



World Vision

IMAGINE Project

Summary of the research report

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Institut des Sciences Humaines

Supporting Teachers' Professional Development in Contexts of Conflict: Understanding Barriers and Opportunities

1



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The photographs used in this report represent the **IMAGINE** project but are not specific to the events and locations described within this document.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
01 Context	4
02 Methodology	5
2.1 Literature review and regional and national consultations	5
2.2 Qualitative surveys	6
2.3 Quantitative Surveys	8
03 Findings	9
3.1 Current situation/context	9
3.2 Overview of issues affecting current teachers' professional development programs	10
3.2.1 Current issues affecting TPD programs	10
3.2.2 TPD programs in operation: between equality and inequality of opportunities	11
3.3 Catalysts: identifying specific opportunities to improve TPD	12
3.4 Barriers: identification of specific bottlenecks that currently exist in TPD	13
3.4.1 Gender at the heart of the Ministry of National Education's support system for TPD program implementation	14
3.4.2 Specific barriers and bottlenecks in TPD	15
Conclusion and recommendations	17

Acronyms used in this report

AE	Teaching Academy
CAP	Teaching Facilitation Centre
ISH	Institut des Sciences Humaines
MEN	Ministry of National Education
TLC	Teachers' Learning Community (written CA in section 3.2.1)
TPD	Teachers' professional development

A photograph of three people standing in front of wooden bleachers with blue metal railings. On the left is a man wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and a red headband. In the center is a man wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt. On the right is a woman wearing a yellow vest over a patterned shirt. They are all smiling at the camera. The background shows more bleachers and some trees.

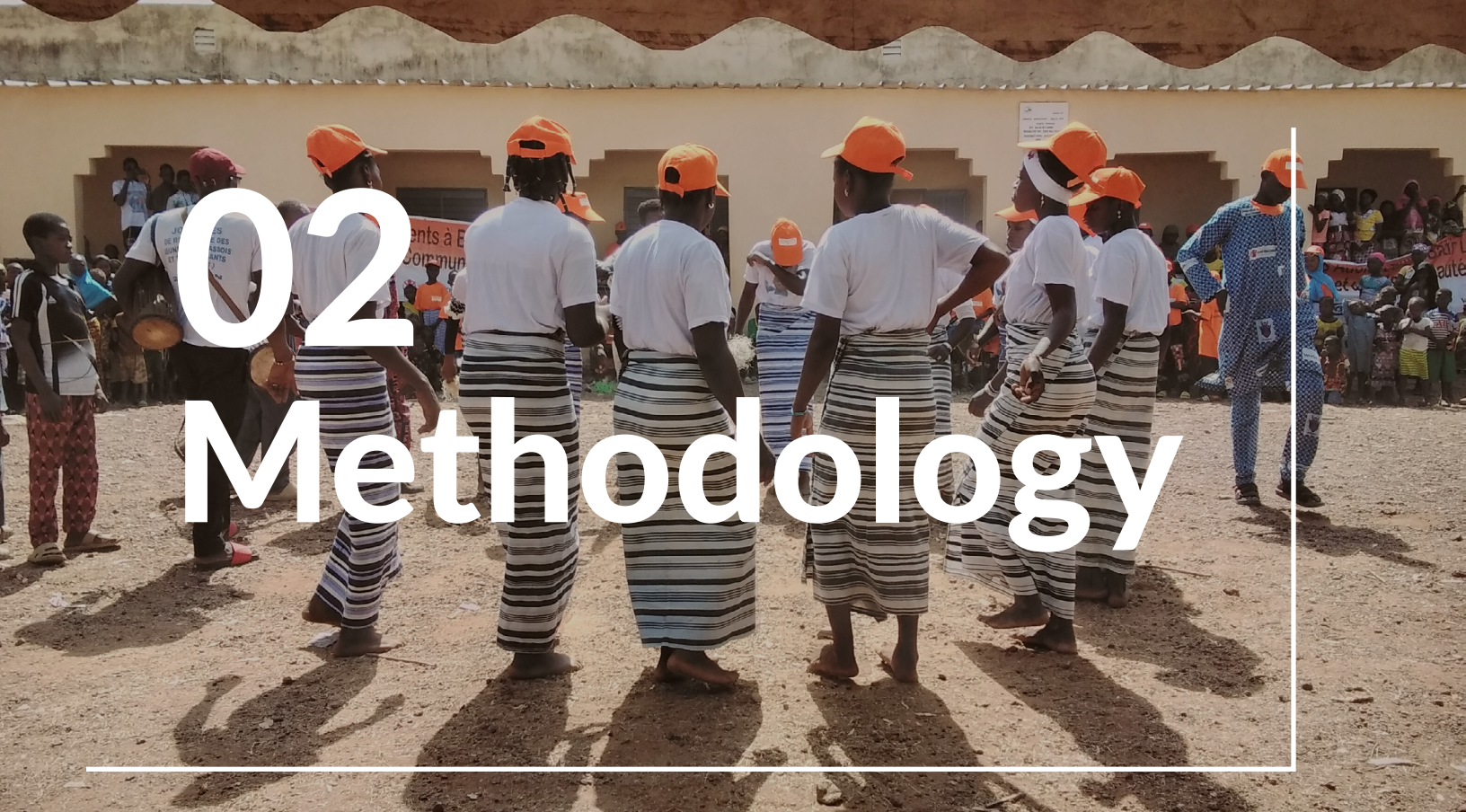
01 Context

Teachers' professional development (TPD) and inclusive education are central to the concerns of the State of Mali, which has been entangled, for more than a decade, in a security crisis that continues to expose the limits of conventional practice in continuous teacher training, teaching, assessment of learning and also to accelerate the deterioration of the quality of teaching and learning.

This traumatic and paralyzing crisis regularly forces some of the most vulnerable population groups (women, adolescent girls, people with disabilities) into precarious circumstances, and compromises the very principle of inclusive education and the ideal of schooling for all. These effects have not gone unnoticed by the partners of the State including the Consortium consisting of Plan Canada, Save the Children Canada and World Vision Canada.

This study intervenes in the context of a crisis that the State and educational bodies are unable to cope with. It has been undertaken with a view to analysing the current capacities of the Ministry of National Education to offer inclusive, flexible, conflict- and gender-sensitive education.

It aims to identify helps and hindrances to the matter of aligning the teachers' professional development and learning programs with the context of the security crisis in the national education system. In other words, it is a question of understanding the strategies and means implemented by the Department of Education and its divisions to strengthen the competence of teachers so that they can provide quality education that remains adaptable to the context of crisis in the areas of Mali afflicted by conflict.



02 Methodology

This research into teachers' professional development as part of the IMAGINE Project combined quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to triangulate the information and take better advantage of the results obtained in the field.

2.1

Literature review and regional and national consultations

In general terms, the literature review focused on organizational literature, relevant secondary data and statistics. More specifically, it drew on the databases of the National Directorate of Normal Education (DNEN), the National Directorate of Pedagogy (DNP), and the IMAGINE Project regarding the initial and continuous training of teaching staff, the issue of how to strengthen teachers in the context of a health and security crisis, as well as the gender perspective. Taking advantage of scientific university publications was an important stage of this literature review.

Regional and national consultations were held to afford all stakeholders a better understanding of the research plan. The regional consultations were held in Ségou and Mopti in May 2023. The national consultation followed in Bamako later the same month. The workshops involved State actors, education service providers and other interested parties such as the State Technical Services, community organizations with a stake in education such as School Management Committees (SMC), teachers' unions, etc. The discussions led to a better understanding of the challenges of the research

to be undertaken in relation to the issue of teachers' professional development. The participants did not see the need to change the proposed title. Consultation in all locations agreed on 'Supporting teachers' professional development in the context of conflict: Understanding barriers and opportunities'. However, changes were made to the formulation of some research objectives.



Qualitative surveys

The qualitative surveys consisted of semi-structured interviews primarily with key informants: Ministry of National Education (MEN) executives, directors from the central services, the Teaching Academies (AEs) and the Teaching Facilitation Centers (CAPs), as well as educators, municipal councillors, school management committee (SMC) representatives, etc. These interviews shed light on the complexity of the TPD question in relation to conflict and gender. Specific interview guides were drafted for each category of contributor.

A total of 60 interviews were carried out on this basis, including 50 individual interviews and 10 focus groups. We started from the premise of 25 individual interviews and five focus groups per region. The draw was made according to a carefully considered sampling that accounted for all of the target demographics. This sampling featured 18 women (seven school administrators, nine teachers, one SMC member, one NGO facilitator). The proportion of women surveyed was actually around 30 per cent. The goal of having as many women as men in the sampling was not achieved because of the sheer numerical scarcity of women in the administrative and technical bodies in education. Women are also absent in some remote and/or isolated schools.

The further one travels from the big cities, the fewer female teachers and the more male teachers one finds. Female teachers tend to be better represented in large cities and less so in small ones. In 2018, in the Mopti region, there were 54 female teachers and 57 male teachers in Bandiagara, a gap which widens in Bankass where there is a staff of five female teachers compared with 37 male teachers. Meanwhile in the city of Mopti the trend is reversed with 342 female teachers registered in contrast with 286 male teachers. The situation is the same in the Ségou region where the localities of Barouéli and Macina have 26 and 54 female teachers respectively against 48 and 88 male teachers, while in Ségou there are 441 female teachers and 370 male teachers (MEN-CPS, 2017-2018).

The district and municipal survey locations were chosen in conjunction with the IMAGINE Project staff, with input from local actors (AE and CAP managers). All interviews and focus groups were systematically recorded. Informal group chats were conducted with groups of teenage students. Girls were intentionally engaged in each focus group.

Table 1: General distribution of respondents by location and target demographic

Districts	Number of surveys by stakeholder categories							
	AE	CAP	Teachers and School Principals	SMC	Unions and contact persons	Student focus groups	NGO	Municipal Council
Macina-Tenenkou	1	2	21	1	1	1	1	1
Ségou-Baraouéli	2	2	20	1	0	1	1	1
San-Tominian	1	2	16	1	1	2	1	1
Bankass-Koro	1	1	17	1	1	1	0	1
Mopti-Douentza	2	2	27	1	0	2	1	1
Bandiagara-Djenné	2	2	15	1	1	1	1	1
Total	9	11	116	6	4	8	5	6

Source: Institut des Sciences Humaines (ISH) survey 2023

This sampling covers all the surveys (quantitative and qualitative). It is distributed among the categories of contributors, including AE and CAP officials, municipal councillors, teachers and location personnel. For the sake of efficiency, we have grouped the districts on the basis of proximity and accessibility.



2.3

Quantitative Surveys

The quantitative surveys were aimed at teachers, whether they had benefited or not from a TPD program in various locations (main town in the district or municipality of the survey). The quantitative survey's focus on teachers is because TPD is exclusively for them. The questionnaire also contained qualitative questions. Two categories of teachers were surveyed: those who have received teachers' professional development training and those who have not. Of the 10 teachers per district, we chose seven teachers from the first category consisting of teachers with TPD experience and three from the second category.

Quantitative data was collected on the researchers' tablets or Smartphones, via questionnaires which were configured as an XLSForm file and uploaded on the KoBoToolbox platform.

The survey reached 105 female and male teachers from 12 districts. However, the male respondents (77 people, or 73 per cent) outnumbered the females (28 people, or 27 per cent). This situation reflects the composition of teaching staff on the ground.

8 IMAGINE Project: Summary of the research report



03 Findings



3.1

Current situation/context

There are numerous institutional actors at work in the education sector. Sometimes, overlaps of activities and conflicts of competence occur between them. However, the main factor disrupting the provision of quality education is insecurity. The repercussions of this are instability and teaching staff deserting their posts. When regular schools cannot function, non-formal schools step in to support educational continuity. However, many voices insist that they are unable to meet the demand. Most parties argue that they do not provide quality education in conformity with universal teaching standards. A senior male official from San gives us further details: “These schools are generally based on the memorization of holy texts. And, on an educational level, religious values are prioritized over secular values. This kind of teaching is purely dogmatic.”

Actors advocate integration between formal and non-formal education, and it transpires from almost all discussions that the Ministry shares and supports this view. The majority of study participants are in favour of a framework for collaboration between the Qu’ranic schools and CAPs or AEs. Even though Qu’ranic schools are the only sort tolerated in the occupied areas, their struggle to guarantee coverage of quality education means that most respondents are convinced of the imperative of greater integration between formal and non-formal providers as a way to offer some kind of alternative.

3.2

Overview of issues affecting current teachers' professional development programs

The intermittence of classes is linked to several factors, including growing insecurity, the displacement of teachers and population groups, COVID-19, strikes, teacher absenteeism, classroom overcrowding, the domestic responsibilities of children especially girls, child marriages, premature pregnancies, learners falling behind, excessive punishment, harassment and gender-based violence. The negative impacts of armed conflicts on TPD are instances of attacks and traumatic situations. Continuous Teacher Training (CTT) and Teachers' Learning Communities (CA) operate sporadically.

3.2.1

Current issues affecting TPD programs

Factors disrupting the provision of quality education in the regions of Ségou and Mopti are resulting in instability, school dropout and shutdowns. Students are deprived of learning time and fall behind in knowledge acquisition. Disruptions drive up the attrition rate among teachers, hamper the students' educational and social development and cause many adolescents to drop out of school and turn instead to begging, delinquency or even recruitment into terrorist groups. Insecurity hinders annual training plans.

Continuous training is only practiced teacher-to-teacher in localities unaffected by armed conflict, around themes such as school and classroom management in times of crisis and disaster. Respondents are unanimous in finding that the Teachers' Learning Community takes account of gender and conflict. Furthermore, the consultations revealed that some local elected officials have no knowledge of the Teachers' Learning Communities, while others are under the impression that they belong to the State, AE or CAP. The interviews also showed that the TLC is experiencing a loss of momentum.

We have laid bare many of the consequences of this turmoil for the quality of education. The insecurity that takes hold in the aftermath of armed conflicts rules out any quality training. Armed conflict has a negative effect on teacher capacity building. "Armed conflicts create instability and force teachers to flee, so it's difficult to strengthen their capacity in conflict zones," said a female DNEN trainer.

3.2.2

TPD programs in operation: between equality and inequality of opportunities

The findings show that 94 per cent of respondents say that men and women have the same opportunities to participate in continuous teacher training sessions. This high rate shows that there is no gender discrimination in training in the various AEs and CAPs.

However, some discussions alleged that arbitrary criteria were being used to select training session participants, while others maintained that women are under-represented in training sessions because they are unavailable or too rare on the staff. The fact that there are schools without female teachers is understandable insofar as women remain poorly represented in the education sector in Mali, with a rate of 32 per cent in basic education (MEN, CPS, 2019) (i.e. less than a third of the teaching staff).

Otherwise, the initiatives are considered effective and even very effective according to one participant who gave two instances of when NGO support had made all the difference. This effectiveness is measured by respondents in terms of the observable changes in education actors as a result of the initiatives. One senior male school official puts it this way: "We know these strategies are working because we are seeing a change in behaviour from both teachers and learners in attitudes towards gender." Reflecting on the implications of this, a senior male official from San notes that: "These strategies are effective insofar as they contribute to protection, retention in the classroom, combatting child marriage of girls and combatting violence against girls in school."

Finally, regarding the positive effects on pedagogical practices, teachers acknowledge that TPD programs make it possible, among other things, to: correct the gaps in pedagogy, facilitate free expression among learners, introduce new teaching methods and build inclusiveness into teaching.

The following passage presents the strategies implemented by the AEs and CAPs to take care of the capacity building of teachers in times of security crisis. Depending on the circumstances, strategies vary between the redeployment of some teachers to calmer areas, training in radio-based tuition, the pedagogical use of tablets and the implementation of pilot home learning programs supported by volunteers recruited from the community.

Regarding the training of teachers in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), one senior male official from Bandiagara remarks: "Two thirds of us have been trained in the use of technology in education." In the Mopti CAP some 180 teachers have already been trained. In the absence of a state program of initial and continuous training for all teaching staff to integrate ICT into teaching practices, partners often try to fill this gap in their own areas of operation by providing training for some categories of teachers on the use of certain types of ICT. This seems to be the gist of this statement from a participant in Ségou: "Not all teachers are trained - those who take the second year and first year classes are trained in the use of radio in classrooms, with the support of a partner. As for the other teachers, they have not all had this training."

Training in the use of ICT and radio-based tuition is perceived as an alternative form of training and teaching that the CAPs have initiated in order to adapt to the security crisis situation. It's an alternative that leaves some skeptical, however, given the power supply difficulties and the attention span of some learners. Also, the use of ICTs by female teachers in strengthening their pedagogical practice attracts a range of views from respondents. Some, like this male respondent, are pessimistic on the subject: "To my knowledge, no female teacher uses ICT as part of continuous training. During the training, we hear them say that they have this or that difficulty in class. But on the WhatsApp groups that we create as a discussion forum for educational experiences, they never let slip any professional issues. Of the three WhatsApp groups I created, not one female teacher has challenged me on a difficulty related to her teaching practice." The use of ICT for teachers' professional development has still not been fully consolidated.

The relocation of AEs and CAPs, the movement of students from insecure areas to calmer ones, home schools and the redeployment of teachers to less crisis-ridden areas were also cited as educational alternatives which would facilitate continuous teacher training. How effective this is may prove difficult to judge, as no evaluation has taken place yet.

3.4

Barriers: identification of specific bottlenecks that currently exist in TPD

Field research has identified diverse challenges that undermine the efforts of the Ministry of Education and its partners in the teachers' professional development in the context of conflict in the Ségou and Mopti regions. Hence the main barriers mentioned by the respondents are anxiety caused by insecurity, remoteness of schools, socio-cultural representations of gender, weak state resources and competition for jurisdiction between central education services. This section presents and analyzes these different bottlenecks hindering the effective implementation of TPD.



3.4.1

Gender at the heart of the Ministry of National Education's support system for TPD program implementation

The Ministry of National Education has undertaken several gender-sensitive initiatives at school, ranging from the creation of advocacy bodies to the design of modules with a gender focus. Regarding these bodies, we note the creation of a position of Technical Advisor at the Ministry, a Gender Division at the National Directorate of Basic Education (DNEF), a post of Gender Officer at the Teaching Academy (AE) and a post of Gender Advisor at the Educational Facilitation Center (CAP). As regards pedagogy, there is the training and monitoring of teachers on the gender perspective, incentives for girls to study, as well as the creation of modules relating to the emergency management of classes with displaced children. Other initiatives include the establishment of the children's government, mentoring and tutoring, the ambassador and the girls' club.

The findings show that impressions vary as to the link between initial and continuous teacher training and gender. Measures for implementing the gender perspective are dependent on initial and continuous teacher training, but these do not always achieve the transfer of expertise from gender officers to teachers in the view of some respondents.

Teaching Academies and CAPs benefit from the input of numerous NGOs on location for teacher training on gender and in the context of conflict. For example, many are playing their part in Ségou, as we hear in this excerpt: "There are several partners involved in the schooling of girls, who have worked extensively in the field of teacher training on the gender perspective. Among these partners is the SCOFI-COATER project, 'DEFI for girls' schooling and IMAGINE. Then there is also the Schooling for Girls Support Program (PASCOFI) with AMESS and AGIR who operate here in the Ségou region, but their areas of intervention differ from one partner to another. Some run projects at the basic 1 level, others at the basic 2 level."

Regarding the balance in the allocation of classes to teachers in basic 1, a male official from the San Teaching Academy explains: "The Academy does not encounter any major difficulties in incorporating the gender perspective. We have gender modules that we share with all teachers. We train them so they can integrate it into their practice. Because they are the ones who are in direct contact with the children and therefore it is necessary to train from the ground up. So we must make them understand that there is equality between girls and boys, and they all have the same rights." According to another AE official from Bandiagara: "There is no gender-based discrimination in the allocation of basic 1 classes to teachers."

3.4.2

Specific barriers and bottlenecks in TPD

The barriers to mainstreaming the gender perspective in continuous teacher training are: communities struggling to grasp the gender perspective, insecurity, insufficient state resources and the poor self-image of female teachers themselves. According to the findings of the questionnaire survey, insecurity (37 per cent) is the main obstacle to the implementation of TPD. It is followed by financial difficulties (21 per cent) and lack of political will. It emerges that the status of women can also hinder the participation of female teachers in training, and they contribute to maintaining inequalities between themselves and their male counterparts. NGO members of a youth group in Douentza note that female teachers refuse to travel to training locations, or let their husbands forbid it. The words of a senior male official from Djenné are blunt on the issue: "Women underestimate themselves, they shy away from positions of responsibility."

However, the idea of the poor self-image of female teachers is not shared by all female participants, some of whom point the finger at discrimination against female teachers instead, as sociocultural burdens tend to make them less available than their male colleagues. Indeed, a senior female official from Mopti says: "Male and female teachers all practice the same profession. We can work in a school just like men, which is why women lead the same classes as men. I think that if we choose to undergo teacher training, one should assume that we (as female teachers) will take the same skills into the classroom as the male teachers. For me, it's not about women underestimating themselves, even if they do have social constraints. Also, is it not the case that women hold positions of responsibility in the field of education such as Head of Division (SCOFI), AE or CAP Training Officer or School Principal?"

The barriers to the achievement of gender- and conflict-sensitive teachers' professional development include insecurity and anxiety arising from the conflict, remoteness, financial and logistical problems, favoritism in the selection of training session participants, school shut-downs and conflicts of competence between central bodies. But the question of remoteness being a barrier to continuous teacher training does not wash with those who point out that the State's strategy has been to widely implement the Teachers' Learning Communities for CTT opportunities.

Certain conflicts of competence and tussles for jurisdiction persist between education sector bodies. Although continuous training is devolved exclusively, at least in theory, to the DNEN, it so happens that the DNP and the DNEF also have a stake in teacher training, thus creating a situation of overlap or power struggle. The existence of this conflict is illustrated by this AE official from Ségou: "In Ségou, the DNP is active in training reproductive health teachers as part of the ATWA project, whereas the DNEF trains teachers in SSAP." Finally, we note that the implementation of TPD programs through gender-inclusive pedagogy (GIP) suffers from many shortcomings. This pedagogy proved to be virtually unknown during the surveys.

16 IMAGINE Project: Summary of the research report





Conclusion and recommendations

This research into TPD gave expression to the diverse opinions of state education actors, international partners, local elected officials and population groups on the theme of the opportunities and barriers affecting the implementation of support systems for teachers' professional development in a security crisis context. We found that there are several factors that disrupt teaching in school, particularly safety and lack of funding. This situation creates setbacks for learning time and gaining knowledge, and leads to school dropout. The disruptions to whole academic years are the most acute in the districts of Bankass, Koro and Macina.

Insecurity and anxiety related to the conflict, the remoteness of schools, financial and logistical problems, the paralysis of schools, conflicts of competence and jurisdiction between central bodies are all classified as barriers to the gender- and conflict-sensitive teachers' professional development program.

We also noted that the Ministry of National Education and its partners have undertaken several initiatives addressing institutions, pedagogy and advocacy for the sake of gender and building the capacity of actors in the field. Sixty-seven per cent of teachers surveyed believe that TPD programs promote gender sensitivity, whereas 37 per cent and 33 per cent respectively think that they improve speed and flexibility in accomplishing tasks.

Training in the use of ICT, radio-based tuition, the relocation of AEs and CAPs, the displacement of students from troubled areas to calmer ones, home schools and the redeployment of teachers to areas less afflicted by the security crisis, offer educational alternatives that facilitate continuous teacher training.

All these strategies are considered to be effective to a large extent because they contribute to protection, retention in the classroom, combatting child marriage of girls and combatting violence against girls in school. Whilst often tolerated, non-formal schools are unable to ensure coverage of quality educational provision, so most participants saw a need for greater integration between formal and non-formal education as an educational alternative.

The efforts made by the State and its partners have certainly borne fruit, but the security situation and the technical, material and financial conditions for the provision of the education service remain major concerns.

The evaluation identified various recommendations, including:

- Complete an updated mapping of all state and NGO interventions to identify areas of conflict and risk and their needs in order to improve educational provision. The MEN and NGOs should carry out this work in partnership.
- Carry out large-scale training on gender-inclusive pedagogy (GIP). The initial surveys revealed a very low awareness of this pedagogy. Apparently a guide was written that passed technical and political validation, but it has hardly been put into effect.
- Raise awareness and train teachers in the appropriate use of social networks for educational purposes. Social networks are created but end up being used for other activities.
- Reinvigorate the TLCs and involve local elected officials in running them.
- Set up a monitoring and evaluation system for distance learning.
- Initiate research that tackles other themes such as the management of children of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).
- Encourage greater integration between formal and non-formal education for the sake of greater inclusivity in areas under occupation.