new commercial policy and an integrated framework for the development of the private sector and key competitive product sectors.¹¹

How is the gender aspect integrated into the PRSP 2002? This is important to investigate, as we know that gender and gender relations constitute essential and deep cutting dimensions of poverty. Women are the poorest of the poor due to male dominance over scarce family resources with negative consequences for women and children. Even in very poor families and household units, unequal access to or male control over the existing scarce resources such as better quality land for cultivation, agricultural equipment and rural credits, creates cleavages between men and women in contemporary Malian society.

However, what would be called gender discrimination from a development perspective is not directly dealt with in those terms among the people themselves. In Mali, male domination is presented and lived as a traditional and religious discourse in its own right, which makes change and reform policies difficult. Both men and women are ignorant about other alternatives. People think and act as they have learnt since early childhood. The deteriorated life conditions are not a motivation for men to become more generous as regards women's needs of land to cultivate, but rather the other way around. Men act and argue along the same gendered logic as always. This means that men consider their responsibility to provide for the family of greater importance than women's and thus give priority to their own ways of defining needs and preferences, even if, in practice, women may sometimes be the principal providers.

In the PRSP, the situation of poor women in contemporary Mali is pointed out without further explanations or interpretations.¹² Considering its importance, I would have liked more analysis of gender relations and its effects on the conservation of poverty structures. The spatial analysis of poverty in the PRSP is joined by an analysis of the link

¹⁰ PRSP 2002:4

¹¹ PRSP 2002:2-3

¹² PRSP 2002:28, *ibid* 2002:57-58

between poverty and health and other factors affecting the living standards. Nothing is, however, mentioned about the gender system and the hierarchical social structure of the society at large as a factor related to poverty. In the whole PRSP, which embraces 85 pages, there is half a page dedicated to the involvement of women in the priority areas,¹³ which is said to require strengthening (literacy, education, health) and almost one page under “Cross-Cutting Issues” about the role of women in the poverty reduction process.¹⁴ Under the heading “The Role of Women in the Poverty Reduction Process” one finds the goals set up by the State covering the years 2002–2006 with the aim to, among other important things, contribute to a forty percent reduction in the gender disparity in literacy rates.¹⁵

As a strategy for an effective and long lasting poverty reduction, this is not really enough. Without a proper analysis of the sensitive factors of Malian society, which influence the unequal distribution of financial and social resources and a strategy for eliminating these factors, progress will be slow and the social and economic development in a democratic spirit curbed. On the other hand, it is promising that the PRSP has particularly considered poor women and their vulnerable situation as an effect of female illiteracy and bad health and decided to make strong efforts to improve the prevailing situation.

¹³ PRSP 2002:28

¹⁴ PRSP 57–58

¹⁵ PRSP 2002:57

4. General Characteristics of Mali

The Republic of Mali is situated in West Africa, surrounded by Mauritania, Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Guinea and Senegal. Its surface is five times that of Sweden and the country is populated by almost twelve million inhabitants, of whom 52 percent are women. The demographical growth is three percent. In 1998 the rural population was 73,2 percent. The Mali population is young; 46,6 percent are less than 15 years old. People marry young, especially girls. The official and legal marriage age is 15 for girls and 18 for boys.¹⁶

At least twenty ethnic groups (Bambara, Peul, Soninké, Sénoufo-Minyanka, Dogon, Malinké, Songhaï, Tamasheq and others) are found in Mali, with a long tradition of living together. The ethnic groups are often categorized according to being sedentary or nomadic. The sedentary people are found in the Mandé cultural grouping (40 percent of the population) to which Bambara, Malinké, Dioula and some other minority groups belong. 33 percent of the Mali population are Bambara and use Bambara as their first language, 15 percent are Peul, 12 percent are Sénoufo, to mention the biggest ethnic groups. The Bambara live dispersed almost everywhere in Mali, even if they traditionally were found in Ségou, where they founded a powerful kingdom in the 17th century. As the Bambara have mixed with other ethnic groups and their language has spread accordingly it has now become the leading language beside French, the official language, practiced in school and in the state administration.¹⁷

Most ethnic groups were historically divided into a hierarchy of nobles, free people, people of caste and slaves. The importance of these status groups in present-day Mali urban society is uncertain and contested, but it seems reasonable that the ubiquity of patron-client relationships partly reflects this historical heritage.¹⁸ My guess is that all current forms of societal life in Mali, including the gender system, are influenced by this hierarchical system of social stratification.

Bambara gender relations are sometimes strained, to judge from Bambara women's own stories.¹⁹ According to findings from a study of a series of Bambara villages in central Mali, women are rarely in a position

¹⁶ Commissariat à la Promotion des Femmes. Rapport National sur la Situation des Femmes au Mali, Beijing 1995. Nov. 1994:6

¹⁷ Adriamirado 2001:28–29

¹⁸ Vaa 1991:125

¹⁹ Cf Toulmin 1992

to make a choice as to where and with whom they will live. Fathers and brothers arrange their marriages. For a woman who dislikes her husband or her family situation, there are few alternatives open to her, or no one, if the woman wants to keep her respectability as a married woman and mother. So she will usually stay in her husband's household. A woman sometimes finds herself in a weak position, exposed to the occasional beating from her husband in accordance with Bambara gender ideology. Farming is considered to be the most valuable form of work, to which men dedicate much of their time. The women, half-jokingly, called their position akin to that of slavery, as they are bought and sold by men who take and give them in marriages.²⁰ They play no role in village politics, having no forum for regular meetings. Generally, women do not take part in men's secret society meetings, but are actually a target for their attentions, being forced to hide indoors during men's secret feasting, under dread of a terrible death. Women joke about these threats, but remain in their houses not to tempt the men's wrath. They commented their behaviour in the following way: "There is enough unexplained deaths within the community to believe in the *komo*'s²¹ ability to seek out a victim."²²

The Fulani people is an ethnic group, which distinguishes itself by not being dominantly agricultural. They are called *Fulbe* in their own language, *Peul* in Francophone countries and *Pulaar* in Senegal, Gambia and Mauretania. All Fulbe have three things in common: the language Fulfulde, the moral code of behaviour, which is called "the Fulani way" (Fulfulde: *laawol pulaaku*) including generosity, patience and cattle, the Zebu cows, which they love.²³ Only a small part of the Mali Peuls are pastoralists nowadays, even if they used to be nomads, living mainly from cattle breeding. After long periods of drought, during which their herds have drastically diminished, many Peuls have become semi-nomads. They combine rural activities with migration (foremost men), and trade and handicraft with cattle breeding as well as the production and selling of milk, such as fresh cheese and yoghurt (women) in the nearby markets. Many of them are to be found in central Mali. They sometimes exchange their milk products for millet, creating economic links between Bambara and Peul households of varying length of time and size.

As the nomad women do not cultivate any family fields, the segregation of space, of work activities, of means of production, and income generating activities is more accentuated at the Peul camps than in Bambara households. Men are in charge of the cattle, herding the animals to places where pasture is available as well as milking the cows. Women dedicate themselves to small animals such as poultry or goats and to the distribution and preparation of the milk that is brought home by the men.

Compared with Bambara women, Peul women live in a strictly stratified society. Traditionally a distinction was made between people of various social categories such as the nobility (*Wéhebe*), the merchants (*Diawaambe*), different castes (*Nyeeybe*), herdsman (*Jallube*), and ex-slaves

²⁰ Toulmin 2001:13

²¹ *Komo* is the village 'fetish' which is in the centre of the men's secret society rituals.

²² Toulmin 2001: 266–267

²³ Bovin 2001:13

(*Rimaybe*). These divisions are kept alive to a greater extent than among the Bambara. The droughts have had varying effects on women depending on the access they have to and the use they make of natural and social resources, as defined within the normative frameworks of the society.²⁴ Women belonging to the nobility are not allowed to move around freely in public places, even if this rule is often broken in practice. For them economic activities are not seen as appropriate for women outside the realm of the rural or urban household.

The bride wealth which the bride used to get from the bridegroom's family consisted of money, clothes and cattle (among the herdsman) slaves or cattle (among the elite or nobility) and millet (among the slaves). Besides the bride wealth the bride used to receive gifts from the husband. The gifts were meant to help a woman to build up her own 'house' and property. In contemporary Mali the bride wealth practice is still flourishing, and the size of the sums of money escalating. The gift-giving practice varies according to the available means in the individual case. The migrants' remittances to their families at home have certainly contributed to the rise of the bride wealth in Mali, both in the countryside and the cities. The animals, however, that woman receives from her husband do not become her property; she has only milking rights over them. In case of a divorce, she will leave them with her husband. Only when he dies will she inherit them.

The fact that Peul women have got this kind of property as wives make them economically more independent than their Bambara sisters, who depend on the husbands' benevolence as regards land to cultivate. Yet, men's unwillingness to permit women's free mobility limits their possibility to earn money. The elite women are thus for gender, ethnic and religious reasons confined to their homes. Women of all groups have to have their husbands' permission to trade. The ex-slave women are the ones traditionally used for manual work and who could take on jobs as housemaids, traders, hairdressers etc. without great ideological male resistance. In the Peul case we see how gender values are combined with ideas of ethnicity in combination with social class and caste.²⁵

Around eighty percent of the Malians are Muslims; the other twenty percent are Christians or adhere to traditional religion or mixed religious traditions. There exists a religious revival in Mali just as in other African countries. Islam is not showing its fundamentalist face in Mali. Very few women are veiled, and the attitude towards religion is relaxed and tolerant, compared with the neighbouring country Mauritania.

²⁴ de Bruijn 1995:85-86

²⁵ Ibid 1995

5. Political Characteristics

Mali used to be the centre of great empires. This was long before it became a French colony, named “the French Soudan” in the middle of the 19th century. In 1960 Mali finally got its national and international sovereignty, after the federation with Senegal had failed (1956–59). Since then, three political regimes have followed: from 1960 to 1968, the country had a socialist regime with a one party system, the L’Union Soudanaise. In 1968 there was a military coup, which gave the power to the *Comité Militaire de Libération National* and in 1978, *l’Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien* took over, governing Mali with a one party system until 1991.

After thirty years of one party system, the Republic of Mali has engaged in democratization, decentralization and economic liberalism. This political orientation started in 1991 as a consequence of a popular insurrection, in which women took an active part. After a transitional period of 14 months, multi-party elections were organized in 1992. The institutions of the Third Republic of Mali were put in order and the construction of a pluralist democracy, favouring a state of justice, began finding its form. Until March 1991, Malian women had only one association, directed by the only existing party. This situation changed dramatically with the creation of a multiparty system in Mali.

After the decentralisation in the beginning of the 1990s²⁶ – seen as a necessary tool for the democratization of the country – Mali has been divided into 703 municipalities (French: *communes*), out of which 19 are urban districts, 52 so called “circles” (French: *cercles*), eight administrative regions and the district of Bamako.

In January 2000, the number of women involved in the management of State Affairs was seven female ministers of 22; 16 female technical advisers of 116; 34 women judges of 302; two female public prosecutors of 52; 23 female lawyers of 185 and two female ambassadors of 22. Women are represented in the leading group of the political parties. Of the 147 deputies of the National Assembly, 18 are women, and in the urban districts there are 89 women advisers among 666. In the rural areas the number is 128 women among 8 134 advisers, out of which 6 are female mayors.

Women also show their vital interest in civil society through their engagement in associational life. In Mali one finds age group associa-

²⁶ See further Kassibo. 1997.

tions, self-help groups, religious associations, informal production collectives, rotating saving associations, formal economic interest groups and women's development associations; all of them fruits of women's organisational skills.²⁷ According to one co-ordinating organism of women's associations visited in Bamako in February 2003²⁸ there were 728 registered women's associations in Mali, out of which 320 were to be found in Bamako and 422 in the regional capitals. In Mali there are all together 2040 NGOs and associations with women leaders and women members.²⁹ Another source, the Plan of Action of MPWCT,³⁰ also states that there are more than 300 NGOs and formal women's associations in Bamako, more than 100 national consultants and numerous projects in favour of women, offering information, training and sensitization.³¹ According to another document, women are only ornamental figures with no say in the State bureaucracy, manipulated by the men. Unfortunately, some of the NGOs and women's associations are, by the same sources, said to function ineffectively with no professionalism, created with the sole purpose of getting development financial resources.³²

Women's power in public life, in spite of the democratic openings and everybody's right to vote, is scant. Their ignorance about civil citizenship as a means of political power restricts the majority of women to giving their votes in the political elections along the party lines indicated by their husbands. Many women, as well as many men, especially from the rural countryside, cannot vote anyhow, as they lack an identity card, due to the fact that they lack birth certificates. Besides, being illiterate and living far from the nearest town, they have neither the time, nor the money nor the knowledge to go through the administrative procedures to get the documents. But without an identity card, they have no possibility to open a bank account, get a passport etc. They remain marginal to public life at the formal institutional level. It is only through women's co-operatives (French: *groupements économiques*), that they could get rural credits as a group, not as individuals.

²⁷ Etude de MARP, 2002:13–17

²⁸ Coordination des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Mali (CAFO)

²⁹ Oral communication with staff members at CAFO

³⁰ Gouvernement du Mali. 2002. *Politiques et Plans d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille*, 2002–2006:22

³¹ See also paragraph 6. vi. "Women's participation in public life".

³² Tomieri and Maïga 2001:17–19

6. Gender Relations and the Legal Framework

i. The Mali Constitution of the Third Republic (1992)

A series of international and national documents in favour of the democratic rights of the individual and the non-discrimination of all citizens and of women in relation to men have been signed by the Malian government.³³ All the basic legal texts, such as the Constitution (1960, 1974, 1992), the Work Law, the Law of Social Contingency and the Marriage and Guardianship Law (1962) confirm equality for everybody without discrimination according to race, sex, religion and ethnic belonging. They stipulate everybody's right to education, work, rest and social assistance.

The Mali Constitution of the Third Republic was passed by the referendum of the 12th of January in 1992 and promulgated in 1992.³⁴ As regards individual liberties, the first title of the Mali constitution, called "The Rights and Duties of the Human Being", assures the same rights to both male and female citizens without any discrimination. Its articles nr 1–24 deal with the inviolability of the human being and with the right to physical integrity, the principle of equality between the citizens, the liberty to form associations, the right to property, the right to health and social protection, and the right to work. These articles do not refer explicitly to women's rights, but constitute the basis for the current legislation. What concerns respect for Women's Rights, the preamble says: "The sovereign Mali people proclaim their determination to defend the Women's and Children's Rights as well as the cultural and linguistic diversity of the national inviolable community." Actually, article 119 of the Constitution, says that "the current legislation remains valid to the extent that it is not in contradiction with the articles of the Constitution or if it is not explicitly abrogated." Laws against the spirit of the Constitution or the international instruments should be declared "anti-constitutional".³⁵

³³ The Constitutions which were adopted by Mali in 1960 and 1974 were both subscribed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Citizenship and the Charter of the United Nations.

³⁴ The decree nr 92-073/P-CTSP of February 25th, 1992.

³⁵ Tornieri and Maïga 2001:27

In spite of what is said in the Constitution and in the national law texts, the application of the laws have not been respected and especially women have suffered from discriminatory legal treatment in comparison with men, particularly with reference to repudiation, custody of children and inheritance. However, those who give voice to their complaints are a minority of urban, educated women, who want law reforms and development projects to increase the knowledge among women about their actual legal rights in society. Rural women's passivity concerning their juridical situation is explained in one of the documents from the MPWCF by women's ignorance due to female illiteracy and the current incorrect interpretation of the laws. The problem is defined in the report as an ignorance about women's rights on a national and international level and men's neglect in respecting women's legal rights.³⁶

ii. The legal frame according to regulations

Since 1992 Malian lawmakers have made certain efforts to reform legal domains which govern social, political and economic life. However, there is one domain in which no law has been adopted in spite of the interpellations of women's associations and NGOs. I refer to succession (inheritance), which continues to be governed by customary law. During many years women activists have expected a reformed version of the Family and Guardianship Law (French: *Code du Mariage et de la Tutelle*) of 1962.³⁷ Although the reform work is finished, the family law is still not ratified. The institutions that could play a crucial role in the adoption of a law text, or in the amendment of the discriminatory juridical texts, are: the Government, the National Assembly, the associations and the NGOs of the civil society. The following Commissions play a prominent role in the promotion of women's status: the Commission of Health, Social Affairs and Solidarity, of Institutional Law, Justice and Republican Institutions, of Rural Development and Environment, of Work, Employment and the Promotion of Women, Youth and Sports, and the Commission of Education, Culture and Communication.³⁸ Strong forces work for a change in accordance with the Human Rights doctrine. The proliferation of women's associations and NGOs, and of political parties, eager to get women's votes, the liberalisation and the development of the mass media create a good climate for an increased juridical and social awareness among women.

iii. The customary law and its practice

Women's legal status in Mali is characterized by the co-existence of modern and customary law or rules. According to the women juridical activists in Bamako, the customary rules are based on an idea of inequality between the sexes, which grants man the dominant role in the family and in society.³⁹ From the female juridical experts' point of view in Bamako, women's dependence on male power and authority have several

³⁶ Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille. 2000. *Rapport national de la situation des femmes au Mali cinq ans après la conférence mondiale de Beijing*. Rapport National. New York. June.

³⁷ The Marriage and Guardianship Law

³⁸ Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et la Famille. *Situation des femmes au Mali cinq ans après la conférence mondiale de Beijing*. Rapport National. 2000:32

³⁹ Tomieri and Maïga 2001:30

negative consequences for women, particularly for those who are illiterate and ignorant. One example on the juridical level is the man's position as the unquestioned head of the family, with the right to decide where the family shall live. The wife has to ask for her husband's permission to trade. A man can even decide before a judge, if he so wishes, that another woman than the mother will take care of his children after his death, if the children are minor of age. No part of the inheritance, if divided according to customary law, will be given to the widow.⁴⁰

It is important to notice that these customary law traditions persist, in spite of the abolition of the customary courts at the beginning of the 1960s. This is explained by the fact that the adoption of the new legislative acts and the recognition of the legal system resulted in the incorporation of customary principles and Islamic standards into national statutory law that are applicable throughout the country. Thus, some laws have a strong customary basis, and law suits related to inheritance are always decided by judges, assisted by magistrate's assistants, whose job is to assess the customs of the parties.⁴¹

In the long run, migration, globalisation and the influence of development policies, will lead to social and economic changes by which the customary rules gradually become adapted to modern life. There is probably already an ongoing negotiation of interpretations and meanings of local customary practice, which remains hidden for the law reformists in the capital of Bamako. For the sake of the young female generation in Mali, who live in an increasingly overlapping urban-rural context, certain law reforms connected to marriage, divorce and the custody of children are of special importance. Some customs and traditions will remain alive as expressions of gender, religion and ethnic identity, such as the payment of bride wealth and other forms of gifts and feasts, connected to important passage rituals. Besides family law, there are currently three domains of customary and religious law under debate for possible reforms and for changes of dominant attitudes, namely rights to land for cultivation, property rights and women's participation in public life.

iv. Marriage, divorce and succession

First, some characteristics of social organisation will be given as a background:

The agricultural and agro-pastoralist societies of southern Mali, comprising the majority of the country's population, were traditionally patrilineal and patrilocal gerontocracies. A marriage was a contract between lineages and was confirmed by the transmission of bride wealth from the man's lineage to the lineage of the woman. If she became a widow, she was given to a younger brother of the deceased (levirate). Women were seen as guests in their husband's lineage, at least until they had given birth to children. They had neither property rights in their family-in-law nor in their parents' home, once the bride wealth had been paid. Married women's wealth depended on what they themselves could accumulate.

⁴⁰ Ibid 2001:30

⁴¹ The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy. 1999:137.

The strength of kinship ties and the importance of marriage persist, both in town and in the countryside. Except for the nomadic populations in the north, polygamy was and is still common and is actually increasing in both rural and urban areas. In the villages, the basic residential unit is the extended household or compound, consisting of an elder with his wives and his married sons and their families.⁴² In the cities, there may be a trend towards the creation of nuclear families, but this may be more of necessity than preference, since nuclear units are found primarily in poorer settlements in the outskirts of the city, not in the better-off, more settled neighbourhoods.⁴³

Since 1996 a reform of the marriage law, mentioned above, has been prepared. The resistance is hard from those who promote customary values and religious traditions.⁴⁴ The reformers want a law, which reflects what they call “modern” Mali. Besides women’s rights to inheritance, women want the rights to the custody of children in different circumstances related to divorce and death. In customary law, women are still seen as under men’s protection and as part of his patrimony. Men’s practice of repudiation, which is forbidden according to the family law of 1962, and women’s status as widows is also under debate. The ancient tradition of levirate (see above) is not needed any longer, as women are able to provide for themselves, if not in the countryside so in the cities. The main thing, according to the law reform activists, is to leave the decision to the woman over her own life as married, as divorced and as a widow. In the Mali legislation, minimal age for brides is fifteen years, while traditionally, girls should get married at the age of thirteen. Also in contemporary Malian society, girls marry very young, The younger the bride, the higher is the bride wealth.

Today, there are mainly three different types of marriage procedures in Mali. One is the *civil marriage*, performed in front of the mayor or the district chief (French: *chef d’arrondissement*), a rather late institution (1962). Many choose a civil marriage after the religious or customary one. The law regarding civil marriage was elaborated after long consultations with the traditional authorities, the religious leaders and the presidents of some of the largest women’s associations. Legally, the customary wedding cannot take place until the civil wedding has been performed. Often the order is reversed, though. Some couples do not marry according to civil law at all, which means that no proper marriage contract exists and no legally guilty divorce is possible for the wife. The husband, on the other hand, can repudiate his wife, as mentioned above, according to customary practice. The customary marriage is seen as the best way to establish links of friendship, and to confirm kinship loyalties between two communities or lineages. It is an act of solidarity between groups rather than individuals. The religious marriage is gaining ground in Mali, especially in the urban milieu. The Islamic marriage is often performed on a Friday and in both the case of religious and of customary wedding procedures, great parties accompany the event.⁴⁵

⁴² Vaa 1991:127

⁴³ UNICEF, 1989:115

⁴⁴ For information about the persistence of customary law in Africa, see Adepoju 1999:14.

⁴⁵ Camara 2002:196–198

According to the Malian marriage law of 1962, the sum of the bride wealth was officially fixed to be 20 000 francs CFA when the bride was a young girl and 10 000 francs CFA in marriages with a divorced woman or a widow. This comparatively modest sum concerned the civil marriage. It cannot be compared with the great gifts of money, oxen, cola nuts, salt, sugar, tea and clothes for the bride, offered by the bridegroom's family in customary and religious marriages. Even today, the latter forms of marriage, with lavish spending of material resources, are the most frequent ones in Mali.

v. Women's access to land according to customary law

Women's relationship to farming land reflects the prevailing dominance of customary law – or rules – and practices in contemporary Mali in general. In the following I base myself on the Analytical Study of the Status of Women and Law in Mali (ASSWLM) (French: *Etude analytique sur le statut de la femme et la loi au Mali*) and on my discussions in Bamako with one of the authors of the study, Mrs. Soyata Maïga.⁴⁶

There are several types of land for cultivation for women outside the realm of the family unit:

1. *land "aménagé"*, which means land prepared for cultivation, belonging to big companies such as the Niger Office, the Mopti Office and the Office of Ségou Rice. Recently, women have gained access to land "aménagé" for cultivation and for extension services to a greater extent than before, especially to land administrated by the Niger Office;
2. *land, belonging to the state*, to which women theoretically should have access,⁴⁷ but which has traditionally often been controlled by men;
3. *land under customary law*,⁴⁸ which means that it is given to the male head of household or family unit. He uses the fields provided by the "land master's" ancestors (in Bambara regions). The "land master's" function today is to mediate in land conflicts. The redistribution of land for cultivation and for pastoral use is only directed towards men, who decide how to distribute it – by lending some of the fields to the women – within the realm of the family. Because of the poor quality of the land and land scarcity, men offer their wives the poorest parcels.
4. *land as trousseau*, which means land as a marriage gift for the bride. In case of a divorce, the land goes back to the husband;
5. *land to be bought*, because in many zones land is actually sold, particularly to women cooperatives. The administrative authority registers the buying of land, but it is not stated in the text who has the right to inherit.⁴⁹

Concerning agricultural credits, women face difficulties in taking individual loans, due to various practical and ideological constraints. Illiteracy, lack of identity cards and unfamiliarity with and fear of dealing with authorities constitute some of the constraints. Efforts made by the Ministry of Agriculture, NGOs and development aid agencies to create

⁴⁶ Tomieri and Maïga 2001:56–58

⁴⁷ In French called "régime foncier de droit interne"

⁴⁸ In French called "régime foncier coutumier"

⁴⁹ Tomieri and Maïga 2001:58

cooperatives compensate these drawbacks for women. Access to loans and credits are organised through economic cooperatives (French: *groupements économiques*). Step by step the attitudes towards the customary law will change, so that women, just like men, will be fully acknowledged as civil citizens and as individuals with access to agricultural credits.

Women's right to dispose of farming land varies, as pointed out above, according to the importance paid to customary rules in the region. In the regions of Sikasso, Ségou and Kangaba, women get their own fields for the cultivation of rice, peanuts or vegetables, but they also work on the family fields, the products of which are considered to be men's property. Generally speaking, female farmers encounter much greater difficulties to get access to land than male farmers, because of customary rules and current traditional attitudes. National laws confront regional habits and gendered systems of thoughts, which are especially hard to break up in times of unemployment and shortage of land for agricultural production for men as well as women.⁵⁰

Women's underprivileged situation as regards access to land and estate, particularly in the rural zones where the great majority of the population lives, constitutes an obstacle for women's fight against poverty. To an increasing degree they are becoming responsible for the provision of their families (see below 8, i). Land remains the most important natural resource, constituting the principal source of survival and necessary also for cash cropping.

vi. Women's participation in public life

Here it is necessary to make clear what is meant by "public" life. Generally, activities and space connected to home are called domestic, while activities and spaces outside home, frequented by people of both sexes, who may not know each other, are called public. Often it is said that women dwell in the domestic sphere, while the public sphere is male dominated. In the case of Malian women it is evident, that for religious and traditional reasons, women are expected to remain in the private sphere. This is a crucial dilemma, which women deal with more or less successfully to make a living in a respectable way.⁵¹ Even female associations, flourishing in Mali as well as in other West African societies are, from a male point of view, considered to be female space and thereby domestic, as meetings mostly take place in someone's home or house yard and only have female members.⁵² The few men who have different opinions sometimes prohibit their wives to participate in the associations. However, as political action and economic activities mostly take place outside home, where men and women mix, women have to enter the public arena and make their voices heard. Men have to become used to women not just as gendered bodies but as civil citizens with a political will to act and influence the development of their society. This is the background to feminist and legal efforts to reform laws in Mali against men's customary right to restrict women's mobility or to, as mentioned above, prohibit them to trade.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid 2001:27–28

⁵¹ Evers Rosander 1997

⁵² Ibid 1997

⁵³ See Tomieri and Maïga 2001

In a study of women's NGOs as agents of democratization in Mali, the conclusions point in a similar direction. The division of labour in the private sphere is negative for women what concerns their equal possibilities to participate in public life.⁵⁴ Women's associations and NGOs are separate spaces, which deal with "women's issues", not interfering in those areas of public life, where the important decisions are taken. Outside the unisex NGO space, a woman is confronted with the society's demands on her to be silent and to show a modest behaviour in front of men, not to be criticized for lack of respect or sexual looseness. The gendered domestic pattern – the man talks, the woman is silent – is repeated in public life.

Women's associations and NGOs are proliferating in Mali as a result of the democratization process and of the international donor community's funding of activities to promote gender equality and democratic development. The effects on changes in society and on the gender hierarchy are probably small, as the socio-cultural structure permeates the composition of the board and the choice of the executives of the associations. Leadership is in the hands of the president, who is always recruited from the top strata of the society. Some women's NGOs have little to offer in terms of training or expertise. Their activities are split up into many fields and in many cases the professional competence is low.⁵⁵ The donors' view of women as members of a NGO group, striving for a common goal, sometimes lacks justification in reality. The group consists of individuals, using the NGO as a platform for individual or family related benefits in most cases. Social stratification is always present and the women's associations as well as the NGOs are not radical agents of change but rather the contrary for that very reason.⁵⁶

vii. Religious law

Compared with customary rules, Islamic (*shari'a*) law has to a certain extent contributed to an amelioration of women's marriage and inheritance conditions. Muslim men cannot have more than four wives, according to *shari'a*. They are, at least if they follow the religious law which is based on the Koran, bound to treat their wives equally, striving to be just to each one of the co-wives in a polygamous household. The succession is regulated, even if men and women do not share property equally. Sisters inherit half the amount of their brothers, and widows inherit one eighth as compared to the widower who inherits one fourth of the property – the rest is for the sons, and to a less extent, for the daughters.

Also the religious law asserts – in practice – that men's access to material resources such as land is not to be questioned, basing itself on the perspective of men as providers of the family and as family heads. However, in the Islamic zones of Mali (Gao), women inherit land just like men, although half of the amount, in accordance with religious law. On the social level, Muslim law has its harsh sides as well for the women. Take the example of marital "disobedience", as defined by the husband with reference to the interpretation of *shari'a*. The husband has the right to correct his wife, which in practice means to punish her physically, if he

⁵⁴ Lennung 1998:3

⁵⁵ Tomieri and Maiga 2001:17

⁵⁶ Evers Rosander 1997



considers her not obedient. Another alternative for the husband in cases of “disobedience” is repudiation, which is practiced as an Islamic devise, even if it is forbidden by the penal code.

Even if this GP customary law and Islamic jurisprudence are discussed separately, the two law systems often overlap in people’s minds.

7. Socio-Economic Characteristics and Structural Adjustment

The Malian economy is above all dependent on its primary sector (the production of cereals, peanuts and cotton), which provides almost 45 percent of the gross domestic product. The secondary sector (industry and mining) represents 17 percent and the third sector (trade and services) 38 percent. The great majority of the women work in the primary sector. In 1994, 77% of the women were occupied in agriculture, cattle breeding, forest exploitation, such as recollection of herbs and leaves, transportation and commercialisation of agricultural food products.⁵⁷

The socio-economic and structural gender disparities are found on many levels in the Malian society. Women's level of well-being is inferior compared to men's. One example already mentioned is that the only planned activities for women (vegetable cultivation, rice cultivation) within the framework of the Mali State Economic and Social Development Plan, are directed towards women in collectives, not to them as individual producers.⁵⁸ (Cf above, 6, v.)

About 80 percent of the population live on agriculture. The main crops are millet, sorghum, rice, maize, peanuts and cotton. Peanut and cotton constitute more than 60 percent of the total export sum of the country. Cattle ranks second to agriculture, followed by fishing, especially in the Mopti region (the river of Niger). Cash cropping of cotton and peanuts and the low production of cereals in contrast to the increasing population have caused changes in the gender working relations. Just like men, some women in the south of Mali have started to cultivate cereals and cash crops, with little or no time for complementary cultivation of vegetables. The cotton cultivation has increased women's workload and the agricultural calendar has been prolonged with more than two months because of the cotton harvest, preventing women to dedicate themselves to the differentiated cultivation of, among other species, gombo (*hibiscus esculentus*) and peanuts in women's small fields.⁵⁹ In case of women's participation in their husbands' cash cropping activities in southern Mali, women have had less time to farm for their own benefit, and have had a net loss of welfare due to cotton farming.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille. *Situation des Femmes au Mali cinq ans après la conférence mondiale de Beijing*. Rapport National, New York, 2000:7-13

⁵⁸ Commissariat par la Promotion de la Femme. 1994. *Rapport National sur la Situation des Femmes au Mali*. Ixe Conférence Mondiale sur les Femmes Lutte pour l'Egalité, de Développement et la Paix, Beijing 1995, Nov.

⁵⁹ Zuidberg and Djire 1992:17

⁶⁰ Lijja and Sanders 1998:73-79

The industrial sector is based on the transformation of agricultural and pastoral products. The majority of the industries are located in Bamako or in other urban centres. The mining sector is important, particularly gold mining. Through the years the country has had to confront serious difficulties: not only climatic factors, demographic explosion, economic crises and the burden of loan payments and unemployment but also migration and a very harsh economic structural adjustment program have caused temporary deprivations for the population.

The structural adjustment policies in Mali have affected very hard on Mali's already poor population very harshly. Economic reforms have been implemented since the early 1980s. A second phase of adjustments took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which included reforms of the public enterprises, health, education and agricultural sectors, intending to remodel the institutional framework of the state. Immediate effects on civil society included wage settings, job losses, deteriorated school conditions, and loss of subsidies for inputs for agricultural producers.⁶¹

In 1994 the West African currency, the francs FCA, was devaluated by 50 percent, which had, together with the economic adjustment program, an immediate impact on the health sector. Health care costs increased by 43 percent, discouraging people from using the clinics. The educational system has been characterised by high rates of grade repetition and drop-outs. Girls' attendance in schools decreases as they move through the educational system from primary to post-secondary levels. Within structural adjustment lending conditionality, the government of Mali has been pressured to designate more of its budget to primary education. This has the potential to increase girls' enrolment in primary education.

In agriculture, the reforms have aimed at increased production, and diversified production and improved efficiency of the cotton sector and the grain marketing system. With these changes, intermediary structures for agricultural credits have been abolished, with the result that women have very little access to credit for farm inputs (between 1990 and 1995 women received less than one percent of available credits).⁶² Extension services reach only one-third of the villages and, within those villages, extension mostly reaches men. The explanation may be that men are assumed to be the farm heads and women the farm helpers.

The structural adjustment tenet – not to spend more than one earns – has been managed at the household level by women. “When incomes drop and costs escalate, women have adjusted by taking on more responsibilities either in the informal sector, for cash or to reduce cash needs, for example as caregivers. Policymakers will have to recognize that resources and decision making are not shared within the household, necessitating the adoption of gender-sensitive policies if growth is to be the outcome of adjustment programs”.⁶³

⁶¹ Rondeau 1997

⁶² Ibid 1994:183

⁶³ Ibid 1994:184

8. Gender and Natural Resources

i. Food security

After the drought periods of 1973 and 1983 rural women had to provide and care not only for their children but also for old, sick and handicapped family members, as many husbands and/or fathers had left in national and international emigration.⁶⁴ Some rural women started to raise animals (poultry, goats) to increase their income. Several attempts to organize women in cooperatives, economic associations and saving and credit banks were made to offer women means for income generating activities. One example is the governmental fund called Support Fund for Women's Economic Activities, where women can borrow small amounts of money with 10 percent interest.

The Economic and Social Development Plan had as its objective to promote an intensified agricultural production for food security in 2000. However, as stated above (see chapter 7), the only actions in women's favour were the ones within the framework of women's associations, where offers were made to cultivate collective land (for water rice and vegetables), not to individual female producers. Little or no agricultural extension service for women of the same kind as for men exists for the female cultivators. Training is given by the Centre for Rural Extension. There are two types of centres: the male centres and the mixed centres, in which women get training in their domestic tasks. No efforts to improve women's agricultural technical knowledge have been made nor has any information about fertilizers and pesticides been forwarded to the female farmers. This is also the case of the two centres of "Training of Agricultural Advisers" (French: *Formation des Animatrices Rurales*). Attention has been drawn to the situation. Companies such as the Niger Office begins to get interested in women's capacity as agricultural producers, offering fields for collective cultivation (French: *champs de case*) and the growth of vegetables in combination with agricultural advice. The current policy is to let each regional department initiate sector programs in favour of the women. It is the task of the ministry delegates to supervise the programs.

According to the National Plan of Women's Situation in Mali 1995, the objective of the agricultural politics in Mali is to improve women's economic status as self-sufficient farmers and to increase their income

⁶⁴ The text in this chapter is based on the National Report of Women's Situation in Mali, Nov. 1994:16–24 (Commissariat pour la Promotion de la Femme: *Rapport National sur la situation des femmes au Mali Beijing 1995*; Nov 1994)

from agricultural products. However, the outline of this policy does not in a satisfactory way pay attention to the socio-economic realities of rural women in Mali, whose total agricultural production is considerable and should be worthy of a more serious interest. Women should have the right to land on the same conditions as men. They should get the same extension services for the management of the land. Women should have the security of knowing that they can remain on the land, to be able to plan their agricultural work strategically. This is repeatedly stated elsewhere in the GP.

ii. Natural environment

Mali women's interest in the natural resources and their role in relation to natural resource management can be considered from two angles. One is the use and exploitation aspect, another is how women contribute to the protection and rebuilding of these resources (soil, land and forest products, ligneous and non-ligneous). The weak level of female participation in the natural resources management can be imputed on several factors.

First there are factors of a socio-cultural kind, which have not been given the proper importance in the planning and execution of projects. Not sufficient attention has been paid to most women's uncertainty what concerns their rights to use the land. The socio-cultural limits of women's mobility and the difficulties for them as women to communicate with the male advisers without losing their reputation as a respectable woman, constitute hindrances. So does women's scant degree of education, or illiteracy. The male advisers, on their part, cannot address themselves directly to the women nor do they understand properly the needs of women. Another limiting factor is that men do not know enough about women's use and abuse of natural resources.

Women, however, have a great empirical knowledge of the natural environment, of the fertility of the land, the vulnerability of certain zones etc. The general deterioration of the environment to which Mali is exposed affects the women more and more. They are not only obliged to walk longer distances searching for firewood and other forest bi-products; they are also deprived of their income-generating activities from herbs, leaves and fruits. To sum up, women have a special interest in environmental questions and could be potential partners in a common effort to care for the natural resources

iii. Women and water

To fetch water is a female task, which old women and children are liberated from. It is the women of the home units who choose where the water will be collected and how it will be used; the quantity, the quality, the access to the well. Considerable time and effort is dedicated to fetching water. Many rural women walk five kilometres to fetch their daily water, dedicating two hours a day only for that purpose. However, even if women's task as "water fetcher" is well known, we know less about their traditional responsibility to maintain the well, keeping it clean, and about the places for fetching the water.

Studies have shown that Malian women are aware of the relation between water and health. But when it is a question of decision making

for the installation of new wells or water taps, collection of money to cover expenses, financial management, and technical maintenance of water taps, the tendency is not to involve the women. That is why women seldom are found as representatives in the village committees of water management. Women do not get any information or training in questions concerning water management and they are consequently not ready to take decisions about the consumption of water and the maintenance of labour.

The female lack of participation in the water projects has two explanations:

the personnel of the water projects are men, who consider women as passive beneficiaries, not as active agents. Moreover, the planners and project executors are men, who are not aware of women's traditional knowledge about water nor do those, who do know, think it is of any value.

vi. Women and forests

In the countryside there exist close links between women, family and trees. In women's daily life forests play an important role, particularly the trees. Women get their firewood from trees and bushes, while the leaves are used for cooking and for selling on the market. Women also collect medical products, fruits and grains.

However, women's participation in reforestation programs is scant. The seeding and planting of the trees are generally organised by male foresters, with whom rural women have little contact. Through women's NGOs there exists a way to reach rural women, engaging them in reforestation activities such as filling the pots for germination in the nurseries, putting the grains in the pots and later weeding and watering. Once women understand the connection of reforestation for their own and their families' future their attitude is benevolent, but their time for additional activities for the improvement of the natural environment and the forest regeneration is limited.

Another type of activity for women is the training in the fabrication and use of stoves, which need less fuel than the traditional ones. In order to save the forests and to improve the natural environment these stoves (French: *foyers améliorés*) have been introduced in development programs, supported by international donors and in collaboration with the ministries concerned.

9. Gendered Livelihoods

The livelihood concept applied in this GP is defined by Robert Chambers as comprising “the activities pursued by individuals and households to increase levels of wealth and of stocks and flows of food, cash and other resources to provide for subsistence and security against impoverishment”.⁶⁵ A livelihood system, as explained by Mariken Vaa, “thus refers to the mix of individual and household strategies, which mobilise available resources and opportunities”.⁶⁶ The concept not only links different components of analysis in the economic sphere; it also captures underlying relationships within the household and between households and members of the household and external actors.⁶⁷ Livelihoods are by definition tied up with the personal relationships or networks in which each individual is involved in both social and economic activities. This is why they also become gendered, influenced by the sex of the actor and her/his patrons, clients, neighbours, relatives or family members. Here rural, urban and migratory livelihoods in Mali will be described in short terms, with its focus on gender relations.

i. Rural livelihood

In general terms, the division of work and responsibilities in contemporary rural society are to a large extent based on gender complementarity.⁶⁸ Typically, men are in charge of preparing the fields before cultivation and building and repairing houses. Women prepare food, fetch water and fuel, bring up children and look after the sick. In addition, they do the larger part of the agricultural work on the family and communal fields, and also have their own personal gardens. They may be involved in small-scale marketing of agricultural products and of hand-craft products. Men are expected to provide the staple foods – rice, maize or millet – while women provide the sauces that go with the cereals. They do this from the produce of their own gardens, from gathering wild plants and from ingredients bought in the market with money from their own earnings. Rural women often have more extensive duties in relation to their families of origin, especially during the part of the year when the

⁶⁵ Chambers 1985:85, quoted in Vaa 1991:122

⁶⁶ Vaa 1991:122

⁶⁷ *ibid* 1991:123

⁶⁸ In this paragraph, I am using Vaa's article 1991:128–131.

men's granaries are empty. Their own private wealth is used for social needs rather than personal, such as caring for the children's needs, the young daughters' trousseau and the obligatory gifts to kin and neighbours. Rural women's lives are filled not only with domestic and agricultural work but also independent entrepreneurial activities to be able to get cash to satisfy all economic and social needs and demands.

ii. One example from the field – rural Mali

This information is from a study of a Reduction of Poverty Project (RPP) in twelve villages in central Mali (2002).⁶⁹ The villages are called Kayes, Nioro and Diéma in the Kayes region and Kolokani, Nara and Banamba in the Koulikoro region. The study is presented here in short lines to give some recent case material about gender relations and poverty in rural Mali. It is based on a rapid rural appraisal, in which qualitative data were collected with the ambition to investigate the living conditions of the villages from the villagers' perspective. On the one hand, the idea was to get a better understanding of the mechanisms that keep poverty alive. On the other hand, the ambition was to investigate the fighting strategies against poverty found among the village populations as groups and individuals.

Most villagers interviewed consider themselves poor, because of the hard living conditions, related to climatic circumstances beyond human control. According to the groups of old, young, male and female village people in Kolokani, poverty is characterised by:

- lack of water to cover the domestic and production needs;
- constant food insecurity;
- lack of income to invest in income generating activities;
- lack of means or material for work and transportation;
- low rate of schooling, of basic sanitation and alphabetisation;
- lack of family support (exodus of young people, dislocation of families);
- incapacity to get better housing conditions and clothes.

During more than a decade, the villages of the study have experienced both declines and increases in agricultural and pastoral production. In 2000 and 2001 the results were particularly catastrophic in terms of agricultural production. The general statement of the village people was that they experienced an increased destitution of the population, reflected in the total situation of the zone of study. More than half of the families live in extreme poverty and women, young girls and old people are the most affected. The Bambara, Moor and Soninké women are mobilized for covering the food needs of the family units. Only Peul women do not contribute or contribute little to food production, but resort to petty trading in an effort to earn money, besides the production of milk products – if there is enough milk.

What do men and women do for survival? What are the social and economic conditions of women in these villages compared with the men's?

⁶⁹ Gouvernement du Mali. *Etude de Base MARP* 2002:64

Migration is one way of coming to grips with the situation. In one of the ethnic groups, the Soninké, migration is since long an established economic strategy and constitutes both a way of getting cash and a factor for the development of the village in terms of financial contributions to the village infrastructure. The remittances from the migrants abroad is used for buying food stocks of great necessity, for the consolidation of the solidarity chains between relatives and neighbours and for traditional exchanges (marriage, name giving and funeral party costs etc), capital for buying cattle and for starting income generating activities. The migration also opens up for exterior contacts and permits the establishment of links with partners and “twin” communities in France and Italy.

In the Bambara and Moor villages, exodus is a response to the acute food crises created by climatic circumstances, shortness of water, abuse of natural resources and big families to nourish. There is also a lack of remunerated work during the dry period of the year, which causes men to leave for more favourable zones of Africa (Benin and until recently the Ivory Coast) or to go outside the continent. Men want to get money for the family consumption, but also for agricultural equipment, such as oxen, carts and ploughs.

Girls migrate to work as house servants in the nearby towns or in the capital, to get money for their trousseau. Their mothers lack the means to equip their daughters properly before marriage. The migration of the girls is not very popular among the older villagers, who think of migration as a risk for young girls’ moral behaviour. Mothers are left without their daughters’ help in the fields and old and sick people lose much of the care they used to get from the young girls.

Generally, the cereal production of the collective fields of the young people serves as a security stock, during the dry period. This reserve is needed, even if the young people migrate seasonally. Women have developed various survival strategies and individual solutions, such as the collection of fruits and edible leaves to exchange against milk and cereals or to sell on markets. Bad years, women may be obliged to sell their small animals such as hens. Good years, they exchange part of their harvest against sheep or goats from the Peul.

During the bad year of 2000, young unmarried and married women left the villages for seasonal migration to Bamako, Djidiéni and Kolokani to earn money for the stock of the wet season. The solidarity and mutual exchange mentality helped the village population over the worst months of hunger. One example will be mentioned: the Association of Young People in one Soninké village distributed gifts of cereals from their collective field to village people in need.

Farming is the principal economic activity of the women in the three ethnic groups Soninké, Moor and Bamanan/Bambara. Each woman disposes of one field of her own, which she cultivates for her household needs. The surface is limited, as the other domestic tasks deprive her of time to work on the field, but the crop variation is great: peanuts, millet, maize, gombo, and vegetables. The production is for home consumption, and may also be exchanged for other products such as milk, or sold on the market place. Some women dedicate much time to the production of butter from the karité nuts. Others collect fruits and leaves. Handicraft activities are scarce in the villages. The Moor women make skin adorn-

ments, colliers and bracelets; time consuming activities of little profitability. The cattle breeding activities is of an extensive kind in the Peul villages and of a sedentary kind in the Bambara, Soninké and Moor villages. Sometimes, Peul women have cattle, sheep and goats.

In the following I am citing the conclusions of the study of twelve villages close to Kolokani as regards women's situation. Women in the zone of study were confined to their role as producers and family reproducers, and their economic contribution was considerable. Their status had not changed, even if their workload and their importance for the survival of the unit of agricultural production had increased. They remained under the authority of family men, and were dependent on male decision making what concerns marriages, family planning and all the essential questions of the community. The mothers or the young girls to be married were not asked about their opinion of the marriage partners of the daughters. Polygamy was practiced and, according to some women, made it possible for the women to dedicate more time to the income generating activities. The customary marriage was the rule. Women did not know of anything else; they were illiterate and ignored the existing laws such as the Marriage and Guardianship Law.

Village women were not informed or very little informed about the decisions of their husbands, fathers or brothers concerning the exploitation of fields, cattle, choices of marriage partners, utilisation and management of family unit property and the education of children. Men did not ask for women's opinions and women did not participate in any decisions concerning the family unit. Neither did they participate in the decisions on a communitarian level. Very few women assisted in the meetings of the Village Farmers Organisations. If they were present at meetings, they remained just silent figures.

Thus, the study showed that women were active both in the production and the reproduction of the family unit, in income generating activities and in physical work for the community. All the year around, women are the first ones to stand up in the morning and the last ones to go to sleep. They work around fourteen hours a day during the busy seasons of the agricultural year. No data on men's workload is added for a comparison. Variations of women's workload in the individual cases are due to family status and age, the availability of children for additional work, co-wives, access to technical help like mills, economic resources of the family unit etc. The women themselves think that they work more than the men. However, they do not see how to change the situation, as men think that tasks like fetching water, collecting fire wood, fetching plants and wild fruits, preparing food, minding children, pounding millet and hulling peanuts, cleaning, washing up and washing clothes is women's work only, impossible for men to occupy themselves with. Added to this comes the woman's cultivation of her husband's field, her own field if the husband let her dispose of one, and the communal or the women's cooperative fields.

Women's access and control of resources are small, if any. The majority of women have only a limited control over the allotment of the income. They often spend their money on improving the family's living conditions. Buying cereals, spices, clothes, financing family ceremonies and the trousseau for their daughters and school equipment for the

children are common ways of expenditure for women. The community's resources such as common land, well, cattle, health centres and schools are under men's control. Women have access to such resources, but on men's conditions and through their decisions.

iii. Urban households

In Bamako, the capital of Mali, a house or compound inhabited only by a husband and his wife or wives and their children is unusual. The predominant residential pattern is more complex, often including an old man and his wives and children, plus their unmarried children. Variations are great; some compounds being extended through constructions horizontally or vertically or presenting a mixture of the two. The various domestic groups living in a compound usually pool their resources, at least as far as cooking is concerned, which for people with low incomes, as in Bamako, is by far the main expense. With regard to cooking, the responsibility for preparing meals for everyone in the compound rotates among domestic groups and within a polygamous group, among the co-wives. In large compounds, two women cook at the same time for subsets of compound members. A woman living in a compound where there are several domestic groups may, for example, be responsible for cooking for the compound for a whole day, twice a week and be free for the rest of the week. Moreover, women make it a point of honour to outdo each other, mainly through their own contributions. In addition, a woman not responsible for the preparation of the common meal that day may well prepare an additional meal for her husband.⁷⁰

The majority of the male and female urban population lives within highly complex networks of relations, covering the nuclear family units, the domestic groups, the compounds in which they live and other close by compounds where relatives, kinsfolk and neighbours live. Understanding of these urban networks of relations is a basic prerequisite for explaining the behaviour of the individual, as well as the transformations occurring in the systems of production and reproduction and community and domestic organisation. The frequency of income transfers in the compound, transfers of goods such as cereals, blankets, jewels and other gifts, reveal important data about social and economic life, which could be interpreted as belonging to the field of survival strategies. The flow of material and immaterial resources, maintained by the reciprocal giving away and receiving of gifts, loans and by saving associational activities is dominated by women rather than men. Women manifest their social and economic skill most of all through the organisation of the passage ritual parties in connection with marriages, name-giving ceremonies, funerals etc. The female competition for status and prestige on the ritual party arenas brings meaning and social positioning into women's lives, especially in the urban context, where the field lies open for the conquest of social power without the social stigma attached for ever to some rural people in the small villages, where their families have lived for many years. The paraphernalia of these female party performances in the form of fabrics, jewellery, cookery pots and spices constitute markets for female sellers and buyers.

⁷⁰ Wéry, 1987:46

iv. One example from the field – urban Mali

Bankoni is an unauthorized settlement in Bamako, situated a few kilometres outside the city centre of Bamako. More than 50 000 people lived there in 1987, when the study was carried out which is here presented in short traits.⁷¹ The population of Bankoni was very mixed ethnically, economically and in geographical origin. Some well-to-do merchants, middle class employees and successful entrepreneurs lived there, as well as waged workers in industry and export. Many men were unemployed and the majority of households were poor, even by Bamako standards.

Dwelling units in Bankoni were grouped in compounds, consisting of a walled-in courtyard leading to rooms with separate entrances around most sides with one entrance from the street. There was no electricity and few amenities. Drinking water was sold by the bucket for at least part of the year, due to the bad quality of the water from the house wells. Households varied in size and composition between different houses and also over the year. In the dry season, which was a slack period in agriculture, the compounds swelled with visitors and jobseekers.⁷²

In this study of thirty Bankoni women, who were chosen for lengthy interviews concerning their urban life, economic activities and responsibilities and migration histories, only one had never married.⁷³ Three were engaged, two were widowed, four divorced and temporary single and twenty were married. All women but three pursued income-generating activities. One of them was too old, but had earlier traded spices. The other two were young with small children and husbands who were traders; the only men in the sample who provided for their families. Seven of the married women were without any support from their husbands, while the other women had husbands, whose incomes were either insufficient or very irregular.⁷⁴

Four women were housemaids with a regular but low income, one worked as a cook, another as a combined cook and cleaner. The salaries were given to their families in the rural villages; in the case of the cook the salary contributed to the common fund to feed fifteen persons in this Bankoni household. The rest of the women were traders, unlicensed and without any regular income. Some of the women went on trading trips to other West African countries, where they sold Malian handicraft and brought back industrial goods. For this they needed a capital, which was generally achieved through revolving funds, credits and gifts from relatives. Their earnings and trading activities were sporadic. The others were involved in selling door-to-door at the local market or from their own compounds. Some of the women (twelve) sold what they produced themselves in or close to their homes: food, cakes, snacks or soap with only small profit margins and moderate incomes. The others traded in cloth; either traditionally embroidered lengths of cloth for ceremonial gifts, or machine-sewn modern clothes, or they were dyers of cloth.

The women complained that money worries were a permanent feature of their lives. The hardest off were those women who, with the help of their daughters, were the sole providers of their families. They

⁷¹ Vaa 1991:131

⁷² Ibid 1991:132

⁷³ The selection of the respondents started with one key informant who also served as an interpreter. The sample consisted of all adult women resident in her compound. Vaa 1991:132.

⁷⁴ Vaa 1991: 132.

worked long hours producing and selling day-to-day necessities while lacking money to prepare and eat proper meals. The author cites the answer she got when asking these women about their health: “I am suffering from the malady of poverty”.⁷⁵ Many women complained about the lack of funds to stay in business on a more regular basis. They liked trading for different reasons, one of them to earn money, of course, but also as an arena for intense social activities.⁷⁶ Women’s economic enterprises depend on the ability to draw on networks of kin and friends. But social relations need to be constantly renewed through visits, gifts and displays of respect. This excludes people in downward spirals of poverty from benefiting from immediate assistance and the more long ranging redistribution of assets.⁷⁷

According to the result of the Bankoni study, the gender relations in the urban setting have the following characteristics: women rather than men resorted to a wide variation of activities in order to earn money and secure household survival. Few of the men who were unemployed used their time to seek other work than what they were trained for. Many women had very long working days, and the poorer the women were, the longer the days. Added to the female responsibility for feeding the household were the domestic tasks, which were time-consuming as well. In comparison with women, both self-employed men and those who were wage workers had much shorter working days than women. Men had actually a lot of enforced leisure time through unemployment or early retirement. “So while poverty may be an equalizer in status among women, it does not equalize the ways time is spent, nor the division of work between men and women”, the author of the study states and goes on: “The way poverty is shouldered differently by men and women has led to a widening gap between the normative and the actual. Men should provide for their families, but in many cases they fail to do so”... “Resent was rarely expressed against husbands for not earning money; this was accepted as no fault of their own.”⁷⁸ Summing up the study, the author points out the fact that even if men cannot live up to the ideal of providing for their families, they still keep male authority unquestioned in the home. Economically marginalized, poor men still maintain their status as superior to women, by public religious observance and by seeking each others’ company.

v. Commercial and entrepreneurial activities

The case study above shows how the urban economy offers opportunities of entrepreneurship for women as well as for men. At the same time, women have to cope with continued limitations based on gender and social status also in the urban context. But the pauperisation and marginalisation of large segments of the urban population are accompanied by the accumulation of wealth among other, smaller segments. Such urban change processes among women are often overlooked in social and development literature. The fact that some of these women have become extremely rich does not seem appropriate to mention, while women as

⁷⁵ Ibid 1991:134

⁷⁶ Ibid 1991:135

⁷⁷ Ibid 1991:140

⁷⁸ Ibid 1991:141

victims of poverty are dominating the descriptions of the urban female population.⁷⁹

Women entrepreneurs or traders dedicate themselves to many activities, from selling street foods, prepared in their homes, to trading with cloth and jewellery, to financial consulting. Economic activities reaching outside the realm of the family is extremely frequent in urban women's daily life. A survey from 1997 on Bamako's poorer sections, based on a random sample of 900 adult women, revealed that almost 80 percent of them were working outside the home, and about half of these petty trading.⁸⁰

The husband's attitude to his trading wife is crucial for her professional failure or success. If he gives her permission to travel around alone, doing business with foreigners, she is lucky and her commercial activities can flourish. If she, on the other hand, has the kind of husband who wants to borrow money from her and refuses to pay it back, he may ruin her enterprise, as she cannot deny her husband the loan. Women traders contribute to the family economy, as soon as they have the financial means, which has the effect that men give less money to satisfy the family needs. Interestingly, no women traders in the survey of thirty-two successful women traders in Bamako had separate accounting, but used money from their business for the household expenses without distinction.⁸¹ To be able to get permission from their husbands to earn money of their own through entrepreneurial activities, women had to compensate the husbands economically. But these gender attitudes seem to change slowly. The women traders interviewed in Bamako mostly state that with the economic means which trading yields, they get a stronger position in the family and also among kin what concerns decision-making in family matters.⁸²

vi. Migration

In the paper "The Situation of Women in Mali", presented at the United Nations Conference in Beijing 1995, it is stated that female migration from the rural areas into the cities is an increasingly popular solution for poor women, with or without children. People are on the whole very mobile. Both national and international migration is frequent; some people are seasonal migrants; others – more men than women – stay away permanently. Women who migrate to the cities are usually young – between 16–35 years old. The national rate of migration from the countryside to the towns is 10,4 percent. The most attractive migration goal is Bamako, the capital, which has more than one million inhabitants.⁸³

Many families have, in the absence of the men who work abroad, changed the family constellations into urban "mother-child units", who live without the male head of household during shorter or longer periods of time. The mothers may sell cooked food or fruit and vegetables in the streets, the young girls work as house servants and the boys, who are big enough to carry burdens, run errands at the market places. Everybody

⁷⁹ Diallo and Vaa 2002

⁸⁰ MISELI 1998:97–123 in Diallo, Assitan and Vaa, Mariken, 2002.

⁸¹ Diallo and Vaa 2002

⁸² Ibid 2000

⁸³ Tornieri and Maïga 2001

contributes as best as they can to the survival of the family unit, often without male household head. Many women are seasonal migrants, who return to the countryside when the rain comes, to cultivate what they can for domestic needs, leaving temporarily their work in the city. After harvest, they come back to town.

Violence, sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and trafficking are problems, which the young girl migrants from the rural villages have to confront in the city, without the protection of a father or brother. It is a fact that many young people, boys as well as girls, deceived by promises of well paid jobs, are transported by middlemen in buses from Bamako to the town of Nouadibou (Mauritania). There they are sold to sex traders with many clients from the mines in the south of Mauritania.⁸⁴

vii. Employment – unemployment

Unemployment constitutes a constant preoccupation in Mali. Since the beginning of the 80s, those who have an exam from secondary school or higher education do not find jobs. The country is thus confronted with a serious problem of unemployment among men and women who have secondary diplomas. Unemployment is high also among other groups of people, such as certain categories of agricultural workers, cattle breeders and fishermen, who have become victims of agricultural policies, in terms of a promotion of big scale production combined with restricted support of small scale production.⁸⁵

Within the State sector no vacancies are found. The capacity of the private sector to absorb the unemployed is weak, which contributes to make the informal sector, also called the non-structured sector, the preferred way of survival for those who have not been able to find employment. In all sectors, women are represented in smaller numbers than men. Only within the domains of handicraft and trade do women dominate over men, measured in terms of percentages: women occupied in handicraft 62 percent and in trade 58 percent. On the labour market in Bamako, those born in the city and immigrants have the same difficulties in finding a job and among them, particularly the young people who want a remunerated employment within the modern sector.⁸⁶

Employment respectively unemployment data in the various sectors are uncertain, due to definitional problems, seasonal variations and floating employment patterns. Many women and men have casual jobs, which could be categorised as more or less formal. Others, and among them many women, stay home and engage in all forms of domestic tasks, some of which are remunerated, others not.

⁸⁴ Gouvernement du Mali. 2002. *Plan d'action de lutte contre les différentes formes d'exploitation des femmes et des enfants*.

⁸⁵ Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille. *Rapport National sur la situation des femmes au Mali* Beijing 1995; Nov 1994:32

⁸⁶ Diop 1998:6

10. A Demography and Health Survey

The data presented in the following are taken from a survey, *Mali – Demography and Health Survey in 2001*, and constitutes the Synthesis Report, abbreviated and translated from French.⁸⁷ The survey was carried out from January to May in 2001 by the Cell of Planning and Statistics at the Ministry of Health and the National Direction of Statistics and Computer Science. In the survey, 12 849 women, between 15 and 49 years old and 3 405 men between 15 and 59 years old participated, from all regions of Mali, urban as well as rural. This survey has the advantage of being fairly recent, covering a wide range of Malian people, with a special emphasis on mothers and children.⁸⁸

The objective of the survey has been to collect, analyze and inform about the demographic data, which offer information about fertility, family planning, mortality and about the health of Malian mothers and children. Another ambition has been to evaluate the prevalence of anaemia and HIV/AIDS in the population, which had not been made in earlier surveys. As these data are effective indicators of poverty, I find it therefore motivated to present the most salient characteristics of the synthesis from the survey.

i. Sex and age

70 percent of the women and 67 percent of the men live in rural areas. According to this synthesis, 46 percent of the population is under 15 years. So Mali has a young population, with more women than men (94 men per 100 women).

ii. Household composition

The family units in the cities (5,7 persons) are larger than in the countryside (5,2 persons). In town, family units consisting of nine persons or more are not unusual. 89 percent of the households have male household heads. In the cities, 13 percent of the households are female headed, while in the countryside the percentage of female household heads is 11.

⁸⁷ CPSMSDNSI. 2002 Enquête Démographique et de Santé du Mali 2001: Rapport de Synthèse. La Cellule de Planification et de Statistique du Ministère de la Santé, Bamako.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 2002 Enquête Démographique et de Santé du Mali 2001: Rapport de Synthèse. La Cellule de Planification et de Statistique du Ministère de la Santé, Bamako.

iii. Educational level and literacy

The proportion of women and men over six years who have never been to school is 77 percent and 66 percent respectively. Less than two percent of the women and three percent of the men have finished primary education. Only 44 percent of the boys and 33 percent of the girls between 7 and 12 years go to school. Among those children aged 13–18 years, only 10 percent go to secondary school. On all levels of education less girls than boys attend school.

Only 15 percent of the women are literate compared to men, of whom almost 32 percent are literate. Just like education, the illiteracy is found among older people, in the rural areas and in the poorest regions. In Bamako, more people know how to read and write.

iv. Housing characteristics

Very few households have electricity; about 11 percent in the whole country have access to it. There are great differences in the distribution of electricity between the countryside (two percent) and the cities (37 percent). Most of the households use water from public open wells, also for drinking purpose (38 percent). Less than half of the population has access to clean water.

30 percent of the rural households lack toilets, while 62 percent have simple latrins. Radios are frequent in town (83 percent) and a little less in the rural areas (64 percent). Television is found among 5 percent of the rural population and 42 percent of the urban. There are more bikes in the countryside (54 percent) than in the towns (35 percent) and more motorbikes (33 percent) in the towns than in the rural villages (17 percent).

v. Fertility and family planning

The practice of polygamy is wide-spread in Mali. 43 percent of the women live in polygamous marriages. This form of marriage is more frequent in the countryside (45 percent) than in the urban areas (34 percent). The fertility level has not changed particularly in Mali during the last 15 years. Under actual conditions, a Malian woman will give birth to 6,8 children during the fertile part of her life, statistically calculated, compared with 6,7 in 1995–96 and 6,9 in 1987. The data shows that Mali still is one of the countries in West Africa with the highest fertility rates.

The fertility of young girls continues to be a health problem, because as many as 40 percent of the girls of the survey between 15 and 19 years of age were already mothers or were expecting a child. Young mothers tend to have difficult deliveries and the mortality rate for babies with mothers who are teenagers is higher than with mothers over 20. There is a negative relation between the level of education and the level of fertility of the young girls. Almost half of the young girls without any education were already mothers at the age of 20, while only 16 percent of the girls under 20 with a secondary level of education or less had any children.

Even if the level of knowledge about contraceptive methods is rather high, the use of contraception is extremely low. And even if, as is the case in the survey, three quarters of the women declared that they had heard

about at least one modern method of contraception, only 6 percent of the married women stated that they had used one of the methods themselves. The difficulty to accept the use of family planning explains to a great extent that the level of fertility remains high in contemporary Mali.

vi. The Health of mothers and children

The survey showed that there are few existing possibilities for Malian women to be examined in maternity centres during pregnancies. Not more than half of the number of women interviewed had had access to prenatal care by professional health personnel and this situation had not improved during the last five years. Giving birth at home was still the most frequent and only 40 percent of the women had been assisted by a midwife trained in modern health care or medicine.

The Malian women aged 15–19 years suffer from chronic energetic deficiency twice as often as women older than 20. In Mali, one out of four children dies between the ages 0–5 years, half of them before reaching one year of age. So even if the child mortality rate has slightly diminished (of 1000 babies born alive, 229 die before their fifth birthday), the numbers remain desperately high. Malnutrition constitutes a crucial problem. Two children out of five suffer from delayed growth due to insufficient and poorly composed food. Only one child out of four under six months are exclusively breastfed, which is what international child health organizations recommend up to six months of age.

vii. Maternal mortality

During the period 1990–2000 the maternal mortality varied between 500 and 600 deceased women per 100 000 births.⁸⁹ Thus, the maternal mortality is still high in Mali, as well as in the surrounding Sahel countries, where the number is between 500 and 1000 deceased mothers per 100 000 births of babies alive.

viii. Anaemia of mothers and children

Almost two women of three have anaemia (63 percent). The most easily treated form is found among the majority of the women (39 percent). Mostly the anaemic women are pregnant or 35–39 years old. More than four children of five aged 6 months to 5 years have anaemia. Half of these children suffer from a light form of anaemia, while 11 percent of the children have a serious form.

ix. Female circumcision (female genital mutilation)

In Mali, female circumcision (female genital mutilation) is still a very wide-spread practice. According to the results of the survey, more than 90 percent of the Malian women without regard to age declared that they were circumcised. The sanitary environment of the circumcisions remains a problem. Almost all the operations are made by traditional circumcisers; just in two percent of the cases have professional health personnel been involved. Only seven percent of the surveyed mothers said they did not intend to have their daughters circumcised.

⁸⁹ According to another source, the maternal mortality rate is 1 200/100 000 (afrol.com/categories/women/profiles/mali_women.htm)



x. HIV/AIDS

Both men and women in Mali know a great deal about HIV/AIDS. However, women know less about how to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS. Only 13 percent of the women could refer to at least two important ways of avoiding HIV/AIDS, while among men, this proportion was 60 percent. Moreover, the use of condoms was not established, less than two percent of the women said their partner had used it in their most recent sexual intercourse. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Mali is estimated to be two percent for women and 1.3 percent for men.

xi. Comments

This synthesis offers a disquieting reading. Only slight improvements compared with 1996–97 have been achieved for women in Mali, according to this recent survey. One of the progresses mentioned in the PAP 2002–2006 is within the field of education, where the high level of female illiteracy has diminished a little due to the alphabetisation of women. The education rate of girls in primary school is also said to have increased from 33 percent in 1996–97 to 44 percent in 1998–99. Still, in spite of massive development aid from international and national donors and a multiparty governmental system in Mali, promoting democratic development and decentralisation during the last ten years period, statistics show that hardly any change for the better for the rural Mali women has occurred in terms of health and literacy.

11. Promoting the Status of Women

i. The Ministry of Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family (MPWCF)

In March 1993, a “Commissionership for the Promotion of Women” (French: *Commissariat à la Promotion des Femmes*) was placed under the authority of the Prime Minister. In September 1997, the Ministry of the Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family was created by a decree which was further elaborated in 2000 and 2001. Its main objective was to create a national policy for the promotion of the woman, the child and the family, which has also been done. The last document is “Activity Policy and Plans for the Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family, May 2002–2006” (French: *Politiques et Plans d’Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, de l’Enfant et de la Famille 2002–2006 Mai 2002*).⁹⁰

One of the Ministry’s ambitions was to integrate a juridical dimension into the political and institutional framework for the promotion of women’s status in Mali. Part of this ambition has been, as mentioned above, to revise the law texts and to reform the Family Law and the Law for the Wellbeing of the Child. Several outlines of women’s projects are waiting to get financing for elaboration and realisation through the Ministry for the Promotion of the Woman, the Child and the Family. Due to weak leadership and shortage of money, MPWCF has not been able to achieve many of its goals.⁹¹

Judging from the international documents concerning the promotion of the status of women, the main goal during the 1990s has been to eliminate the discrimination and the so called harmful practices for the woman’s and the child’s health (French: *pratiques néfastes à la santé de la femme et de l’enfant*). This does not only refer to female circumcision (French: *excision*), also called female genital mutilation, but other practises as well, such as scarifications, tattooing, domestic physical violence against women etc.

ii. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW), which was adopted in 1979 by the United

⁹⁰ Politique et Plan d’Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, l’Enfant et de la Famille. 2002–2006, May 2002.

⁹¹ Tournieri and Maiga. 2001:10

Nations Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

CEDAW has defined the strategy for promoting and protecting the basic rights of young girls and women, eliminating all kinds of discriminations and inequalities. Mali's signature to and ratification of the optional protocol was made in 1986 and the 7th report, which seems to be the last one according to CEDAW's list of country reports, is from 1988. Mali's last ratification is from the 5th of December 2000.⁹²

It is of interest to remember that a country, that has ratified the Convention, is legally bound to put its provisions into practice. It is also committed to submit national reports at least every four years. Mali's intention to comply with the CEDAW's prescriptions against female circumcision is not clear. By reference to customary law and to the family's (i.e. the male family head's) right to decide for its own members, parents (fathers and grandparents, mainly) see to it that small girls, not older than five years, are circumcised before they are able to have a will of their own. Even if efforts have been made to declare female circumcision a criminal act, it seems still for political reasons difficult to speak publicly about a law against it in contemporary Mali.⁹³

iii. Women's civil society

Limiting factors for women's participation in the public sphere have already been touched upon (see 6.vi.). To this will be added that the resistance to women's participation in public life due to poverty, illiteracy and social constraints in public space (women's silence in the presence of men) is particularly ironic, considering the fact that women are already trained in associational life through their manifold women's associations. Since childhood many women have participated in age set groups, which later in life have developed into informal and formal associations, forming part and parcel of rural Mali women's social, economic and political life. Women could, with proper training and consciousness raising, become sources of influence and empowerment. A high quality professional strengthening of both women's associations and NGOs will probably give good results for the promotion of women's participation in the civil society.⁹⁴ Gender awareness training for enabling them to deal with women's integration into a gender-mixed civil society would be needed to facilitate this process.

To give an example of rural associational life, the RPP study from central rural Mali will again be mentioned here (see 9.ii.). In the villages, however poor the population is, the traditional revolving fund associations (French: *tontine*) for the saving of money still exist. Many of the associations lack official status, but they function with precise rules, which are respected by men and women. The villagers have to participate in the collective work sessions, mostly in the collective fields, and in the community activities. Women's cooperatives are to be found in seven of the twelve villages under study. Their goal is to promote the socio-economic

⁹² UN. 2003. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm. 2003 05 28

⁹³ The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy. 1999:16

⁹⁴ Ministère de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille. Politiques et Plan d'Action pour le Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfants et de la Famille 2002-2006. 2000:132

development of the members. Their economic resources are generated through the members' contributions, from what is harvested in the collective fields and other income generating activities. Generally, the money, which is distributed among the members as loans with or without interest, makes it possible for them to start some economic small-scale enterprise.⁹⁵

iv. Communication and press

After the democratic reforms, a policy of the development of mass media has begun to improve people's access to different media. The radio has become the most popular way of getting information for the Malian population: 50,8 percent of the women and 81,3 percent of the men listen to the radio at least once a week.⁹⁶ Many free radio stations, both national and regional, have introduced themselves in Mali, sending on the FM band. 69 percent of the home units have a radio and 14,3 have a TV set. Access to media is more frequent among the urban people, especially in Bamako. It is the urban women with education who dedicate most time to media; rural women lack the time and resources. Among the women with a second or superior level of education, 80 percent look at television, almost everybody listens to the radio and 68 percent read journals or newspapers. There are also other channels of communication, such as theatre and puppet plays, which form part of a diversified cultural and artistic inheritance.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Gouvernement du Mali. MARP. 2002:14

⁹⁶ Gouvernement du Mali. MARP. 2002:14

⁹⁷ Gouvernement du Mali. *Politique et Plans d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille. 2002-2006.*

12. Improvements of Women's Status

To improve Malian women's status from here to 2006, the special objectives of MPWCF are:⁹⁸

1. Reduce the rate of illiteracy of women in general and girl children in particular.
2. Improve women's health and especially women's reproductive health.
3. Strengthen equity between men and women.
4. Improve the image of the women.
5. Fight against women's poverty.

There are two goals of special interest from a gender point of view, namely the strategy for equity and the fight against female poverty. The strategy for equity contains ambitions such as:

- to create an institutional and social environment which assures and warrants equity and equality between men and women, juridical and civic education and assistance, a re-reading of the laws and rules according to the constitution and the international conventions;
- to prohibit marriages with girls under 15;
- to make education for girls and boys compulsory;
- to prohibit levirate and repudiation;
- to prohibit female circumcision.

How to achieve the goals?

“The legislation and the official regulation will be progressively confronted with the customary and the religious law with the ambition to fight against certain social customs, which will include violence, not only physical but also psychological, against women or girls. The integration and implication of customary and religious leaders in the process will be led by the MPWCF, the Ministry of Justice and the female civil society to create the institutional conditions for the application of a future family code.”⁹⁹

For “fighting against female poverty” the specific objective is to strengthen the economic capacity of the women. Because of the weak economic power of women, and of the increasing female pauperisation,

⁹⁸ Ibid. *Politique et Plans d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille*. 2002–2006. 2000:38

⁹⁹ Ibid. *Politique et Plans d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille*. 2002–2006. 2000:38

“a strengthening of their organisational and entrepreneurial capacities and a promotion of the new perspectives of investments and credits emerges. The strategy will be to facilitate women’s access to the means of production.”¹⁰⁰

This is a very sensitive issue in Mali today, considering the customary rules concerning land distribution, deriving from men’s self image as unquestioned main providers and authorities and their attitude to family property and succession. The question to be raised is maybe if the male gender role within the dominating gender system is the real obstacle for women’s increased well-being in times of poverty and economic and environmental crises. If this is so, it will be a matter for national and international development agents, preferably men, to seriously try to find ways of dealing with this situation. All men – in the rural communities, in the ministries, the rural extension services, or the World Bank, just to mention some examples – are contributing to women’s second rated status by avoiding to come to grips with gender issues related to economic rights and duties. Most of the time they are comfortable with promoting women’s development aid projects *separately*; projects, which in size and economic support never compete with men’s. This kind of double approach is common in Mali today, nourished by mainly unconscious sexist attitudes.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. *Politique et Plans d’Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, l’Enfant et la Famille*. 2002–2006. 2000:40

13. Summing Up

This Mali GP has mapped some of the most salient characteristics of the gender relations in Mali, relating them to poverty. The GP is based on available documents, reports, strategy papers and sociological and anthropological literature. In the following I will resume the content of the GP in a few headlines with accompanying texts.

i. Gender segregation

Many West African societies are organised on a gender segregation basis. This is also the case in Mali. There are of course variations between different geographical areas, religious traditions and ethnic groups in this respect. Age is another variable, which affects the cultural norms of gender segregation. But even if old women have a saying in society and a considerable influence over younger men and women, gender always counts more than age. Women, regardless of age, do not speak in gender mixed meetings outside the realm of the family.

The segregation of female and male activities does not result in more power for women, as men most of the times make decisions without the consent of women concerning both domestic and public affairs.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, women have a certain independence in the performance of the tasks considered as female, as men do not like to interfere in women's work.

ii. Hierarchical social relations

West African societies have traditionally been very hierarchical. The aristocrats or members of the families of religious leaders used to have relations to slaves with whom they were united in links of inequality and super- respectively subordination. The notion of "free" people in contrast to the caste divided people, who were artisans by profession and of inferior status, was deeply rooted and exists even today, manifesting itself in the strictly endogamic¹⁰² marriage rules. Elaborated property rights characterized different groups of the society. The slaves constituted the productive main-d'oeuvre, not only for the aristocrats with their contempt for manual work, but for the entire "free" population during certain periods of time¹⁰³. Even today, people from the slave group are

¹⁰¹ UNICEF 1994:322

¹⁰² Endogamy means that marriages are only permitted within the same caste, ethnic group, tribe etc.

¹⁰³ UNICEF 1989:35

the ones who take on remunerated jobs such as restaurant and housemaid jobs and trading (women) or construction work (men) in the urban areas and agricultural work for cash cropping companies (men and women) in the rural areas.

In contemporary Mali, the dominating group consists of a fraction of bureaucratic bourgeoisie and of big traders. There is a tendency for an agrarian bourgeoisie to develop, who invests and organizes the production of vegetables and cattle breeding near the big cities of Mali. As a consequence, women loose income as a result of these initiatives on a big scale. Also male small farmers loose their market. But women are more affected by the degrading situation than men, as they always remain marginal in comparison to men. To resume, the relations between men and women vary according to women's position in the domestic group, to ethnic belonging and age, and to the system of production, but also according to seasonal migrations, urbanisation and, as mentioned above, inherited social status.¹⁰⁴

iii. Gender interdependency patterns

The mutual dependence of husband-wife is connected to the reproduction of the family in Mali as elsewhere, besides other emotional, economic or political factors, that may motivate the marriage. Women need men to become mothers and they should conceive within wedlock. "Man gives woman her dignity", as the Bambara proverb says. In a society like Mali's with mostly patrilineal descent and a patriarchal ethos, marriage is the most important institution for women and men for getting a respected position in society and for getting recognition in the local community. "Marriage is the same as the perpetuation of the lineage and a reciprocal help; it gives considerateness and respect", as one Mali woman expresses herself.¹⁰⁵ Women are ready to endure all kinds of sacrifices to become wives and mothers. Marriage is not an individual affair, however. The taste or feelings of the couple do not count but rather the agreement of the family and the blessing of the two allied groups. Even in a Muslim context, marriage maintains traditional customs and values, the symbiosis between living and dead – the ancestors – being crucial. The male head of an "extended" family can only approve of a marital union, if the customary rules are followed and if the marriage is compatible with the material and moral interests of the group.

iv. Mali Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

The goals for poverty reduction is formulated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The main objective is to reduce poverty from 63.8 percent in 2001 to 47.4 percent in 2006.

Poverty affects nearly two thirds of Mali's population, out of whom nearly one third lives in extreme poverty. The breadth of poverty varies according to the area (urban, rural), the sector of activity, age and gender. It is also clearly stated in the PRSP, that poverty affects many more women than men. Comparatively little attention is dedicated to poverty reduction for women especially, but the need to increase women's literacy rate and to facilitate access to adequate health services is particularly

¹⁰⁴ Tournieri and Maïga 2001

¹⁰⁵ Camara 2002:183

stressed. The relation between the prevailing gender system and poverty is not analysed in such terms. Reference is however made to the socio-cultural factors among other factors to explain women's exposure to poverty in contemporary Mali.

v. National, customary and religious law

Women's juridical status in Mali is characterized by the co-existence of modern and customary law or rules. So even if several laws have been adopted with the intention to offer women legal protection and to warrant them more freedom of choice than the customary rules do, the application of the modern laws remain a difficult issue. A series of international and national documents have been signed by the government in favour of the democratic rights of the individual and the non-discrimination of all citizens and of women in relation to men.

The Mali Constitution confirms equality for everybody without discrimination according to race, sex, religion and ethnic belonging. Still, a reformed family law, which treats women as individuals, not as part of the family only, and without the obligatory protection of a male family head, has been delayed and is yet not ratified. A law prohibiting female circumcision is obviously still politically impossible, and not on the agenda, in spite of the fact that Mali has signed and ratified the optional protocol of CEDAW in 1986.

Religious law is often overlapping customary law, fortifying traditional values and male-dominated practices. On the other hand, Islamic rules of inheritance are more tolerant to women than the customary ones and the religious rules prescribe an equal treatment of a limited number of wives in polygamous marriages, to the benefit of co-wives.

Women's subordinated position is confirmed in contemporary legal practices, in spite of the modern laws' stress equity and human rights for everybody. Marriage offers the best example of the prevailing power of customary law in Mali. Parents marry their girls when they are younger than 15 years old with reference to the customary law, even if fifteen is the minimum age stipulated in the national law. Women have difficulties in getting a divorce unless they can compensate for it with a sum of money to the husband, while the husband may repudiate his wife without legal consequences. Polygamy is a frequent phenomenon and allowed according to both customary and religious law, increasing also in the cities. If the husband dies, the widow may have to marry a brother of the deceased (levirate). These were just some of the examples mentioned above.

In economic life, women are also controlled by men and by customary rules. Women's exposure to male benevolence or disgust as regards access to land for cultivation or permission to trade outside home has sometimes negative consequences for women's financial situation and thus for the whole family's well being. Women have no voice, little power and only informal influence in the civil society or in public life in general. On the other hand, rural women are active in a number of informal associations, in which they find a platform for social and economic activities. Urban women find different ways of earning money, investing them temporarily in rotating savings associations, away from the reach of husbands. Female NGOs promoting women's rights are offering edu-

cated women an arena for political training and projects, focusing on gender awareness. Within the framework of traditional gender ideology women find ways of adapting to change, exploiting modernity by their own cultural means, one of which is women's associations.

vi. Rural livelihood

Women as agricultural producers need land (for the cultivation of cereals, and rice and for the gardening). Wood is their energy source. Water is needed for all vital purposes: family consumption, agriculture, cattle breeding, fishery and the many products obtained through the gathering of plants. Two factors are decisive for women: their access to land locally and regionally (the land tenure system and its rules) and women's position in the social system, of which gender relations constitute an important part.

According to Mali tradition, the heads of household have the right to decide over the cultivation of the land and so have the other (male) land users. Women should be satisfied with the possibility of getting the usufruct right to the land. The family unit (husband and wife/wives and their children) cultivates the land together, and a women's possibility to have access to land depends on the situation of the family in the village and of the village in the region. The collective exploitation of the land makes it difficult for the individuals, men as well as women, to cultivate land individually for their own purposes. However, women are disfavoured compared to the men as far as parcels of land for cultivation. Men are seen as responsible for the food supply of the family, even if, as mentioned above, in times of droughts women take over this responsibility, while men migrate.

Thus, gender relations are an essential factor in the analysis of women's access to land for agricultural production and for access to the natural resources. Together men and women are dependent on each other for the survival of the family unit. Men have the power, but they need women's collaboration in the agricultural production and in the domestic realm. Women lack power at first glance, but their powerlessness is, as we see, relative. Since the great droughts 1973–1984 women have increased their individual agricultural production to compensate for the food deficit of the family. Consequently, what we see is a transformation of women's work – a greater contribution to food production and a strengthening of their role as provider of the family. Combined with other changes, such as migration, globalisation, and development programs, the power relations will also seek partly new forms, even if changes in gender roles are slower than the economic ups and down of society.

vii. Urban and migratory livelihoods

In the cities, where the provision of basic necessities such as shelter, clothes, food and fuel have been monetized, men's and women's tasks are no longer complementary. Many men fail to provide for their wives and children in town, where unemployment is high. It is then up to the woman to earn money for herself and the children. Women's earnings are at her disposal. The wife's economy is as secret and hidden from the husband as his economic situation is secret to the wife. This form of contract between husband and wife where men and women have sepa-

rate economies, may be seen as a modification of the gender-based division of work and responsibilities prevailing in rural societies. The urban economy was initially based on male wage labour and only rarely was women's work recognised as part of the monetized economy. The norms regarding urban men as sole providers for their families spring from these historical circumstances.

In the study of urban women living close to Bamako briefly outlined, the conclusion in terms of gender relation was the following: even if men cannot live up to the ideal of providing for their families, they still keep male authority unquestioned in the home. Economically marginalized, poor men maintain their status as superior to women, by public religious observance and by seeking the company of other men. Women do not question men's right to leave the household work and the main responsibility for the education of children in the hands of the women. As a consequence, urban women's workload is heavy and of a constant nature; not adapted to seasonal variations, which is the case for rural women and men.

Migratory livelihoods for men and women coincide with the urban one, to the extent that we deal with migration from the rural to the urban areas of Mali. Just a final remark about the categorisation rural-urban: for the part of the population who actually work seasonally in the cities and seasonally in the rural villages, living periodically in the village and in the city, a separation of rural-urban may not be relevant for them. These people actually transgress the borders between the rural and the urban, constituting a third category of importance in Malian society. They are agents of change and serve as bridges between different life styles and household organisational forms.

viii. Gendered passivity

The main problems related to poverty and gender as described in this GP, could be summarised in the following way, using the *MPWCF Policy and Action Planning 2002–2006* document's formulations:

- woman's illiteracy remains an obstacle for the socio-economic promotion;
- woman's health is not improving;
- women's use of the basic social services is weak and the efforts made to improve the quality of the services are not sufficient;
- women's and the girl children's legal and social status remain unchanged.

According to this document, the main obstacle for women in fighting poverty is not men or the male gender role in society in the first place (see above), but "women's passivity" in the vocabulary of the MPWCF document. This is said to be the result of women's illiteracy and heavy work load, their lack of time and scarce juridical knowledge, and the socio cultural situation, which is characterised as a society of gerontocrats and patriarchs.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Gouvernement du Mali. *Politique et Plans d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme, l'Enfant et la Famille. 2002–2006*. 2000:28

The “passivity” of the rural women with regard to alphabetisation is to be explained by their heavy workload, devoting many hours to domestic and agricultural tasks. They also need the help of their young daughters in domestic as well as agricultural work, which explains their resistance to letting young girls attend school. The mother-daughter labour unit is a *must* for many women, both in the cities and in the countryside, especially if they live in monogamous family units. Besides, as far as primary school for small girls, their parents are afraid of that they will be sexually harassed or abused by schoolboys and teachers. The parents find learning French of no use for their daughters, but think they would rather need some religious teaching

Men’s resistance to women’s participation in public life and women’s “passivity” appear particularly ironic to Westerners, who are impressed by Mali women’s long experience of associational activities. Women could be a huge potential for democratisation and political activation on the grass root level. Through the informal and formal associations, which are part and parcel of Malian women’s social and economic life, they already have channels for influence and empowerment, if they, in collaboration with men, could overcome the mentioned gendered constraints.

Women’s slight engagement in decision-making processes concerning the natural environment remains a serious handicap. The male advisers’ ignorance about women’s knowledge and the gender constraints for a good communication between women and the male advisers are mentioned above as negative factors, which have to be eliminated. One way is to train and employ female advisers in rural, forest, water and environmental extension programs for rural women.

14. Final comments

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. This is obviously a challenge for international development agencies, whose presence in Mali is impressive. The creation of an urban development bourgeoisie as a side effect of the prolific development activities is noticeable in Bamako. Big and expensive jeeps fill up the sandy roads, offices abound with their staff of directors, co-ordinators and secretaries. A great number of documents, as it seems, are produced in an effort to come to grips with the state of poverty in Mali. This GP is just another attempt with a similar ambition, from a gender system perspective.

Sometimes, however, I get the feeling that we are too negative and one-sided in our descriptions of the Malian people and their enemy: poverty. Let us not forget that those who in the development aid documents are defined as “poor people” in Mali, often find alternative ways to cope with their situation. They combine many activities and find new niches to get some extra income. Moreover, they have a rich social life, with marriage, name giving and funeral parties and exchanges of property for the sake of social status, prestige and self esteem. Relatives abroad often contribute to the financial costs for the rites de passage feasts at home to keep up the family reputation. Women work hard and work more hours than men, but they do not compare themselves with men. They see men as different, but indeed as necessary for the family unit, or at least as fathers, who recognise their children. Men give women their female dignity as wives and mothers. Women give men their social honour as fathers, husbands and heads of family, of household and of compound. This side of life is not visible in the documents, but it is essential for completing the picture of gender relations in Mali.

15. Mali Gender Profile Statistics

Mali is one of poorest countries in the world and ranked 153 out of 162 countries in the 2001 Human Development Index prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Demographic data:

Proportions women – men in Mali

Women 52 %

Men 48 %

(Source: Tournieri and Maïga. 2001)

Life expectation:

Women: 49,7 years

Men: 46,4 years

(Source: World Bank, Development Report (1998/99))

Apportionment of women- men according to matrimonial status:

Married: 84,9 %

Unmarried: 12,8 %

Widow: 1,2 %

Separated or divorced: 1,2 %

Apportionment of men according to matrimonial status:

Married: 66,4 %

Unmarried: 31,7 %

Widower: 0,4 %

Separated or divorced: 1,4 %

In Mali, 44 % of the women and 27 % of the men live in polygamy. The average age for the first marriage for women between 15–49 years, is 16 years and the average age for women at the birth of the first child is 18,8 years. Fertility rate (births per woman) 6.4.

(Source: CPSMSDNSI. *Enquête Démographique et de Santé de Mali-II/ EDSM-II*, 1995–1996)

(Source: <http://devdata.worldbank.org>)

Education

Level of education for women in Mali:

None: 81 %

First degree – basic education: 11,9 %

Secondary degree or more: 7,1 %

Level of education for men in Mali:

None: 69,3%
First degree- basic education: 15,6 %
Secondary degree or more: 15,2%
(Source: CPSMSDNSI. EDSM-II 1995–96)

Rates of schooling for children in Mali at different levels of teaching:

Level of teaching	sex	1994–1995	1997–1998
Nursery school	girls	1,22	1,69
	boys	1,38	1,80
Basic school, first year	girls	33,40	40,30
	boys	51,30	59,90
Basic school, second year	girls	9,90	12,30
	boys	19,30	23,40
Secondary, general level	girls	3,00	3,90
	boys	7,60	8,90
Secondary, technical and professional	girls	1,80	1,60
	boys	2,90	3,20
Higher education	girls	0,60	0,80
	boys	2,80	3,40

(Source: Cellule de Planification et de Statistiques of the Ministry of Basic Education, 2000, in Tournieri and Maïga. 2001)

Employment:

The active population in Mali constitutes 38 % of the total population.

67,3 % of the active population are men;

32, 7 % are women.

84 % of the population live in rural areas;

16 % in urban areas.

More than 80 % of the female population lives in rural areas and work mainly with agricultural production, cattle breeding, fishing and the exploitation of forests.

15 % of the women and 85 % of the men are engaged in the modern sector.

(Source: CPSMSDNSI. EDSM-II: 1995–1996)

Number of women who are salaried employees:

Out of 36 716 salaried employees, 9 203 are women, i.e. 25,6 %.

14 % of these women have a matriculation exam and four years of higher education.

In this group (14 % of 9 203 women), 35 % occupy high posts.

Number of women registered by the Work Law ("Code du Travail"):

Out of 51 864 salaried people who are registered by the Work Law, 6 357 are women, i.e. 11,9 %. 60% of the 11,9 % are found within the field of social and personal services.

(Source: Fondation Friedrich Ebert. *La situation de la femme malienne; livre blanc*, 2000:114)

Employment of women in rural development

83,6 % of the people who work in the rural sector are women.

Among those women, 76,8 work in agriculture.

1,8 % breed cattle; 1,0 % are fishermen and 4 % exploit forests.

(Source: l'Observatoire de l'Emploi et de la Formation, 1997)

Unemployment

Environment	Urban	Rural	Total
Sex			
Men	33 586	5 097	38 293
Women	12 158	1 452	13 610
Total	45 744	6 549	52 293

(Source: Commissariat à la Promotion de la Femme. *Rapport national sur la situation des femmes au Mali*, Nov.1994)

Women's participation in decision making by occupying important posts, in percentage compared with men, in January 2000.

Responsibility Posts	Women	Men	% of women
Ministers	7	15	32
Deputies	18	125	12
Economic, Social and Cultural	3	44	6,4
Counsellors			
Constitutional Courts	2	7	22,2
Community Councils	281	8134	3,4
Mayors	11	690	1,6

Ministry Cabinets

General Secretaries	0	22	0
Directors of the Cabinet	3	19	1,6
Technical Advisors	16	100	13,8
Directors of Mission	20	46	30,3
General Police Controllers	3	39	7,2

Responsibility Posts	Women	Men	% of women
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Justice

Judges	34	273	11
Presidents of the Tribunal	2	50	3,8
Prosecutors	2	50	3,8
Presidents for the Sections of the Supreme Court	1	2	33
Lawyers	23	162	12,4
Presidents of the Bar	1	0	100
Law clerk	8	18	30,7
Levy executioner	3	69	4,1

Diplomacy

Ambassadors	2	20	10
General Consuls	0	6	0
Counsellors	5	46	8,9

(Source: Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme. L'Enfant et la Famille. *Rapport national de la situation des femmes au Mali cinq ans après la conférence mondiale de Beijing 1995*. Rapport national. July 2000)

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Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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