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**SUBJECT:** MALI RESEARCH BRIEF  
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Girl's education in Mali is a precedent issue that is affected by the violence and political turmoil of Mali. Girls in Mali are not staying in school and attaining a secondary education because they are sent to work in mines, wed as child brides, suffer through female mutilation, and denied opportunities due to gender basis. The history of Mali was a catalyst for these factors that limit girl's education. After the peak of conflict in 2012, an internationally-mediated peace accord was signed in June of 2015 between actors. Despite the agreement, Mali is plagued with deep ethnic differences that leads to violence. Mali Ranks 179 out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index. The country is also among the 25 poorest countries. Organizations such as USAID, UNICEF, and Plan International have been on the ground in Mali to combat the issue of girl's education. Through their efforts in providing safe environments, participation programs, and community meetings with parents; girls have the opportunity to attain an education and improve their lives.

## **Background**

The Republic of Mali can be found on the interior of Western Africa, landlocked by surrounding countries Algeria, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Mali is divided into eight regions, with a total population of 16,955,536 people as of July 2015 (World Factbook). Mali is composed of diverse ethnic groups, and is reflected in having 13 official languages, along with French. After gaining independence in 1890 from France, Mali became a poster-child for democracy in Africa. Divides among the north and the south were made evident through unrest in the through, in which criminal organizations profited from illicit activities across borders and causing violence (Human Policy Group). In attempt to gain territory, a war was waged against the Malian territory and the rebels. Three years after a peace agreement between the two sides, another rebellion sparked that was led by National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and other actors. This rebellion prompted the Military coup in Bamako on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012 (Clingendael Institute). By the end of May 2012 Islamist had taken over the rebellion and seized control of northern regions, and implemented their own laws. In the south, a military junta had also seized power (Clingendael Institute).

Despite signing an internationally-mediated peace accord in June of 2015, the people of Mali face issues such as food security, displacement, and violence (World Factbook). Mali Ranks 179 out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index (The United Nations Development Programme). The country is also among the 25 poorest countries (The World Factbook). Conflict continues in the Northern regions, and is spreading to the southern regions. The people of Mali do not have access to resources that promote development, such as education.

## Problem

The problem at hand is that girls are not staying in school. The focus age group is girls ages 9-14, because families may allow girls to complete primary school but not secondary education. While Mali rages with conflict between actors in political turmoil, girls in Mali are the ones who are paying the price through not attaining a secondary education. The most precedent root causes of this issue is that girls: are sent work in dangerous mines, wed as child brides, suffer through female genital mutilation, and be denied opportunities based on gender biases. Resolving this issue is urgent, because educating girls is the key towards development for improving people's lives the most effectively. The current state of Mali limits the ability for girls to stay in school such as its dependence on export.

Gold is Mali's most important export, and due to high levels of poverty, families cannot afford to send children to school and instead sends them to work. Children in Mali are sent to work in mines as young as six years old ("A Poisonous Mix"). An estimated 20,000 to 40,000 work in through artisanal gold mining ("A Poisonous Mix"). The highest percentages of women artisanal gold miners are found in African ranging from 40-50 percent (Hinton, Jennifer. Et al). Working in mines puts children at risk physical injury through the dangerous conditions they work in. Children are exposed to toxic chemicals, such as Mercury, that can cause health complications and led to death. This form of child labor excludes children, especially girls, to attain their education and gain skills for other jobs. Families in poverty want to use their young girls as a form of income, whether through working in mines or selling them as wives.

Girls are taken out of school to marry as brides in Mali. The minimum age for which a girl can marry was lowered to 16 years old, but a girl can marry with her parents' permission at the age of 15 (Her Choice Alliance). Although the government has made unconsented child marriages punishable by law, it is a practice that still occurs frequently in Mali. The highest rates of child marriages are in the regions Kayes (87 percent) and Kidal (84 percent) (Her Choice Alliance). When girls become brides at a young age, not only are they denied a childhood but become mothers through early pregnancies. Becoming pregnant at a young age can lead to health complications for both the mother and child, and has led to high maternal and infant mortality rates. In child marriages, girls are more likely to experience domestic violence. From the years 2006-2011, only 37.9 percent of children in child marriages have had secondary education (Her Choice Alliance). Child marriage is one of many cultural practices that exist in Mali that limit girl's education.

Another cultural practice that contributes to girl's access to education is female genital mutilation. This practice is directly linked to child marriage, as a form to secure control a girl's sexual behavior (Her Choice Alliance). Female genital mutilation is exacerbated through gender inequalities and social gender norms in which a girl has choice to resist the practice and its purpose. Gender bias led families to most likely invest in a male's education, rather than females. Men are seen as the future income earners, while women are tasked with domestic

responsibilities (Her Choice Alliance). Menstruation is also a barrier for girls in attending school due to social taboos, a lack of access to restrooms and feminine products. It is difficult to secure the safety of girls attending school where conflict occurs, and puts them at risk (Her Choice Alliance). Inside the classroom, girls also experience sexual abuse from teachers.

## **Best Practices**

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is combating on the ground in Mali and working towards improving girl's education, and promote external youth employment. USAID has been successful in working with the Malian government to ensure long-term investments ("Mali Education"). As a result of their efforts, they have trained female and male teachers from 2,500 schools, support 600 parent-teacher associations and nine local organizations, and reached out to 3,993 youth to attend school ("Mali Education").

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNCIEF) is involved in resolving the issue of girl's education in Mali through running a program in the Segou region that provides a safe environment for girls (Her Choice Alliance). Girls are given access to gender-sensitive learning environments and sanitary facilities. This program aims to eliminate gender basis in classrooms, and resolve issues of safety and menstruation complications in school. UNICEF encourages parents to take part of their girl's education through creating education committees, mother's associations. UNICEF also provides literacy classes for adults (Her Choice Alliance).

Plan International launched a campaign called "Because I'm a Girl," that aims to keep girls in school. This campaign supports a Malian community group called "Fight for Girls." The community groups is located in the city of Bamako, and they meet regularly. The group created a protection and participation program for girls to support them from primary school through university. The group also encourages mothers to take children to early-learning centers in order to promote education from a young age.

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