



EUNPACK

A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

POLICY BRIEF

Perceptions about the EU crisis response in Mali – a summary of perception studies

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Summary and Recommendations

This policy brief provides a bottom-up analysis of the impact of the European Union's (EU) crisis response in Mali. It examines how the EU's engagement in crisis response is received and perceived by different local actors throughout the conflict cycle. The Malian crisis is cross-dimensional, and the EU's engagement in Mali also includes many different sectors and aspects. However, in this brief we are mainly concerned with how Malian stakeholders perceive the EU's engagement in the fields of security sector reform (SSR), governance and capacity building, and humanitarian and development aid. This study therefore seeks to unpack whether the EU's response corresponds to the needs of target groups and if it is perceived as conflict sensitive and reaches vulnerable groups.

The findings indicate that attitudes towards the EU are generally quite favourable, but there are also certain critical issues. Of particular importance is the information gap that this policy brief highlights. Even Malians who have personal and direct contact with the EU do not understand EU programming well enough to make up their minds about what the EU is doing in crisis response in their own country. This runs counter to the objective of local ownership. Therefore, taking this into consideration, as well as the fact that the situation in Mali has improved little since the international community returned in full in 2013, we suggest the following recommendations to the EU:

- develop a more context-sensitive communication strategy;
- deepen the engagement with Malian counterparts;
- ensure greater engagement with Malian society and more direct engagement with society at large;
- improve the communication of how EU programming can benefit the most vulnerable groups, such as minorities, refugees and IDPs.

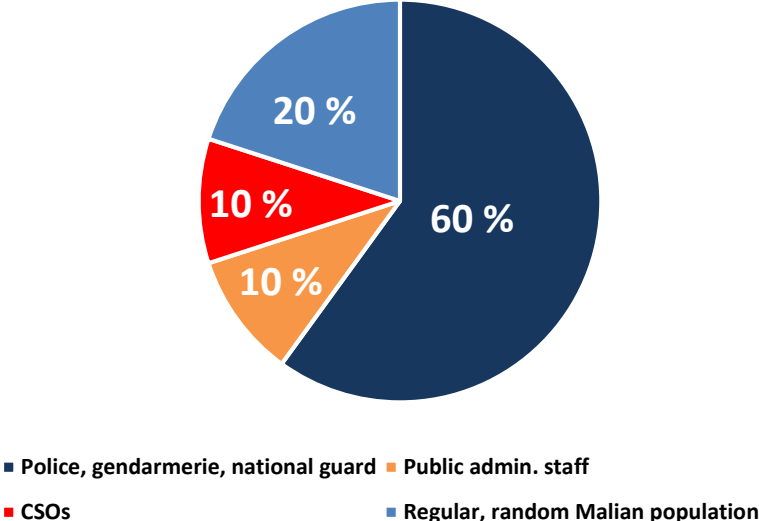
Methodology

The results presented in this document come from a field survey carried out from 1 July to 5 August 2017. Due to the deteriorating security situation in Mali, it was agreed in the consultations in EUNPACK to conduct the survey only in the capital, Bamako. The generic questionnaire developed by EUNPACK to analyse local actors’ perceptions of the EU’s crisis response policies was carefully adapted to fit the local context of Mali.

The two researchers (one junior and one senior) commissioned by ARGA for the implementation of the EUNPACK project supervised a team of eight surveyors composed of young student trainees (six men and two women). They were trained in the correct understanding of the questionnaire. They then went out to test the questionnaire on the ground. A sharing session on the use of the questionnaire was organised in the offices of the ARGA to gauge the difficulties encountered in the interviews.

To date, 130 questionnaires have been administered, with a return response of 105. Out of a total 105 participants, 24 percent were female. The average age of female and male subjects was between 26-39 years.

Figure 1. Sample population of the survey



Most of the interviews were conducted in the Bambara language, the *lingua franca* in Mali. Researchers also carried out simulations of the administration of the questionnaire in the local language with surveyors to ensure a correct translation of the key concepts of the questionnaire before field interviews were carried out. Thus, concepts such as sensitivity to conflict, strengthening of state capacities, etc. were discussed to enable the research team to translate them correctly into local languages. The targets favoured by the study were identified among the beneficiaries of two EU flagship projects in Mali; namely EUCAP Sahel and EUTM. The average duration of the interviews was 20 minutes. It is important to keep in mind that the survey focused on local perceptions of the response to the Malian crisis brought by the EU through various programmes put in place.

It should also be noted that we encountered certain difficulties in accessing respondents, in particular within the Malian Defence and Security Forces. The sensitive context of the conflict seems to make

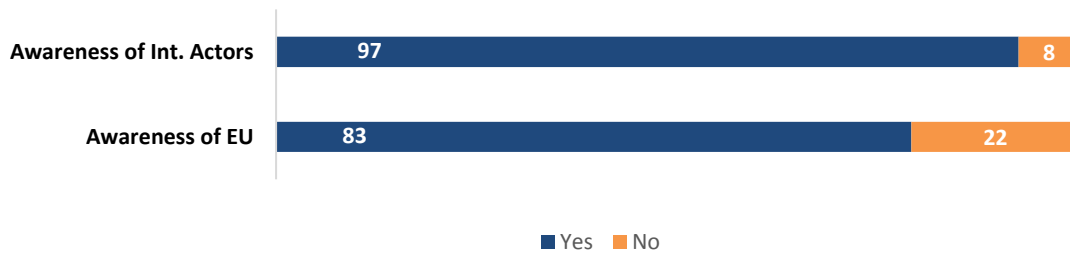
people in the army very suspicious. This means that most of the respondents from the Malian Defence and Security Forces surveyed are from the police and gendarmerie. Military personnel who have received training from the EUTM programme have not yet been reachable for the purposes of the survey due to extremely slow survey authorisation procedures. We did try to secure the support of the EUTM in this process, but their ability to get the message across to counterparts in the Malian army was not strong enough, initially. This is an interesting finding in itself that we will follow up in more detailed fieldwork that will follow this survey, and concrete steps have been taken to facilitate their access during the in-depth interviews planned in the next phase of EUNPACK.

Findings

Awareness of the EU's Crisis Response Intervention

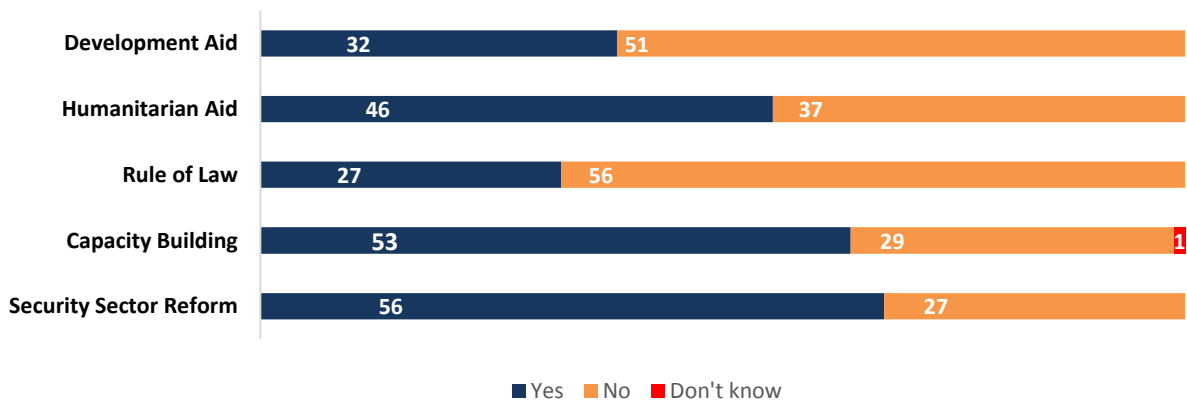
The crisis in Mali, which started with the coup in 2012 and continued with the rapid rise of Jihadist insurgencies, has led to considerable international engagement in Mali, and most Malians are aware of this. In our sample respondents also have a high awareness of the EU. The EU is visible through its humanitarian and development efforts, but also through two flagship projects, The EU Training Mission (EUTM Mali) and the EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali).

Figure 2. Awareness of the EU and other international actors.



Two EU flagship projects: EUTM and EUCAP, are the EU activities in crisis response that most of our respondents are aware of (see Figure 3).

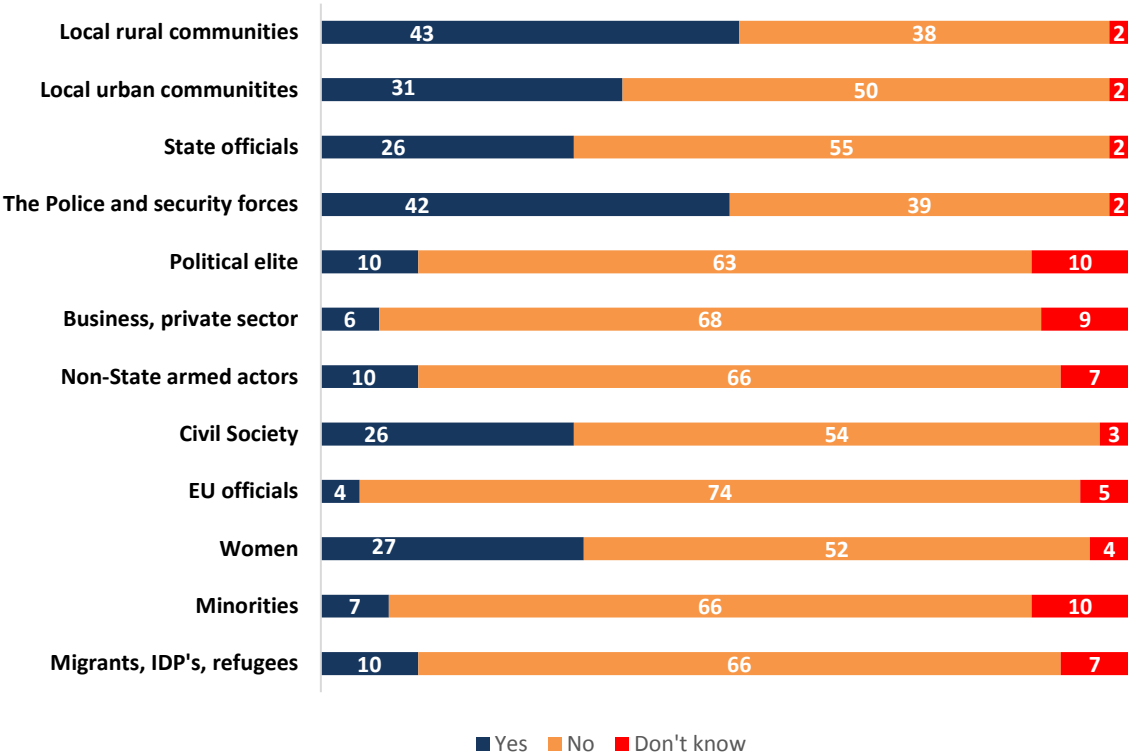
Figure 3. Awareness of EU involvement in development aid, humanitarian aid, law, capacity building



Perceived beneficiaries of EU support

In Figure 4 we see that the sectors most respondents point to as beneficiaries are local rural communities and the police and the military. This is as one might expect. The EU is involved and visible in humanitarian aid to local rural communities and the support to security sector reform through EUTM is also highly visible. The more striking finding is that very few people seem to believe that the EU can reach out to the most vulnerable groups, such as minorities, refugees and IDPs (see Figure 4). This is not necessarily correct if we look at the actual figures of EU assistance to Mali after 2012, but it does give an impression of what local people think. What they see is an EU that is concerned with local rural communities and security issues. What this points to, and what we believe is a challenge to the EU’s crisis response in a country such as Mali, is the inability of the EU to communicate its policies widely and transparently; what it is doing and why they are doing it. This is particularly important in a setting such as Mali, where an important EU member country (namely France) is also present as a major bilateral stakeholder, with a colonial past.

Figure 4. Perceived beneficiaries of EU support



Levels of satisfaction with EU support

The lack of clear communication from the EU and the confusion that this may lead to becomes more evident when we probe respondents’ levels of satisfaction with EU support. As we can see from Figure 5, there is a certain level of satisfaction, at least to the extent that more respondents are among those satisfied than those who are not. This is, however, not the most crucial finding here, but the fact that

approximately half of the respondents have so little knowledge about what the EU is doing and contributing within such crucial sectors of their society that they cannot come up with an answer. They simply do not know whether they are satisfied with the EU’s assistance to security sector reform, governance and capacity building, development aid and humanitarian assistance. This points to a deep problem of democratic deficit because even the people who are involved in sectors that the EU is assisting cannot give an answer to this question – they are simply not aware of the assistance. Thus, if it is the intention of the EU as an external stakeholder to leave a light footprint in Mali and build local ownership, these findings point to some much-needed rethinking about current approaches, based on a deeper engagement with Malian counterparts and the population at large. As such, this also points to an obvious trend in countries such as Mali where the security situation is deteriorating. The international community is still present in the country, but its presence is to a great extent in heavily guarded gated communities where the international community lives and works in isolation from the country and the population it is supposed to assist.

Figure 5. EU support – levels of satisfaction

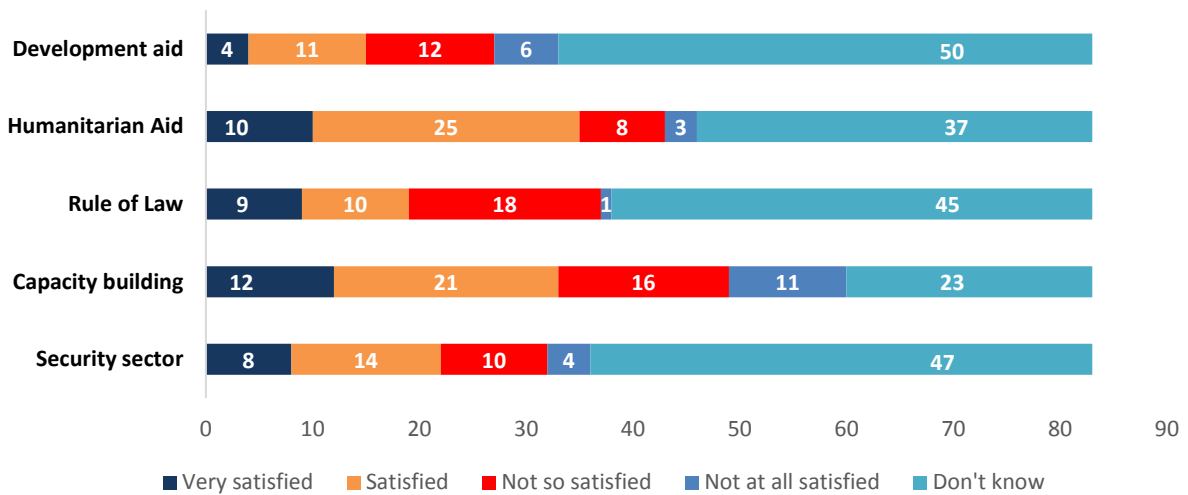


Figure 6. Are you satisfied with the assistance received?

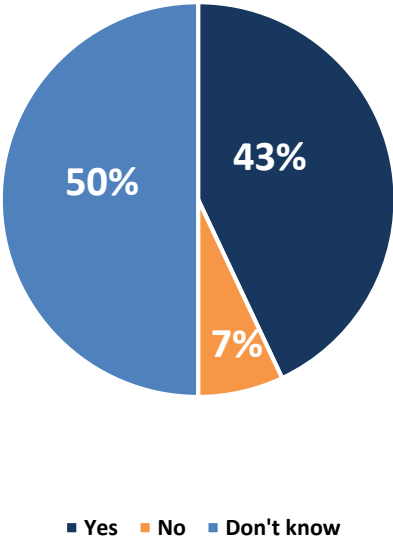
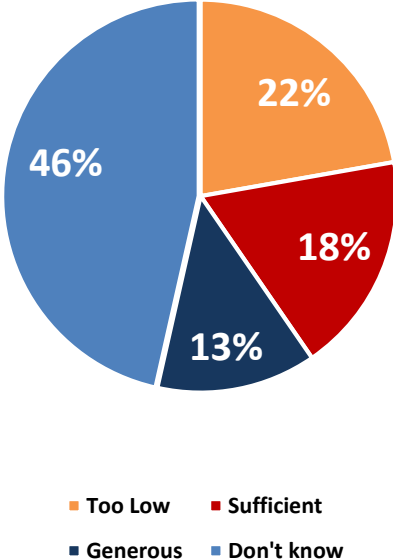


Figure 7. Based on your personal experience, how would you describe the magnitude of EU's crisis intervention?



The same trend is evident when we review how the respondents are personally satisfied with EU assistance and how they would describe the magnitude of the EU's crisis intervention. Some 43 percent are satisfied, only 7 percent says no, but there are also 50 percent that does not know, and asked about the magnitude we see the same thing – our respondents are quite divided, but a fair share of them either do not know or think that it is too low. What this means is that when respondents who have interacted with the EU in these sectors in a personal capacity are asked this question, there is a level of satisfaction, but it is not solid. One reason for this, we suspect, is that even respondents who have regular contact with EU programming have some difficulties understanding what this is all about. One can imagine what the figures might have been if these questions had been asked of only a general sample of the Malian population.

In the next stage of the survey we asked respondents to characterise EU assistance. The minority of respondents able to give an answer are almost equally divided between one group that believes it is either wrong or misplaced, and another group that thinks it is well targeted and the right type of assistance. However, the majority of our respondents simply do not know – again indicating the information deficit that we highlighted above: a deficit that is completely counter to the EU objective of local ownership.

Figure 8. Characterisation of EU assistance.

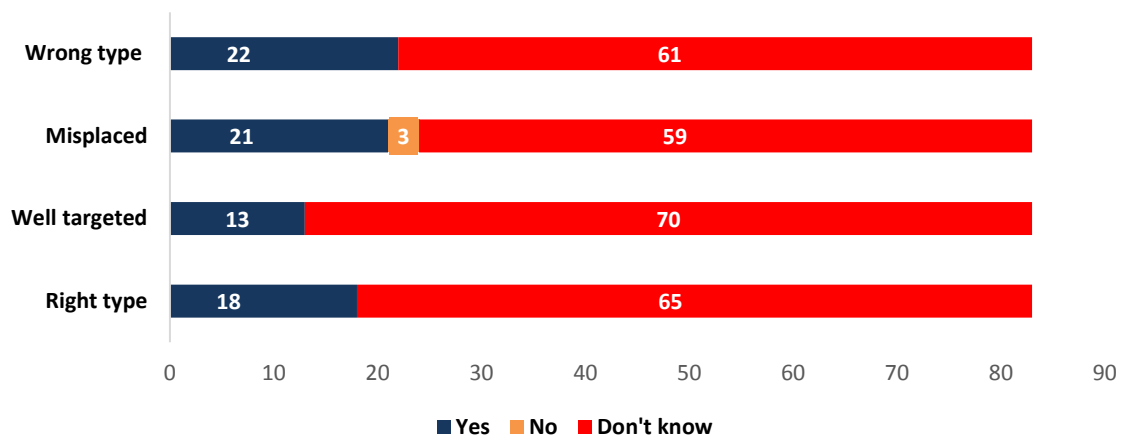


Figure 9. Is the EU conflict-sensitive?

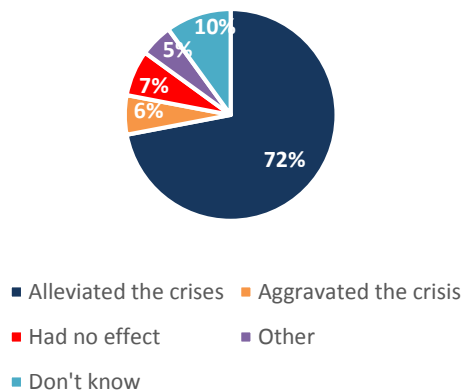
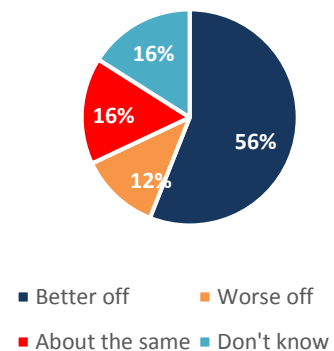


Figure 10. What was the impact of the EU on the crisis?

Figure 11. Do you think that you are better off, worse off, or about the same after the EU's intervention?



Despite the information and local ownership gap alluded to above, for the time being, respondents still have a fairly positive view of the EU. Some 58 percent believes that the EU is conflict sensitive, 72 percent thinks that the EU's contribution has helped to alleviate the crisis, and 56 percent thinks that they are better off today than when the crisis started. Taking the situation in Mali into consideration, this may seem rather strange. However, it is important to note that when measured against the chaos and confusion of 2012-13, the current situation may, after all, seem better. It is a continuing crisis, but above all a phenomenon that many Malians, particularly the inhabitants of Bamako, have learned to live with. All things considered, they are not feeling the conflict as directly as those who live in the northern and the central regions of Mali.

Conclusion

The EU and its crisis response is still viewed fairly positively in Mali. Respondents with some personal experience of the EU do see it as a conflict-sensitive external stakeholder that helped to alleviate the immediate crisis of 2012-13. However, the very same respondents do not know much about what the EU is actually doing, why it is doing it, and on what kind of ideas the EU programming in Mali is based. From our point of view, we should be aware of a serious information gap that cannot be glossed over as it is totally counter-productive to the local ownership that the EU claims it strives to achieve in its crisis response efforts in Mali.

We are of the view that this finding must lead to a serious rethink of how the EU interacts and reaches out, both to its counterparts in Mali and to the population at large. This is important for the sustainability of EU programming in Mali, but it is also important because many Malians have considerable difficulties with separating what are EU activities, what are programmes undertaken by France bilaterally, and what is the work of the UN.

The authors of this brief believe that it is very much in the interests of the EU to separate its activities out from those of the UN and, in particular, from those of an important former colonial power – France. The level of local ownership that almost all donors talk about in Mali does not come about by itself. It must be nurtured and supported, and it must be built on communication and dialogue. Our findings clearly suggest that the EU can and should do much more in this regard in Mali.