USAID/OTI PDQIII TASK ORDER #10, Activity #3

MALI TRANSITION INITATIVE: FINAL EVALUATION

March 8, 2016

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The Evaluation Team consisted of James Khalil and Oren Ipp, as well as researchers Berte Sekou and Mohamed Alamziali Toure, on behalf of Social Impact, Inc. The Team was ably supported by Meghan Neumann and Ariel Frankel from Washington, D.C.

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ACRONYMS

APEM	*Association pour la Promotion de l'Evaluation au Mali*
CEDREF	*Centre d'Etudes, de Documentation, de Recherche et de Formation Avenue du Mali*
CEPPS	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening
CFW	Cash for work
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movement
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DDGS	Direct Delivery of Goods and Services
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DGE	*Delegation Generale aux Elections*
FGD	Focus group discussion
GATIA	*Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés*
GNI	Global News Intelligence
GOTV	Get out the vote
IRI	International Republican Institute
KII	Key informant interview
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNR	Ministry of National Reconciliation
MRO	Mali Regional Option
MTI	Mali Transition Initiative
NDI	National Democratic Institute
ORTM	*Office de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision du Mali*,
PAT-Mali	*Program d'Appui à la Transition au Mali*
PPR	Program Performance Report
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOW	Scope of Work
SRS	Strategic Review Session
TDY	Temporary Duty Assignment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

In accordance with the SOW, this evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent did the Mali Transition Initiative's (MTI's) evolving strategy address and reflect the most critical issues related to the success of Mali's democratic transition?
2. To what extent did MTI contribute to the achievement of its stated goals and objectives?
3. What lessons can be gleaned from MTI that are applicable to other efforts to support peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion and to counter violent extremism in Mali and in the region?

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Following an exploratory assessment in November 2012, OTI launched the Mali Regional Option (MRO) in January 2013, a six-month optional contracting extension of the OTI Cote d'Ivoire task order. The Mali Transition Initiative (MTI) was launched on 1 July 2013 as a continuation of the MRO. Initially focused on elections, MTI began to program in support of the nascent Ouagadougou Agreement in the latter part of 2013. At roughly the same time, MTI also expanded its programming in the North, focusing increasingly on issues of local reconciliation and social, economic and cultural cohesion. In 2014 MTI incorporated *Countering Violent Extremism* (CVE) programming, alongside its continued support to the peace process and what had become known as the '*Normalcy*' stream of work in the North.

EVALUATION DESIGN, METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This evaluation was conducted through standard qualitative social scientific research techniques, including a literature review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations in Bamako, Timbuktu and Gao. The Evaluation Team faced security-based constraints, and in particular it was not possible to travel outside of Timbuktu or Gao towns. While interviewees and focus group participants were brought to the MTI offices for the purposes of the research, this compromised the Team's ability to interact with these individuals in context. An additional constraint occurred as a result of the Team only being contracted to conduct one field trip lasting only three weeks – other evaluations have involved two visits. These security and time-based issues were partially overcome through phone interviews.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A central finding of this evaluation was that MTI delivered a highly strategic program that consistently demonstrated its relevance. While the distinct clusters were all strategic in their own right, they also provided a concrete package to promote progress towards a stable society (in particular, the *Elections*, *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* clusters), as well as to prevent backsliding towards instability and violence (the *Normalcy* and *CVE* clusters). **The program should also be commended specifically for its flexibility and responsiveness (a theme that forms *Lesson 1* of this evaluation, see *Section 6*).** This was apparent, firstly, in terms of the extent to which programming closely responded to events in Mali, e.g. developing what would later become the *Peace Process* and *Normalcy* lines soon after the 2013 elections. MTI also deliberately adopted a range of programming streams, with this breadth ensuring that they avoided 'placing all of their eggs in one basket.' Thus, had the peace negotiations entirely collapsed,

for instance, MTI would not have been without options in the immediate term. **MTI was also flexible in terms of its partnerships (see *Lesson II*), and while the program successfully nurtured a range of relationships with state and non-state actors, it was never overly reliant on specific groups for implementation.**

There is also overwhelming evidence that MTI contributed substantially to many intended low and intermediate-level effects. In the elections stream there is little doubt that MTI improved voters' access to information. For programming related directly to peace efforts, MTI certainly increased the public demand for a formal end to hostilities, and enhanced access to information on the process, in particular through translating the accords in multiple languages. In almost every interview undertaken by the Evaluation Team relating to the *Normalcy* line – whether with grantees, beneficiaries or community leaders – increases in social cohesion were identified as an important outcome. The research also revealed a widely-held perception that MTI enhanced social cohesion in the CVE stream, for instance, as reported by the Mayor of Gounzoureye, and the Kaji Village Chief, among others.

However, a key limitation was MTI's inability to demonstrate contributions to upper-level effects. These would have included, for instance, influencing key leaders of both sides to sign and remain faithful to the accords, and a reduction in violent extremism. **It is necessary to clarify that the Evaluation Team specifically does *not* conclude there was a failure to achieve such results, but rather that the M&E system offered little basis on which conclusions could be drawn (by anyone).** While the M&E-related issues are elaborated on in the lessons in *Section 6*, in summary they include:

- **Poor articulation of intended effects (*Lesson III*)**
- **Inadequate evidence collection (*Lesson IV*)**
- **A misuse of clusters (*Lesson V*)**

Providing comments to an earlier draft of this report, senior MTI staff suggested that the focus on some of these issues strayed outside of the SOW for this evaluation, with the latter in particular relating more to program design. **However, the reality is that M&E and design are heavily intertwined, and the Evaluation Team was unable to fully evaluate program performance against upper-level effects (i.e. answering the second SOW question) in part as the clusters were sub-optimally designed (as elaborated on in *Lesson V*).** While certainly a challenge, being able to demonstrate programmatic effects at all levels is key both for future learning, and more immediately as an evidence-base from which to adapt to programs as they evolve. Simply put, had MTI collected data to show that their *Peace Process* or *Normalcy* lines of programming, for instance, were falling short of delivering the desired effects, they would have been better positioned to make suitable adjustments. While OTI's rapid and responsive approach undeniably complicates the processes, this form of operating it is certainly not incompatible with rigorous M&E.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the above in mind, the Evaluation Team offers the following recommendations:

1. **Country teams in post-conflict environments should design programs that contribute simultaneously to promoting peace *and* preventing instability.** As noted, while the MTI clusters were all strategic in their own right, they also provided a concrete package to contribute to both aims – the *Elections*, *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* clusters focused on promoting progress towards a stable society, whereas *Normalcy* and *CVE* sought to prevent backsliding to instability and violence. This breadth was a substantial asset as it allowed the team to operate strategically,

for instance, via efforts to increase information about the electoral and peace processes, and to enhance demand for a formal settlement to the conflict. While at the same time it also enabled them to contribute to 'putting out fires' as necessary, such was the case in Menaka (as is discussed in the body of the report). In practical terms, this recommendation requires that country teams are capable of combining distinct modes of operating that allow them to deliver long-term, iterative program lines, while also being able to respond in a nimble and timely manner.

2. **Country teams should diversify their reliance on specific sets of partners.** MTI relied on a diverse range of implementing partners, and while the program successfully nurtured a range of relationships with state and non-state actors, it was never overly reliant on specific groups for implementation. As will invariably be the case, not all of the MTI partnerships proved to be equally fruitful, but the potential negative consequences were substantially reduced as a result of MTI's deliberate efforts at diversification.

3. **Country teams should ensure that they draw on adequate specialist and technical advice.** As a consequence of their breadth, OTI programs inevitably involve implementing in thematic areas that fall outside of the 'comfort zones' of the team members. While OTI does run a 'bullpen' to offer such technical support, MTI would likely have benefitted, for instance, from specialist advice relating to CVE and messaging campaigns as both of these themes formed substantial elements of the program. This is also applicable to technical expertise for quantitative surveys, particularly in light of the fact that MTI's sole survey (a social network analysis study) suffered major methodological issues.

4. **OTI should ensure that its country programs have adequate internal M&E capacity.** At a minimum, this should involve embedding an M&E TDY expert for at least three months during the start-up phase, and again at regular intervals as the program develops. Preferably, however, resources should also be available for the implementing partner to hire an experienced, full-time M&E manager – with an expat being selected if local candidates are unsuitable or inexperienced, as was the case with MTI. This individual would be tasked with designing data collection systems, training and mentoring staff, and broadly incorporating M&E into the culture of the program.

1. EVALUATION PURPOSE & QUESTIONS

EVALUATION PURPOSE

As indicated in the evaluation SOW, the purpose is as follows:

> *The purpose of this activity is to conduct an independent performance evaluation of MTI, from its launch in January 2013 to the present. The findings will evaluate the strategic approach, relevance, and impact that MTI had on the political transition in Mali and provide a product that concisely explains achievements and lessons learned. The final product will be shared with the Malian government, U.S. government agencies, and other interested groups. The evaluation should leverage the learning tools that MTI has developed throughout the life of the program, including regular reporting, cluster evaluations, media reports, social network analysis, and reports in OTI's activities database, and take into consideration key events in the political transition to determine MTI's focus, conceptualization, and objectives were as appropriate as possible.*

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following questions were provided in the SOW:

1. *To what extent did the MTI's evolving strategy address and reflect the most critical issues related to the success of Mali's democratic transition?*

   In answering this question, the evaluators should consider OTI's success in identifying anticipating, adapting to, and responding to relevant challenges in the political context in a timely fashion and the extent to which the program's geographic targeting was appropriate.

2. *To what extent did MTI contribute to the achievement of its stated goals and objectives?*

   In answering this question, the evaluators should consider the program's goal through the lens of its objectives and draw upon the findings of existing cluster evaluations. In addition, the evaluators should consider whether the program had a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change would happen, the extent to which the program was implemented in line with its goal, and whether resources (both funds and staff) were effectively allocated to maximize impact.

3. *What lessons can be gleaned from MTI that are applicable to other efforts to support peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion and to counter violent extremism in Mali and in the region?*

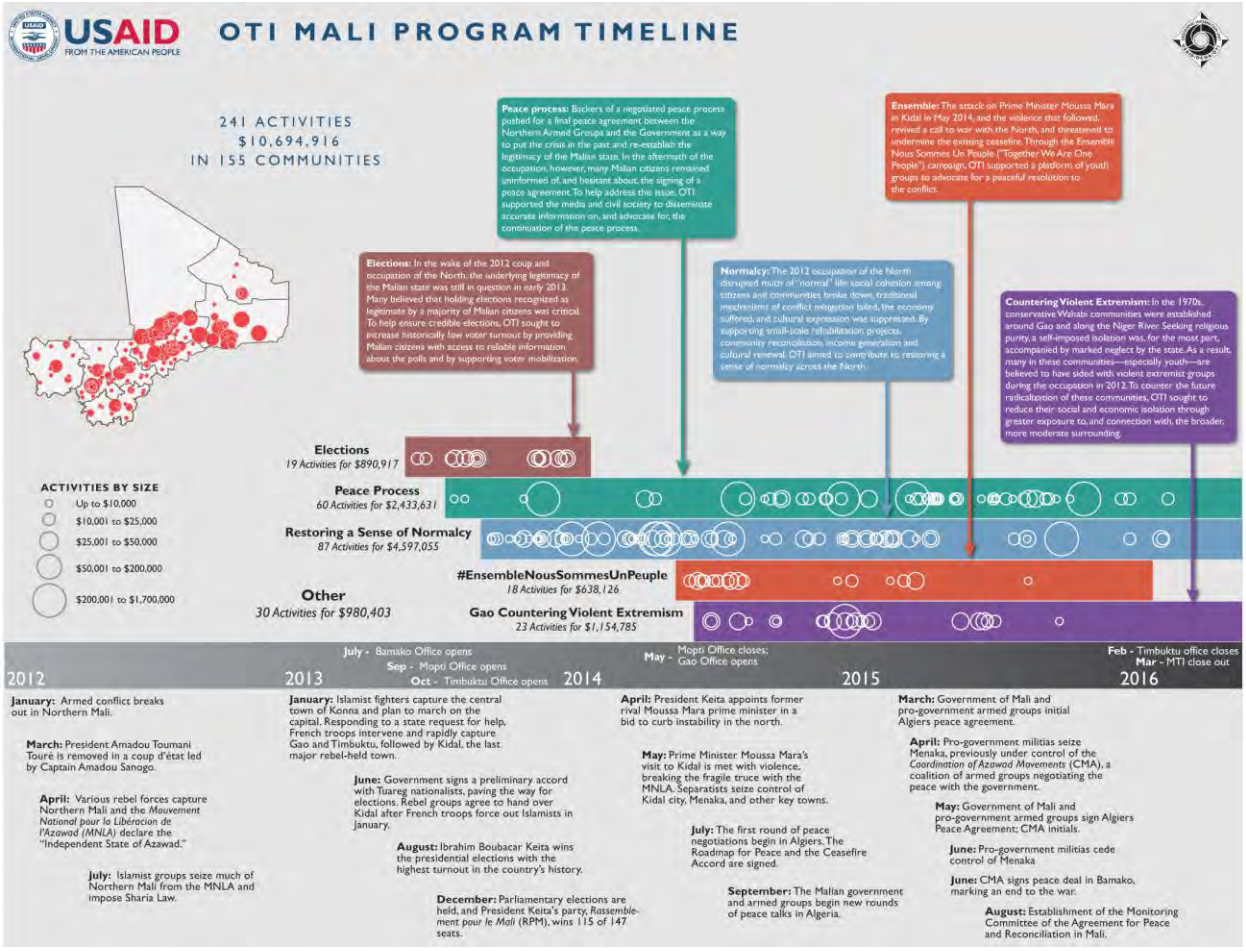
   In answering this question, the evaluators should consider whether the program effectively utilized technology to implement and monitor its activities.

A performance evaluation was conducted *in lieu* of an impact evaluation with control groups in accordance with ADS 203 and reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of the intervention and the political context within which it occurred.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The infographic below is a visual representation of the MTI program and the political context in which it was designed and implemented. The infographic – based on OTI's own model – provides an outline of the main issues MTI sought to address: key political events of the transition, programming according to relevant clusters, geographic dispersion of funds and activities, and the timeline against which MTI was implemented.

Figure 1: MTI Program Timeline



Following an exploratory assessment in November 2012, OTI launched the Mali Regional Option (MRO) in January 2013, a six-month optional contracting extension of the OTI Cote d'Ivoire task order. The two objectives of the MRO – to support broad-based inclusion and participation in the democratic process and to promote improved access to reliable information on the transition – allowed for general activities in the early days of the program. The Mali Transition Initiative (MTI or *Program d'Appui à la Transition au Mali (PAT-Mali)* in French) was launched on 1 July 2013 as a continuation of the MRO. The 2012 Foreign Operations Assistance Act prohibits any assistance to states of which the elected head has been deposed

by military coup until a democratically elected government has taken office.[1] As such, USAID was initially unable to support any type of programming other than elections or humanitarian assistance. It was not until presidential elections were held in July and August 2013 that MTI was able to expand programming and revise the strategy.

Table 1: The Evolution of MTI Objectives

	Objectives
Jan 2013 – Sept 2013	• To support broad-based inclusion and participation in the democratic process • To promote improved access to reliable information on the transition
Sept 2013 – Sept 2014	• To increase citizen confidence in and information about the democratic process and governance • To promote reconciliation and social cohesion aimed at addressing drivers of conflict
Sept 2014 – Mar 2016	• To increase the supply and demand for a peaceful resolution to the conflict • To restore a sense of normalcy in strategic areas in the North • To counter violent extremism through inclusion of marginalized communities

Able to program more broadly after the presidential polls, MTI expanded the program's objectives (see *Table 1*). While continuing to support parliamentary elections scheduled for late 2013, OTI began to program in support of the nascent Ouagadougou Agreement (signed on 20 June 2013). At roughly the same time, MTI also began to expand programming in the North, focusing increasingly on issues of local reconciliation and social, economic and cultural cohesion – a series of activities that would evolve into the 'restoring a sense of normalcy' cluster (subsequently referred to simply as *Normalcy*). To support this programming, in September 2013, MTI opened an office in Mopti town (approximately 600km northeast of Bamako), followed by an office in Timbuktu one month later.

Following a May 2014 Program Performance Review (PPR), a June Strategic Review Session (SRS) and a Temporary Duty Assignment (TDY) by an M&E consultant, MTI revised the strategy once more. The new three pronged strategy called for a continuation of the *Normalcy* stream of work, as well as programming in support of the peace process (which had progressed since the Ouagadougou Agreement, as outlined in *Figure 1*). The new strategy also introduced a more focused civil society component of the peace process work (that would evolve into the *Ensemble* cluster), and initiated the *Countering Violent Extremism* (CVE) stream of programming. In the lead up to the new strategy, and with a greater focus on the North, OTI closed its office in Mopti and opened an office in Gao in May 2014. As part of the new strategy, MTI also introduced five clusters into the program framework:

- *Elections* (a retroactive cluster, i.e. adapted after this stream had ceased)
- *Peace Process*
- *Normalcy*
- *Ensemble Nous Sommes Un Peuple*
- *CVE*

[1] Department of State, *Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act,* 2012. Available at https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/s1601/text, accessed 28 January 2016.

As a practical matter, the Senior Management Team (SMT) largely set aside the program objectives and focused its programming instead on clusters. Consequently, for the purposes of this final evaluation the Evaluation Team also utilized the cluster construct, rather than objectives, as the core unit of analysis for MTI's strategy and programming.

3. EVALUATION METHODS & LIMITATIONS

This evaluation was conducted through standard qualitative social scientific research techniques, including a literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and field observations in Bamako, Timbuktu and Gao. The literature review included an assessment of the OTI activities database, strategic review sessions (SRS), program performance reports (PPR), rolling assessments, management reviews, notes to file, and cluster evaluations, among other sources. Open source material included International Crisis Group reports, leading think tank publications, and online and print newspapers and journals, among others. The interviews began during a trip to Washington, D.C. in December 2015, during which time the Evaluation Team consulted with US-based USG and AECOM staff (see *Annex III*). The field research elements occurred in Bamako, Timbuktu and Gao over three weeks in January 2016.

Table 2: Summary of Field Research Techniques by Cluster

Cluster	In-Person Interviews with Grantees / Stakeholders / Consultants	Phone Interviews with Grantees / Stakeholders / Consultants	Focus Group Discussions with Beneficiaries	Observations
Elections	3	-	-	-
Peace Process	7	-	1	1
Ensemble	2	-	1	-
Normalcy	8	7	1	2
CVE	6	-	1	1
TOTAL	**26**	**7**	**4**	**4**

A total of 232 activities had received funding at the time of the evaluation. This large number of activities prevented the possibility of conducting KIIs/FGDs relating to all activities within the limited timeframe; thus it was necessary for the Evaluation Team to sample selectively. Drawing from the MTI database, the Team used the following criteria for the purposes of selecting KIIs (see *Annex III* for details):

- The number of grants selected within each cluster approximately reflected the size of the clusters both in terms of numbers and monetary value.
- Grantees who received multiple grants were preferably selected in order to enhance 'coverage.'
- Successful/unsuccessful grants were selected from each cluster, as determined by OTI/AECOM.
- Efforts were made to select grants covering all activity 'types' in each cluster, e.g. for *Peace Process* activities this included (a) translations/information distribution, (b) support to the Ministry of National Reconciliation, and (c) rallies and other 'demand-side' events.

Several grantees delivered activities in multiple clusters (e.g. Chamady Comedie, Youth Chamber of Mali, etc.), and to avoid double-counting these are listed as pertaining to only one cluster in *Table 2*. There was substantial variation in the number of activities discussed in the KIIs (i.e. as many of the grantees conducted

multiple grants), as well as the extent to which each of these were discussed. Thus, it is not possible to meaningfully quantify the number of grants assessed through KIIs in all of the clusters (in particular, *Ensemble* and *CVE* as indicated), although a general indication is provided in *Table 3*.[2]

Table 3: Interview 'Coverage' of Grants

Cluster	Comments
Elections	Of the nineteen grants in this cluster, ten were Direct Delivery of Goods and Services (DDGS). For the remainder, the Evaluation Team interviewed three of the four grantees, covering eight of nine grants.
Peace Process	The Team interviewed seven grantees responsible for activities in the *Peace Process* cluster, covering twenty-six of the sixty-one grants. In addition, a number of local leaders (mayors, council members, etc.) interviewed primarily about *Normalcy* grants also focused on *Peace Process* activities that had occurred in their respective locations.
Ensemble	The Team conducted one KII with the current Chairman of the *Ensemble* civil society body, and another with various members of the previous committee. While not all of the twenty-one *Ensemble* activities were discussed *per se*, the respondents focused on a wide range of grants and offered numerous examples as success stories, lessons learned, and so on.
Normalcy	The Team interviewed eleven of a potential sixty grantees responsible for activities in the *Normalcy* cluster, covering a total of twenty of the eighty-seven grants. In addition, the Team also spoke to seven local leaders (mayors, council members, etc.) about *Normalcy* activities.
CVE	The Evaluation Team conducted six KIIs with grantees and stakeholder on CVE activities in Gounzoureye. Given the geographically concentrated nature of this line of programming, most interviewees were well-informed about all CVE grants (excluding the three involving research), and all were discussed to varying degrees during these interviews.

As also indicated in *Table 2*, a limited number of FGDs were conducted with program beneficiaries as this method delivers additional insights as a result of interactions between participants (additional details are provided in *Annex III*). FGDs did not form a major component of the research on the basis of cost (a number of candidate FGDs would have required covering transport fees), and due to the limited time for organizing such events. General parameters for the selection of activities for FGDs included:

- The activities involved many beneficiaries.
- The activities were recent so that the participants are able to draw on 'fresh' memories.
- The activities had a major potential impact on beneficiaries, i.e. thus excluding media campaigns, t-shirt distributions, and so on.
- The activities occurred in the vicinity of Bamako, Timbuktu or Gao on logistical/cost grounds.

[2] *Table 3* is provided *in lieu* of a list of activity numbers forming the focus of KIIs on the grounds that the latter would be misleading (particularly for *Ensemble* and *CVE*) for the reasons given in the main text.

Most MTI activities were closed by the time of the evaluation, thus preventing the Team from conducting observations 'in action.' Nevertheless, the evaluators undertook field visits to the communication cell established by MTI in the Ministry of National Reconciliation, the Ahmed Baba Institute, the Timbuktu Peace Garden, and Independence Plaza in Gao.[3]

The Evaluation Team faced security-based constraints during the course of the research, and in particular it was not possible to travel outside of Timbuktu or Gao towns. While interviewees and focus group participants were brought to the MTI offices for the purposes of the research, this compromised the Team's ability to interact with these individuals in context. Insecurity also prevented the Team from interviewing the Mayor of Goundam as he elected not to travel to Timbuktu following a recent incident on the road – although he was consulted via a phone interview. An additional constraint occurred as a result of the Team only being contracted to conduct one field visit lasting three weeks. Aside from assisting with planning in general, an additional field trip (as has occurred with other OTI evaluations) would have provided sufficient time for the Team to have arranged for the Malian members to travel to remote locations in which MTI operated (e.g. Ansongo, Goundam and Menaka) for additional research, security conditions permitting. These security and time-based issues particularly affected research on the *Normalcy* cluster given its geographical breadth, and were partly overcome through phone interviews (see *Annex III*).

The Evaluation Team also had concerns about the reliability of certain informants, firstly, on the basis of so-called 'social desirability bias.' Social scientists widely recognize a tendency for some interviewees and focus groups participants to provide information that they sense researchers want to hear, rather than their genuinely-held perceptions. Perhaps more importantly in this case, some respondents appeared to offer unduly positive opinions about MTI on the grounds of a perception that this may trigger additional funding. Indeed, one interviewee explicitly asked the Evaluation Team to deliver a positive report on this basis. As the extent of this issue became increasingly apparent, the Team began mitigating against it by highlighting that MTI was ceasing to operate, and clarifying at the outset that the evaluation was in no way connected to future funding. Such issues are sufficiently common and may have also affected MTI's own research, although the Evaluation Team is unaware of evidence demonstrating that this actually was the case.

[3] These correspond to the following grants: Ministry of National Reconciliation (MTI112, MTI131); the Ahmed Baba Institute (MTI100, MTI104); Timbuktu Peace Garden (MTI081, MTI249); and Independence Plaza in Gao (MTI151).

4. PROGRAM STRATEGY

This section responds to the first evaluation question established in the SOW:

- *To what extent did the MTI's evolving strategy address and reflect the most critical issues related to the success of Mali's democratic transition?*

As such, matters relating to program performance and wider lessons learned are respectively reserved for *Sections 5* and *6*. Additional guidance on the first evaluation question was provided in the SOW as follows:

> *In answering this question, the evaluators should consider OTI's success in identifying, anticipating, adapting to, and responding to relevant challenges in the political context in a timely fashion and the extent to which the program's geographic targeting was appropriate.*

This section is comprised of four subsections that correspond to the MTI clusters, with *Peace* Process and *Ensemble* considered collectively for the reasons outlined in *Section 4.2*. **The overarching conclusion is that MTI delivered a highly strategic program that consistently demonstrated relevance and responsiveness.** While the distinct clusters were all strategic in their own right, they also provided a concrete package to promote progress towards a stable society (in particular, the *Elections*, *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* clusters), as well as to prevent backsliding towards instability and violence (the *Normalcy* and *CVE* clusters).

There is little question that the MTI program was closely aligned to U.S. foreign policy priorities. According to the U.S. State Department, 'U.S. assistance to Mali seeks to support the country's fragile peace and implementation of the June 20 [2013] peace accord,' and 'key U.S. interests in Mali include promoting a stable democracy and improved governance [and] promoting regional security by combating terrorists.'[4] MTI helped promote a stable democracy through its targeted assistance for the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2013, support for the peace process in Algiers, and efforts to build a strong and viable civil society in Mali. In an attempt to further regional security, MTI's CVE programming sought to increase the social, economic, and political inclusion of marginalized communities who are vulnerable to violent extremist messages. Both the Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission expressed strong support for MTI, and added that they wished that OTI's mission could have extended.[5]

4.1 ELECTIONS

Though legal restrictions following the 2012 coup limited the initial scope of programming available to MTI, **the program was nevertheless highly strategic in its support for the presidential and parliamentary elections.** It is noteworthy that at the time that MTI was launched (July 2013), dates for the elections had just been confirmed, the population was still deeply affected by the crisis and parts of the country were still held by rebel groups. As such, confidence in the national government was low, understanding of the peace talks in Ouagadougou was limited, and there remained great uncertainty about the future of the country.

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[4] U.S. State Department. '*U.S. Relations with Mali*,' available at http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm, accessed 19 January 2016.
[5] Stakeholder interviews, USG personnel, 13 and 14 January 2016.

Table 4: Elections Cluster Summary (as of February 2016)

No. Activities	19
Types of Activities	Voter education, Get-Out-The-Vote, Support for the *Generale aux Elections*
Amount Dispersed	$816,068
Locations	Nationwide

Broadly speaking, MTI supported three streams of programming for the presidential and parliamentary elections: (a) voter education, (b) Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV), and (c) support to the *Delegation Generale aux Elections* (DGE), Mali's election commission. The voter education activities included messaging and information awareness campaigns, debates, theater tours, and amplification of the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) partners' programming. MTI also introduced a free hotline that provided voters with information and answers about the election process. **This stream of programming was highly strategic in that it addressed a key deficit at the time: citizens had little information about, or understanding of the planning and preparations for the elections.**

GOTV efforts were strategic in that they addressed a critical problem of past elections in Mali: historically low voter turnout (as low as 22 percent for parliamentary elections in 1997 and 28 percent for presidential elections the same year).[6] MTI recognized the importance of high voter turnout as a means to help confer legitimacy on the new government; it was also an opportunity to help boost voters' sense of agency in the democratic process.[7] For the second round of parliamentary elections, MTI was even more strategic in that it targeted areas that were known to have experienced particularly low voter turnout.[8]

Support to the DGE was another highly strategic aspect of MTI efforts. Seven activities were designed to support the DGE in its efforts to raise voter turnout; for MTI this assistance was a strategic opportunity to also extend the reach and visibility of the government. In doing so, MTI hoped to restore confidence in the government and signal its return to the North, including to the rebel stronghold of Kidal.[9] MTI's strategic approach to elections support was summarized well in the *Evaluation Report of Activities by the MTI to Support the Electoral Process*, '[MTI] corresponded to needs and priorities expressed by the voters, the voting administration, partners [and] civil society.'[10]

MTI's strategic approach to elections programming included the decision in June 2014 *not* to focus on local elections after the parliamentary poll in December. Anticipating that regional

[6] International IDEA. '*Voter Turnout Data for Mali*,' available at http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=145, accessed 2 February 2016.
[7] Staff interview, Bamako, 15 January 2016.
[8] OTI Activity Database, *Technical Support to Find Voting Booths*, MTI065.
[9] Grantee interview, 16 January 2016.
[10] CEDREF-Sarl, *Evaluation Report of Activities by the MTI to Support the Electoral Process*, June 2014, 10.

and municipal elections would be postponed until 2015 or beyond, and recognizing that UNDP and CEPPS were already well positioned to provide assistance, MTI chose to de-emphasize its focus on this thematic area.[11] Aside from demonstrating its relevance through the *Elections* line of programming, MTI also showed its ability to be responsive. Specifically, nine activities were underway by election day, and another four were cleared in time for the runoff less than two weeks later. MTI was also ready for the two rounds of parliamentary elections in November and December of that year, with nine activities, including three for the unexpected second round of voting.[12]

4.2 PEACE PROCESS/ENSEMBLE

The holding of presidential elections in August 2013, and the subsequent return of an elected government to Bamako, lifted the limitations on USG assistance to Mali, and provided MTI an opportunity to broaden its scope of programming – most immediately via the *Peace Process* line. As asserted in the *Peace Process Theory of Change*, 'a negotiated solution between the northern armed "rebel" groups and the Government of Mali is the only way to address the civil war which was the catalyst of Mali's instability.'[13] While there is seemingly no formally articulated objective statement for the *Peace Process* cluster (see *Section 6*, *Lesson III* on the form that such statements should take),[14] the explicit aim was to increase public pressure on both state and non-state actors to reach a negotiated settlement.

Table 5: Peace Process Cluster Summary (as of February 2016)

No. Activities	61
Types of Activities	Increasing access to information through translating material, disseminating information on the radio, etc., supporting the Ministry of Reconciliation in particular through enhancing its messaging capabilities, and creating means through which for the public to express a demand for peace, e.g. through rallies and caravans.
Amount Dispersed	$2,337,154
Locations	Approximately half in Bamako, with the remainder in various locations in the North.

In May 2014 MTI simultaneously began the *Ensemble* line of programming, which was delivered exclusively by an umbrella group of civil society partners. This was a response to an uptick in ethnic tensions and bellicose messaging from key political leaders following the so-called 'Kidal incident' in which then Prime Minister Moussa Mara sparked major new clashes between the government and rebel forces by traveling to the *de facto* 'capital' of the Tuareg rebellion. Focusing particularly on the South, the stated aims of *Ensemble* were identified as:[15]

[11] OTI Letter to File, June 2014, 2.
[12] For further detail, see *Improving Voter Turnout and Empowering Women Candidates* (MTI052), *Expanding CEPPS Partner Support for the Second Round Legislative Election* (MTI064), and *Technical Support to Find Voting Booths* (MTI065).
[13] MTI, *Peace Process Theory of Change*, 2014, 1.
[14] The Evaluation Team was provided with several documents that elaborated on the *Peace Process* stream, including a *Theories of Change* that contained a 'problem statement.' None of these included a recognizable objective statement, i.e. the specification of a desired end-state towards which MTI intended to contribute.
[15] MTI, *Ensemble Cluster Background,* 2014, 1

- To support messaging aimed at countering increasingly widespread bellicose perceptions in the capital of the N-S conflict, and;
- To increase civil society voice demanding a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Table 6: Ensemble Cluster Summary (as of February 2016)

No. Activities	21
Types of Activities	Media messaging and activities such as sports days, rallies and debates to distribute a peace and unity messaging.
Amount Dispersed	$699,184
Locations	Largely Bamako with occasional efforts in the North.

In September 2014 MTI revised its objective statements, uniting the *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* lines under the aim 'to increase the supply and demand for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.' **While it was certainly correct to separate the numerous activities under this objective into clusters, the Evaluation Team concludes that the division chosen was suboptimal (the implications of this are discussed in *Section 6, Lesson V*)** – and it is on this basis that the *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* lines are considered collectively in this subsection. According to OTI guidance, clusters should be united by common intended effects,[16] as opposed to implementing partners as was the case with *Ensemble*. This is not to suggest that this was the only distinction between these two streams (as discussed in *Section 5.2*), but it was the most prominent. Not only was there considerable overlap in terms of intended effects (see, in particular, the second objective listed above for *Ensemble*), but both also involved efforts to increase demand for peace, including messaging campaigns, debates, and so. **A more logical division would arguably have been to cluster these activities into 'supply of information' and 'demand for peace.'**

Such issues aside, it is certainly clear that MTI's *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* efforts were highly strategic and responsive. The printing of the peace accords in a variety of languages (with it originally only being available in French) and radio messaging efforts were repeatedly flagged by key informants as being of particular relevance. There was clear strategic value to helping local communities become better informed about the ongoing process. Also of note was that within two weeks of the Coordination of Azawad Movement (CMA) rejecting the terms of a peace deal signed by the Malian government in March 2015, MTI supported its partners to organize pro-peace rallies in ten towns across the north, with over 4,000 people participating in the biggest rally in Gao.[17] Research conducted by the Evaluation Team also supported the *Ensemble Cluster Evaluation's* claim that this line of programming

[16] See, for instance, *OTI Anywhere Monitoring & Evaluation*, 2015, 6.
[17] The rallies were held in Gao (MTI209), Ansongo (MTI212), Timbuktu (MTI213), Goundam (MTI214), Bourem (MTI217), Niafunke (MTI218), Dire (MTI219), Lere (MTI220), Gourma-Rharous (MTI221), N'Tillit (MTI222), Gossi (MTI223) and Tessit (MTI228).

delivered 'the right message at the right time.'[18] The Deputy Chief of Mission also flagged the relevance of such grass-roots programming on the basis that there is a substantial disconnect between the government and society, and also noted the strategic nature of MTI's dissemination effort in particular.[19]

However, an important critique of this programming relates to the assumption articulated in the *Peace Process Theory of Change* that 'both the Government of Mali and the northern armed groups are subject to public pressure – increasing this pressure will also increase the likelihood that they understand they must come to a final peace agreement.'[20] It is certainly plausible that both sides were responsive to such influences, and indeed in April 2015 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly acknowledged the pro-peace rallies. Yet, an awareness of these events is not the same as evidence that the two sides were influenced to sign and remain loyal to the accords by such public pressures. **On this basis the Evaluation Team argues that efforts should have been made to test these assumptions (through the use of methods discussed in *Lesson IV*) given that both lines of programming would have failed to contribute to a formal end to hostilities had this assumption been mistaken.** This is a strategic issue in the sense that under such a scenario MTI could have reacted by channeling resources towards alternative forms of programming.

4.3 NORMALCY

In addition to supporting the peace process, after the 2013 elections MTI also began to program around the key priorities of 'stability, cohesion and peace.'[21] While a precise vision of the strategy remained unclear to the Senior Management Team (SMT), they recognized the need to expand further into the North, and so MTI opened an office in Mopti in September 2013, and in Timbuktu one month later.[22] Initially, programming consisted of rehabilitation and basic services activities, as well as support for local reconciliations. The geographic focus of the program was largely on towns along the Niger River up to, and around, Timbuktu. In the original formulation of the strategy, the Timbuktu region was the focus.

Even after months of programming, however, neither the leadership nor the staff were able to better define or articulate a clear objective underpinning these activities. The SMT recognized the need for greater clarity on the strategy: certain activities appeared *ad hoc*, and while they continued to be strategic, it was not clear to the leadership how or if they added up to the desired effects.[23] The April 2014 PPR team noted this, recommending that MTI 'define cluster level desired outcomes and indicators of success.'[24] Led by the Deputy Country Representative, the MTI team went to great lengths to bring the program into focus: the spring of 2014 featured a PPR, a Management Review, and an M&E TDY. The latter guided MTI staff to draw out the rationale of the activities already conducted – approximately 20 at the time. Through a participatory process, the team articulated the following cluster-level objective:

- To restore a sense of normalcy in strategic areas in the North.

[18] MTI, *Ensemble Cluster Evaluation*, 2015, 2
[19] Interview, 14 January 2016, 13 and 14 January 2016.
[20] MTI, *Peace Process Theory of Change*, 2014, 1.
[21] SMT interview, 18 January 2016.
[22] SMT interviews, 14, 18, 28 January 2016.
[23] SMT interviews, 14, 18, 28 January 2016.
[24] MTI, *PPR Report*, April 2014, 13.

Table 7: Restoring a Sense of Normalcy Cluster Summary (as of February 2016)

No. Activities	87
Types of Activities	Culture, local reconciliations, infrastructure/basic services, income generation
Amount Dispersed	$4,423,077
Locations	Throughout the North, with particular focus on Lere, Dire, Niafunke, Goundam, Douentza, Ansongo, Menaka, and Timbuktu.

Though the articulation of this cluster remained vague and broad (the relevance of this is discussed in greater detail in Section 6, *Lesson III*), the aim behind it was nonetheless highly relevant. Namely, to ensure that 'ongoing conflicts in the North, or conflicts generated during refugee returns, do not undermine a national peace process.'[25] The underlying theme for many of the grants in this cluster was explicit: to promote stability. To understand why this was strategic, it is important to note the context for which the cluster was developed: activities were to take place less than a year after the end of the occupation in towns heavily affected by the crisis. Many in the North felt abandoned by the government, not least because officials in many cases literally left their posts. Social trust and cohesion were damaged, economic life disrupted, and day-to-day life was compromised. The government was also doing little to implement the Ouagadougou Accords or advance the peace process more broadly. Against this backdrop, programming that aimed to secure a fragile and nascent peace was highly relevant.

Not only was *Normalcy* programming relevant to the political context in a broad sense, specific activities were also responsive to critical political moments in Mali's transition. For instance, MTI's programming in Menaka in the summer of 2015 is a powerful example of the flexibility and responsiveness of the OTI mechanism. In a clear breach of the ceasefire agreement at the time, the *Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés* (GATIA), a pro-Mali rebel group, pushed anti-government rebel groups out of Menaka. This sparked a series of violent retaliatory attacks, which threatened to derail the entire peace process.[26] As part of the peace accord signed in Algiers in June, all rebel groups agreed to leave Menaka under the control of MINUSMA and the Malian authorities.

Recognizing the seriousness of the threat, MTI moved to help stabilize Menaka. Though MTI had never programmed in this remote town, within weeks of the agreement, MTI had sent an assessment mission to explore what could be done in the town. In short order, MTI cleared a cash-for-work program that engaged over 500 youth on water and sanitation issues. The assessment also identified the need for electricity (which had not existed in Menaka since 2012) as a priority. Streamlining the usual procurement processes, MTI was able to repair and expand the electrical grid in the town within three months. The rehabilitation of the Menaka radio station followed suit. Working closely with local authorities and MINUSMA, MTI was able to capitalize on a brief window of opportunity to try to address threats to the peace process. A senior local official concluded that 'PAT-Mali programming in Menaka remains a timely support,' and that 'PAT-Mali did a lot in four months.'[27]

[25] MTI *Monitoring and Evaluation Plan*, November 2014, pp 1.
[26] SMT and staff interviews, 25 and 26 January 2016.
[27] Stakeholder interview, 27 January 2016.

Table 8: Illustrative List of Normalcy Activities

Culture	Local Reconciliation	Infrastructure/ Basic Services	Income Generation
Engaging Timbuktu Youth through Theater Competition	Meeting of Leaders and Forum for Reconciliation in Ouattagouna	Emergency Maintenance and New Generator for Timbuktu Water Supply	Cash-for-Work in Five Villages in Soumpi Commune, Niafunke Cercle
Creating Momentum for Peace Summer Youth Mobilization Timbuktu	Inter-community Dialogue to Prepare for Refugee Return to Douentza	Rehabilitation of Independence Square in Douentza	Revitalization of the Timbuktu Peace Garden
Timbuktu High School Regional Basketball Competition for Young Women and Men	Network of Leaders and Activity for Reconciliation in Bourra	Restoring FM Radio Service in Goundam Cercle by Renovating Radio Jimba-Bodo	Youth Cash-for-Work and Sanitation activity in Lere Town
Peace and Reconciliation Theater Caravan in Timbuktu Region	Commemorative Ceremony for Douentza Crisis Committee Members	Rehabilitation of the Harber Maiga Cultural Center in Niafunke	Promoting social cohesion through Cash for work in Ansongo
Timbuktu High School Reading Club and Essay Competition on Freedom	Peulh - Tuareg Dialogue Initiative	Emergency Repairs to the Ansongo Ferry	Cash for Work Herder-Trail Demarcation Activity in and around Lere Town
Promoting Social Cohesion by Increasing Supply of Positive Radio Drama Programs	Community Leaders Conflict Resolution & Reconciliation Talks, Niafunke	Restoring Electricity Supply in Lere	Promoting social cohesion through Cash for work in Menaka

Furthermore, each of four streams identified within the *Normalcy* cluster (see *Table 8*) was strategic and relevant in its own right:

- **Culture:** In the Timbuktu region in particular culture holds a special place in society. As explained by a local artist who participated in the peace caravan, 'culture plays a vital role here. If you don't have this [culture], Timbuktu does not exist.'[28] He further explained that culture – song, dance, theater, handicrafts, libraries – were deeply embedded in everyday life in Mali, which was taken away during the occupation. Thus, as a way to signal a return to normalcy, cultural events were a clear place to start.

[28] Grantee interview, Timbuktu, 21 January 2016.

- **Local Reconciliations:** Local reconciliations were also highly relevant in that they both signaled and symbolized a break from the past, an opportunity for Malians to reclaim their lives and the lives of their families, neighbors and communities.[29] They were also strategic by involving local authorities and visibly demonstrating the return of the government. By addressing local tensions, MTI hoped to prevent flashpoints of violence that could destabilize the immediate area and undermine the national peace process. Further, this type of activity was often conducted as an entry point to a particular town or village, thus building trust in MTI as an honest broker.

- **Infrastructure/Basic Services:** Restoring Gossi's water supply, repairing Lere's electricity system or supporting clean-up campaigns in five Timbuktu neighborhoods all served similar purposes: to help build confidence in, and support for, the government by promoting the perception that local authorities are responsive to citizens' basic needs.[30] Such activities were also designed to help restore a sense of normalcy by re-establishing basic services that were damaged during the occupation.[31] The Douentza high school rehabilitation was perhaps the most visible example of this type of programming. The restoration was designed not only to improve access to education, but as a symbol of ridding the school – and the town – of the extremist organization that controlled the building during the occupation.[32] Another suite of activities comprised the rehabilitation of radio stations, which were designed to enable the government and civil society to communicate more effectively with local populations on a range of topics, including the peace process. This was also strategic in that it allowed many of Studio Tamani's partners to rebroadcast the only independent national news program in Mali. Supporting national (as opposed to local) news was a further attempt to connect Malians in the North with Bamako and the south.[33]

- **Income Generation:** The fourth component of Normalcy entailed five cash-for-work activities and support for a women's farming initiative, known as the Peace Garden. These activities not only sought to provide quick income generating opportunities, they also sought to 'bring diverse groups together to work on a common project to improve social cohesion in target areas.'[34] With a particular focus on targeting and selection of participants, these activities were further designed to re-establish the economic interdependencies that had existed prior to the crisis.[35] The cash-for-work activities also served another strategic purpose: to prevent local conflicts over natural resources. In Lere, for example, MTI designed an activity to mark trails for herders so that their flocks could graze without damaging local farmers' crops.[36]

4.4 CVE

Definitions of *violent extremism* tend to refer to an involvement in the creation of ideologically-motivated violence, *and* support for such acts. For instance, USAID defines the concept as:

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[29] Grantee interview, Timbuktu, 20 January 2016.
[30] OTI Activities Database, *Restoring the Electricity Supply in Lere* (MTI128).
[31] According to the SMT, this criterion helped ensure that MTI did not effectively become an infrastructure program.
[32] OTI Activity Database, *Douentza High School (Lycee) Reconstruction* (MTI027).
[33] Grantee interview, 19 January 2016.
[34] MTI *Evaluation of "Restoring a Sense of Normalcy" in the Timbuktu Region*, April-May 2015, 6.
[35] Annex A: Cluster Backgrounds, Timbuktu Regional Cluster, July 2014, pp 13.
[36] OTI Activity Database, *Cash for Work Herder-Demarcation Trail Activity in and around Lere Town* (MTI027).

- Advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.[37]

The MTI CVE activities targeted villages located within Gounzoureye Commune, located outside of Gao town, in which reside a substantial number of individuals who assisted jihadi groups during the occupation. As reported within the *Cluster Background*:[38]

> *The town of Gao is surrounded by a number of villages (Kaji, Koima, Saadou, Lobou, Bagoundje 2 and Tacharane) along the Niger River that are known for their large Wahabi communities that sided with armed groups during the occupation. On account of their conservative Islamic beliefs, these communities historically opted out of the surrounding dynamics, preferring to keep to themselves. This self-imposed isolation was, for the most part, accompanied by marked neglect by the state, which along with the surrounding populations, allowed these communities to disengage, never seeing the danger such extreme isolation and marginalization entailed.*

Table 9: CVE Cluster Summary (as of February 2016)

No. Activities	23
Types of Activities	Activities can be classified as (a) responding to urgent needs, (b) strengthening connections within and between communities, and (c) engaging in the battle of ideas.
Amount Dispersed	$1,120,178
Locations	Gounzoureye

On the basis of such conditions the CVE objective was identified as being:

- To counter violent extremism through inclusion of marginalized communities.

The CVE line *Theories of Change* elaborates that 'if the social, political, and economic marginalization and isolation of communities in Gounzoureye Commune is reduced, then these communities will be less vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist organizations.'[39] In fact, these statements do not entirely reflect programming (as discussed in *Section 5.4*) in the sense that the activities undertaken also included (a) efforts to respond to urgent needs and thus build trust and credibility with local stakeholders during the initial stages, and (b) initiatives to engage in 'the battle of ideas.' **Nevertheless, the Evaluation Team concludes that the CVE element was highly strategic on the basis that it occurred in a location in which many individuals had already shown susceptibility to violent extremism.** However, one critique of the CVE line from a strategic perspective was that MTI should have placed a greater focus on building bridges between Gounzoureye and the town of Gao itself. This would have been in accordance with the program's own diagnosis that the isolation partly responsible for locals aligning with jihadis during the occupation was not only between Gounzoureye villages, but also between Gounzoureye and the surrounding area.

[37] USAID, *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles in to Practice 2011*, 2.
[38] *CVE Cluster Background* 2014, 5.
[39] *CVE Theories of Change*, undated, 1.

5. PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

With strategy having now been discussed, this section focuses exclusively on the subject of performance, with the relevant SOW question articulated as:

- *To what extent did MTI contribute to the achievement of its stated goals and objectives?*

Additional guidance on this question was provided within the SOW as follows:

> *In answering this question, the evaluators should consider the program's goal through the lens of its objectives and draw upon the findings of existing cluster evaluations. In addition, the evaluators should consider whether the program had a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change would happen, the extent to which the program was implemented in line with its goal, and whether resources (both funds and staff) were effectively allocated to maximize impact.*

As with *Section 4*, this section is comprised of four subsections that correspond to the MTI clusters, with *Peace* Process and *Ensemble* considered collectively for the reasons outlined in *Section 4.2*. **The first overarching conclusion is that substantial evidence exists to suggest that MTI successfully contributed to many of its intended low and intermediate effects.** In the elections stream there is little doubt that MTI improved voters' access to information. For programming related directly to peace efforts, MTI certainly increased the public demand for a formal end to hostilities, and enhanced access to information on the process, in particular through translating the accords in multiple languages. In almost every interview undertaken by the Evaluation Team relating to the 'normalcy' line – whether with grantees, beneficiaries or community leaders – increases in social cohesion were identified as an important outcome. The research also revealed a widely-held perception that MTI enhanced social cohesion in the CVE stream, for instance, as reported by the Mayor of Gounzoureye, and the Kaji Village Chief, among others.

The second conclusion is that it is not possible for the Evaluation Team to meaningfully assess the extent to which MTI contributed to upper-level effects. These would have included, for instance, influencing leaders of both sides to sign and remain faithful to the accords, and a reduction in violent extremism.[40] This is due to a variety of M&E-related issues that the Evaluation Team elaborates on through the lessons in *Section 6*, and which in-brief include:

- **Poor articulation of intended effects (*Lesson III*):** Many of the MTI objectives and cluster objectives are poorly articulated, and as such it is strictly not possible to determine the extent to which these were achieved.

- **Inadequate evidence collection (*Lesson IV*):** While MTI deserves considerable credit for adopting a number of innovative techniques, such as the media monitoring, hotline, and 'blogging' methods, a more systematic approach to data collection should have been developed to reveal MTI's effects.

[40] It is worth clarifying that the examples of low / intermediate / upper level effects outlined in this section do not reflect the judgement of the Evaluation Team, but rather MTI's own interpretation. For instance, CVE was explicitly identified as an objective (i.e. an upper-level effect), whereas social cohesion was considered to be a means to an end (i.e. an intermediate-level effect) within this line of programming – see the CVE *Theory of Change*.

- **A misuse of clusters (*Lesson V*):** The specific issues varied between clusters, but it is worth highlighting the case of the *Normalcy* and *CVE* streams where the clusters effectively displaced the program objectives. Thus, instead of connecting activities to higher-level effects – as clusters are designed to do – the MTI clusters were excessively broad to serve their intended purpose. This additional layer (the so-called 'missing middle') has a critical M&E function – an analysis of the achievements and failures at this level may provide explanations in cases where a program fails to contribute sufficiently to an intended upper-level aim.

It is necessary to clarify that the Evaluation Team does *not* conclude there was a failure to achieve such upper-level results, but rather that the M&E system provided little basis on which to draw conclusions. While certainly challenging, it is important to demonstrate programmatic effects at all levels. **This is critical both for future learning, and more immediately as an evidence-base from which to make adaptations to programs as they evolve.** Simply put, had MTI collected data to show that their *Peace Process* or *Normalcy* streams, for instance, were falling short of delivering the desired effects, they would have been better positioned to make suitable adjustments. While OTI's rapid and responsive approach may make this more difficult, this form of operating is certainly not incompatible with rigorous M&E.

5.1 ELECTIONS

As discussed in *Section 4.1*, in the lead up to the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2013, MTI sought to increase voter education, and participation in the electoral process. There is little doubt that MTI contributed to the former. This can be seen in the overwhelming response to the MTI-sponsored hotline for the presidential election: while only 1,500 calls were expected, over 6,000 were received.[41] OTI's support to amplify the CEPPS partners' programming also improved voters' access to information: a two-minute video on the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) *Code of Good Conduct*, for example, was aired 49 times on the Office of Radio and Television of Mali (ORTM), the Malian government's national broadcast channel, prior to the presidential polls. Over 20,000 of International Republican Institute's illustrated posters on how to vote were also distributed. Hundreds of volunteers in 27 towns across Mali were also deployed for door-to-door grassroots Get-Out-The-Vote efforts.

However, it remains unclear whether such efforts contributed to an increase in voter turnout. Innovative SMS technology made available to the DGE by MTI informed individual voters of their correct polling stations on election day – of those who received the SMS, some may not have found their polling stations otherwise. Other than grantee assurances that this was the case, there was little evidence to support the link between OTI's activities and voter turnout. Similarly, MTI supported the *Association pour la Promotion de l'Evaluation au Mali* (APEM) to help reduce spoiled balloting before the run-off of the presidential poll. While spoiled ballots were reduced from over 400,000 in the first round to 80,000 in the second, it is unclear to what extent APEM's intervention played a role or whether, for example, voters learned how to vote from their first experience in the polling booth.[42]

[41] OTI Activity Database, *Setting up a Platform for Increasing Awareness about Democracy in Mali* (MTI011).
[42] Grantee interview, 18 January 2016.

To complicate matters, a host of other international agencies and implementing partners also supported the electoral process, many focusing on the same issues as MTI. **This presents evaluators with the so-called 'attribution problem' – i.e. complicating the process of attributing 'causes' to 'effects.'** Malian civil society organizations were also involved, carrying out domestic election monitoring activities, as well as voter education and awareness programming.[43] The elections cluster evaluation articulated this well: the 'results should in no way be attributed only to the Mali Transition Initiative (MTI) … It contributed to the implementation of a voting process in which several bi- and multi-lateral partners also contributed (UNDP, European Union, African Union, Canadian, Belgian, Swiss, Dutch and French cooperative organizations).'[44]

5.2 PEACE PROCESS/ENSEMBLE

For *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* programming, MTI contributed substantially to its desired low and intermediate-level effects. On the demand side, as noted by the *Ensemble Cluster Evaluation*, 'the campaign truly did fill a void by providing an important pro-peace narrative during a very volatile time in Mali.'[45] Indeed, *Ensemble* appears to have become something of a household name, for instance, with the *Cluster Evaluation* also maintaining that this brand 'was mentioned in 72 separate [news] articles across 19 different media outlets.'[46] As previously observed, within two weeks of the Coordination of Azawad Movement (CMA) rejecting the terms of a peace deal signed by the Malian government in March 2015, MTI also supported its partners to organize pro-peace rallies in numerous towns across the north, with over 4,000 people participating in the biggest rally in Gao.

On the supply side it was also clear that MTI contributed significantly to increasing access to information on the peace process, in particular through translating the accords in multiple languages. A number of phone interviewees referenced the impact of these efforts,[47] including the Mayor of Goundam's assistant who claimed that:

> *The translation of the Algiers peace agreement in Songhoy was a really well-articulated and comprehensible translation. … The Algiers peace agreement is in French and people have never had a translation of its content before. … People now keep discussing and debating the Algiers peace agreement in the 'grins' (circles of friends). Thanks to the Songhoy translation people are now able to proceed with restitution sessions of the peace agreement in their neighborhood. Today, everyone wants to help his or her friends best understand the content of the peace agreement.*[48]

FGD participants who had attended the *Public Debates for Women on the Peace Process* and *Youth Public Debates on the Peace Agreement* made similar claims. For instance, one asserted that 'the best thing was clearly the direct information and sensitization that was made by the events – people in general did not previously know what the content of the agreement was as the original text is in French.'[49] Another

[43] Staff interview, 15 January 2016.
[44] CEDREF-Sarl, *Evaluation Report of Activities by the MTI to Support the Electoral Process*, June 2014, pp 21.
[45] *Ensemble Cluster Evaluation*, 2015, 2.
[46] *Ensemble Cluster Evaluation*, 2015, 2.
[47] Including the Ansongo Mayor and a civil society representative from Ansongo.
[48] Phone interview with Assistant to Mayor of Goundam. Other phone interviewees who highlighted the importance of this element included the Ansongo Mayor and a civil society representative from Ansongo.
[49] FGD with participants of *Creating Momentum for Peace: Public Debates for Women on the Peace Process* (MTI155) and *Youth Public Debates on Peace Agreement* (MTI190).

participant noted that 'the campaign was conducted properly and the debates were delivered clearly as ordinary people, laymen, and non-literate people now understand the text of the peace agreement and the roadmap.' Similarly, referring to a series of sketches broadcast in five languages by Chamady Comedie, the MTI activities database reports that:

> *These sketches presented the content of the roadmap to the general public by showing the difference between the roadmap and the final accord, explaining the key points of the roadmap, and providing information in local languages that the targeted public understands. As the majority of the population cannot read, the sketches were broadcast on national TV and local radio which represent the major channels of the communication in the country.*[50]

The Chamady Comedie grantee reported to have been contacted through phone calls and social media by various people claiming that this effort made a substantial contribution to informing the public.[51] MTI's initiative to send journalists to Algiers to cover the ongoing peace talks were also seemingly effective, with their reports being distributed widely via Studio Tamani's network of local radio stations.[52] **However, efforts to support the Ministry of National Reconciliation (MNR) supply its own information seemingly met with varied success.**[53] While the online presence and media voice of the MNR increased as a direct consequence of MTI support,[54] this department lacked the capacity to fully exploit data collected via the communication cell establish with MTI support. This arguably occurred at least partly because the media monitoring reports provided by Global News Intelligence (GNI) were excessively technical and quantitative in nature, lacking simple 'so what' recommendations that the MNR could exploit through adaptations to policy or approach.

However, while such findings are clearly positive, it is not possible to determine whether MTI contributed to upper-level objectives due to the three M&E-related issues flagged at the beginning of *Section 5*. Firstly, the *Peace Process* line lacks an objective statement (see *Section 4.2*), and as such it is strictly not possible to determine the extent to which it was achieved. Secondly, MTI did not adopt the necessary research methods to demonstrate their effects – which, for instance, could have included micro-surveys to monitor changes in public knowledge about the peace process, and additional qualitative research to reveal the extent to which they encouraged political leaders to sign and remain loyal to the peace accords. Thirdly, while it was correct to separate the numerous activities under this objective into clusters, the Evaluation Team argues that the division chosen by MTI was suboptimal (again, see *Section 4.2*). Specifically, there was substantial overlap between the *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* clusters, and as such these cannot be neatly separated into discrete units for analysis.

5.3 NORMALCY

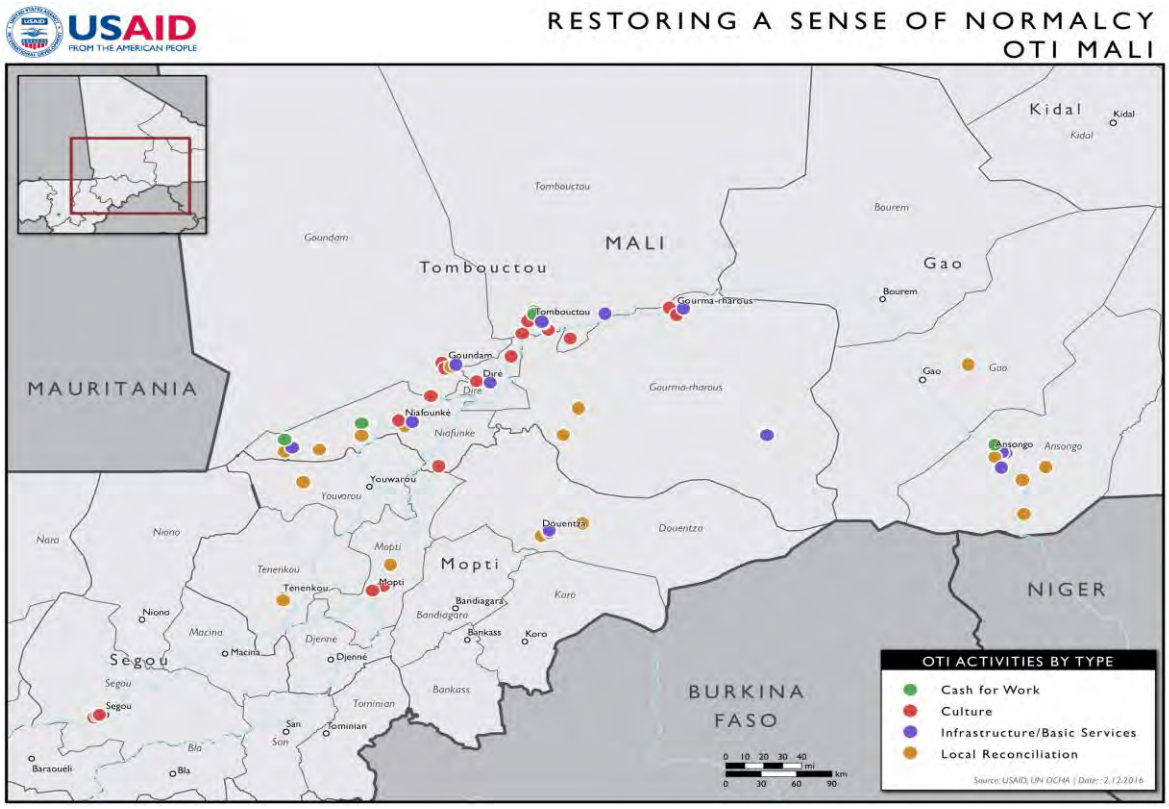
As highlighted in *Section 4.3*, MTI staff struggled to define and clearly articulate the rationale behind the *Normalcy* cluster. Even after the cluster was introduced and the objective revised, many staff still did not fully understand what the cluster sought to achieve (see *Section 6*, *Lesson III*).[55] MTI staff may have had an intuitive sense of what normal was prior to the crisis, but without an explicit articulation of what 'normalcy' meant they had difficulty designing (and having approved) activities that contributed to the

[50] OTI Activity Database, *Creating Awareness about the Peace Negotiations* (MTI145).
[51] Grantee interview, Timbuktu, 11 January 2016.
[52] OTI Activity Database, *Sending Journalists to Cover the Peace Talks in Algiers* (MTI141), and grantee Skype interview, 19 January 2016.
[53] SMT interview, 11 January 2016; Grantee interview, Bamako, 14 January 2016.
[54] Consultant interview, Washington D.C., 2 December 2015.
[55] Staff interviews, 21-22 and 28 January 2016.

cluster. **While introducing the cluster was certainly an important step, the failure to precisely define 'normalcy' remained highly problematic.** It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the Timbuktu (from where this activity was largely managed) and DC staff struggled to articulate cluster-level effects. **Additionally, the failure to develop indicators for *Normalcy* further limited evidence of contribution to desired effects above the activity level (see *Lesson IV*), and as a result there was little for the Evaluation Team to assess in terms of a return to a 'sense of normalcy.'**

There is an additional challenge to drawing effects beyond the activity level for this particular cluster. The cluster was designed to have an impact on discrete geographic locations – i.e. identified 'strategic areas in the North.' **Nevertheless, as MTI expanded beyond the original seven areas in the Timbuktu region to include in Douentza, Ansongo and Menaka (see *Figure* 2), geographical breadth was arguably prioritized over depth.** Interviews with the SMT revealed that geographic targeting was considered for this cluster, and was even included in the M&E Plan from November 2014. **While this expansion was clearly strategic (as highlighted in *Section 4.3*), other things being equal a more concentrated focus would have increased the likelihood of 'normalcy' being restored in any or all of the selected locations, i.e. as finite resource would have been more tightly focused on fewer regions.** A related issue is that, despite the PPR's recommendations that MTI determine criteria for expanding into new areas or scaling up or down in current areas, it is not evident that such criteria were developed in any formal or systematic manner.[56]

Figure 2: Geographical Distribution of Normalcy Activities by Type



[56] MTI, *PPR Report*, May 2014, pp 12.

Though the Team could not assess the cluster more broadly, one aspect of 'normalcy' did emerge from the Team's research. **In almost every interview – with grantees, beneficiaries and community leaders – increases in social cohesion were identified as an important outcome.**[57] Many even described strengthened social cohesion in similar terms: as 'breaking the mistrust' of the past. Whether referring to a rehabilitation project, a local reconciliation or an income generating activity, social cohesion was by far the most commonly cited result of any given activity. The following provide examples of how MTI activities helped strengthen social cohesion within each of the four streams of *Normalcy* activities:

- **Culture:** Particularly in Timbuktu town, many found that celebrating Malian culture through music, dance, song, poetry and sports helped reinforce social cohesion. Some, like a choreographer of the theater competition in Timbuktu, found social cohesion during the week of performances in that 'none of the community [was] left aside because of social or cultural background or color of skin.'[58] Others highlighted that public gatherings demonstrated a strengthened social cohesion in that 'peoples came from all the four corners of Timbuktu without any fear.'[59] Still others, such as a supervisor of a reading club activity, rediscovered social cohesion in the tolerance and openness of students' divergent views and self-expression.[60]

- **Local Reconciliation:** With MTI's support, selected communities were able to resolve local conflicts exacerbated and/or precipitated by the occupation. In many cases, reconciliations were concluded with signed agreements. In Lere, Dianke and Soumpi, for example, MTI-trained mediation teams succeeded in bringing together community leaders and recent returnees to sign community peace accords; though not binding or formal, these accords were confidence-building measures that sought to contribute to social cohesion at the community level.[61] In several cases, staff argued that further programming was only possible after a process of forgiveness and reconciling the past had taken place. Reconciliations were almost always presided over by local authorities, marking the return of the Malian government to areas in the North 'abandoned' by the state. In some cases, however, the return of local authorities was met with suspicion and mistrust. Crisis Committees – established to replace local authorities during the occupation – were often reluctant to surrender their authority upon the return of a prefect or a mayor. In Douentza and Ansongo, for example, MTI organized commemorative ceremonies to recognize the work of the Crisis Committees and to facilitate the 'hand-over' of power. Evidence from interviews suggests that these ceremonies promoted cohesion and alleviated simmering tensions in those locations.[62]

- **Infrastructure/Basic Services:** Highly visible rehabilitations of high schools, community centers, and radio stations, among others, were often the most commonly recalled activities in

[57] There is a case that social cohesion may also be an upper-level effect on a par with / superior to 'normalcy,' and the former concept did feature in an MTI objective statement between 2013 and 2014. However, the Evaluation Team places primacy on the latter (a) as from September 2013 onwards social cohesion did not feature as an intended effect, and (b) in line with MTI's emphasis on clusters as the core unit of analysis.
[58] Grantee interview, 25 January 2016.
[59] OTI Activities Database, *Engaging Timbuktu Youth through Theater Competition* (MTI054).
[60] Grantee interview, 20 January 2016.
[61] For more information, see OTI Activities Database, *Mobilization and Reconciliation of Women across Niafunke* (MTI055) and *Training and Mobilization of Niafunke Youth as Conflict Mediators* (MTI057).
[62] SMT interview, 25 January 2016.

interviews with community leaders and local authorities.[63] The rehabilitation of Douentza's Independence Plaza, for example, was held up as an example of reclaiming the plaza to 'its real purpose as the central meeting point for Douentza's diverse ethnic communities.'[64] Some also interpreted social cohesion more broadly, to include trust in local and national authorities. A municipal leader in Niafunke argued that MTI's restoration of the local radio station promoted social cohesion by reassuring people that there was a peace process underway.[65]

- **Income Generation:** Income generation activities provided participating community members an opportunity to work side-by-side and mend tensions from the past. A member of the women's Peace Garden in Timbuktu referred to the impact of their work as follows: 'Anyone can observe that we have our diversity as we are white and black sisters making one community. The displaced are back and we are all working together. The Peace Garden represents a space where we are empowering the social fabric … because we have been able to roll back the mistrust that we were experiencing subsequent to the occupation.'[66] As a hotline caller from Lere observed, working together for a common purpose builds social cohesion: 'when you see 500 people working on the same path every morning, without history, it gives hope that people like to live in peace.'[67] Similar experiences were reported in Ansongo: 'we no longer speak of crisis in Ansongo … everyone is reconciled: Arab, Tamasheq, Bambara, Songhoy.'[68]

Some evidence that activities may have had an impact above the activity level comes from observations by local authorities and community leaders. These individuals tended to offer broader perspectives on MTI programming, and were directly involved in many activities – thus, their observations on social cohesion and breaking the mistrust of the past are important. A senior local official in Goundam described MTI's support as 'helping Songhoy-Tamasheq peoples rally, interact at the level of the community … [and] reinforce[d] mutual trust.'[69] Another official in Menaka concluded that MTI's activities 'helped set in motion social cohesion, [and] rallied people from all the ethnic groups of the Commune…to interact with other community members without any mistrust.'[70] Others referred to the 'socio-cultural fabric of communities … being reconstructed,' and that 'today, there is no more distrust between people. People are now able to engage in discussions and debates without any tension.'[71]

MTI also illustrates that how activities are implemented is often as important as what is implemented. **In general, MTI was careful and sensitive to utilize existing, local or traditional mechanisms and/or partners to help implement program activities.** Rather than importing foreign ideas or approaches, MTI sought to leverage the existing context. This was manifest in a wide range of activities, including, for example, with *griots* (traditional story tellers and mediators) to facilitate reconciliations; traditional dance and song to promote cultural festivals; community sanitation organizations; and Crisis

[63] MTI's infrastructure / basic services grants, however, often experienced significant delays in implementation. This was also observed by the *Normalcy* cluster evaluation, and the *Activities Database* is replete with notes indicating delays in completing projects.
[64] OTI Activity Database, *Rehabilitation of Independence Square in Douentza* (MTI042).
[65] Stakeholder interview, 22 January 2016.
[66] Focus group discussion, Participants of the Peace Garden, Timbuktu, 22 January 2016.
[67] Hotline data, *Cash for Work Herder-Trail Demarcation Activity in and around Lere Town* (MTI159).
[68] Hotline data, *Promoting Social Cohesion through Cash for work in Ansongo* (MTI188).
[69] Grantee interview, 27 January 2016.
[70] Grantee interview 25 January 2016.
[71] Stakeholder interview, 25 January 2016.

Committees, among others. Similarly, MTI collaborated effectively with government partners at all levels of administration, including at the regional, cercle, commune, town and village levels. Recognizing the benefit of involving local authorities in activities was an important factor in the success of the program.[72]

5.4 CVE

As previously observed, the overarching CVE aim was identified as being 'to counter violent extremism through inclusion of marginalized communities.' In particular, MTI pursued this objective through:

- **Responding to urgent needs:** As reported in the CVE *Theories of Change*,[73] 'communities had not seen outsiders for years even before the occupation, and after the events of 2012, levels of distrust and paranoia were at an all-time high.' Thus, to build credibility with local authorities and gain a point of entry 'OTI worked with the communal mayor's office and village leaders to identify the two most critical neighborhoods where improved access to clean water was urgently needed.'

- **Strengthening connections within and between communities:** This involved, for instance, a commune-wide soccer tournament, the establishment of a network of community leaders to resolve inter-village issues, cash for work schemes with individuals from different villages, and a theater competition for young women.

- **Engaging in the battle of ideas:** According to the *Theories of Change*,[74] this third strand involved activities that directly challenged 'the ideas and perceptions of community members, promoting critical thought, and fostering discussion on the themes of freedom and peace and the occupation of Northern Mali by armed groups.' This included a reading and debate club, and initiatives with women from the ultra-conservative region of Darsalam.

The Evaluation Team's research revealed a widely-held perception that MTI enhanced social cohesion, for instance, as reported by the Mayor of Gounzoureye, and the Kaji Village Chief, among others. A cash-for-work beneficiary claimed that the best thing about the program 'was to bring people of different villages together because after the arrival of the jihadists some people who took their sides had been ostracized by the rest of the population, and the activities we did together [through MTI] contributed to lowering the tension.'[75]

However, while such findings are clearly positive, it must be recalled that within this line of programming an improvement in social cohesion is an intermediate-level effect designed to contribute to the objective of a reduction in violent extremism.[76] **The term 'violent extremism' is widely used (including by USAID, as previously noted in *Section 4.4*) to refer both to involvement in the creation of ideologically-motivated violence, *and* support for such acts.** As such, success in the CVE stream would at least in theory have involved contributing to a reduction in both participation (including future

[72] SMT interview, 18 January 2016
[73] *CVE Theories of Change*, undated, 1-2.
[74] *CVE Theories of Change*, undated, 3.
[75] *Improving Intercommunity Dialogue through Cash-for-Work in Gounzoureye* (MTI130), and *Promoting Social Cohesion through Cash for work in Gounzoureye* (MTI194).
[76] *CVE Theories of Change*, undated.

participation) and support.[77] While it would have been difficult to conduct research on the former in a meaningful manner in this context, MTI attempted to collect evidence against the latter through a social network analysis (SNA) study. This research was based on a quantitative survey undertaken in spring (wave one) and autumn (wave two) 2015. It asked a number of highly pertinent questions relating directly to violent extremism,[78] and the final report claimed a number of positive changes in attitudes.

However, the data reveals substantial problems with the research methods (as elaborated on in detail in *Annex IV*), and the Evaluation Team argues that these provide a sufficient basis on which to reject the findings. For instance, the proportion of female respondents in the second wave ranged from 39 per cent in the village of Kaji (63 of 162 respondents) to 65 per cent in Tacharane (112 of 172), two figures that are improbable from a statistical perspective had the research methods been sound.[79] Methodological issues are also revealed by the fact that the average age of the respondents inexplicably increased from 38 in the first wave to 43 in the second, a difference that alone *could* easily account for the supposed changes in perceptions over time. While MTI deserves credit for attempting an innovative technique in a challenging location, quantitative surveys are sufficiently specialized to require commensurate support from a technical expert.[80] The selection of methods should also be suitable to the environment, and in this particular case a micro-survey would have arguably been more appropriate (see *Annex V*).

[77] It would have been reasonable for MTI to establish their own definition of violent extremism if they had deemed that the common understanding of this term was unsuitable in the context of Gounzoureye. And, this would have provided the basis for an alternative set of intended effects.

[78] For instance, these included "For a group that is in opposition to the government, what is a better way to achieve their goals: fighting (such as with weapons) or protests?" and "How do you generally view [the jihadi group] MUJAO?"

[79] In any case, there is a strong argument that the consultant should have introduced a selection criterion to ensure a 50:50 split of males and females in all locations.

[80] It should be observed that the consultant contracted for the CVE survey was a specialist in social network analysis, rather than survey research, and that in this instance expertise in both were required.

6. LESSONS

With issues of strategy and performance having been discussed, *Section 6* identifies key lessons that can be applied to other programs. The relevant SOW question was articulated as:

- *What lessons can be gleaned from MTI that are applicable to other efforts to support peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion and to counter violent extremism in Mali and in the region?*

Additional guidance on this question was provided within the SOW as follows:

> *In answering this question, the evaluators should consider whether the program effectively utilized technology to implement and monitor its activities.*

The Evaluation Team recognizes that the lessons identified in this section enjoy the luxury of hindsight, perspective, and distance from the events and activities as they were unfolding. As observed throughout this report, the successes of MTI were pronounced. The team delivered a highly strategic program that consistently demonstrated its relevance, and there is overwhelming empirical evidence that their efforts made major contributions to their intended low/intermediate-level effects. **Reflecting this success, the first two lesson in this section elaborate on the flexibility and responsiveness shown by MTI, and how the team ensured diversity in their partnerships.** As also previously observed, a key limitation of the program was its inability to show contributions to upper-level effects as a result of M&E-related issues. **As such, the remaining three lessons focus in turn on articulating intended effects, research methods, and cluster design.** The Evaluation Team hopes that such lessons will be of value not only to specific programs that support peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion, and that aim to counter violent extremism in Mali and in the wider region, but also to OTI initiatives with an alternative thematic and/or geographic focus.

LESSON I: DEMONSTRATING FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS

MTI offered an excellent example of programmatic flexibility and responsiveness. This is the case in a strategic sense, for instance, shifting from a focus on the *Elections* line to what would become the *Peace Process* and *Normalcy* clusters after the 2013 presidential elections. It is equally true in a narrower 'tactical' sense, as best illustrated through its support to Menaka in the summer/fall of 2015 (see *Section 4.2*). In achieving these things, the MTI team amply demonstrated its ability to deliver programing streams that are iterative and requiring of long-term planning, and to respond in a nimble and timely manner. In its final iteration MTI offered a broad package that aimed both to promote progress towards a stable society (in particular, the *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* clusters), as well as to prevent backsliding to instability (the *Normalcy* and *CVE* clusters). **This breadth was a substantial asset in itself as it offered a platform for additional adaptions as necessary.** Had the peace negotiations collapsed, for instance, MTI would certainly not have been without options in the immediate term.

LESSON II: DIVERSIFYING PARTNERSHIPS

MTI relied on a diverse range of partnerships, and never became overly reliant on specific bodies for the purposes of implementation. In terms of key state actors, for instance, the program implemented via the *Delegation Generale aux Elections*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of National Reconciliation. However, the SMT realized early on that while necessary, national government entities may lack the capacity and/or will to be effective partners – and the relationship with the Ministry of National Reconciliation in particular proved to be challenging (see *Section 5.2*). While continuing to

nurture those relationships, MTI also collaborated with local and regional officials, traditional community leadership structures, and civil society. The support and capacity building to the latter (e.g. through entities such as the Ensemble umbrella and Think Peace) was particularly noteworthy as MTI played a substantial role in strengthening a sector that is notoriously weak in Mali. **As will invariably be the case, not all of the MTI partnerships proved equally fruitful, but potential negative consequences were reduced as a result of their deliberate efforts at diversification.**

LESSON III: ARTICULATING INTENDED EFFECTS

Defining success entails clearly articulating what the program is designed to achieve, and this is true for the overarching goal, program objectives, and the cluster objectives. OTI's *Field Guide Book* provides specific guidance on such matters, suggesting that objective statements 'should not describe what an intervention is doing but rather what the intervention intends to achieve,' and should be 'clear about the type of desired change … and [be] comprised of clear or defined terms."[81] The MTI CVE objective is stated as follows: 'to counter violent extremism through inclusion of marginalized communities.' This statement is vague (e.g. with no clarity provided on the term 'inclusion') and describes the process of how violent extremism will be countered, as opposed to the change to be brought about. This problem is compounded by the fact that MTI neither defined the concept of violent extremism, nor formally adopted an existing definition, e.g. that provided by USAID.

Major issues were also apparent in the *Normalcy* cluster – without a clear definition of 'normalcy,' it is not surprising that certain staff reported struggling to comprehend the intent of this line of programming or fully understood why certain activities were approved but not others.[82] This is not a matter of mere semantics, and the takeaway from these examples is not the importance of wordsmithing according to OTI guidance. **Rather, it is that well-articulated goals, objectives and cluster objectives are necessary to offer staff guidance on designing relevant activities that contribute to intended higher-level outcomes. In addition, suitably articulated statements are necessary to provide a platform from which to assess the success of a program.** Less precise statements tend to lead to less precise evaluations, and this in turn threatens to limit the extent of programmatic learning.

LESSON IV: COLLECTING EVIDENCE

The rapid and responsive nature of OTI programming presents particular challenges with regard to the generation of evidence, and to the extent possible caution should be taken to ensure that data collection systems do not become redundant as OTI modalities evolve. For instance, a major survey may become irrelevant if a program is required to adapt its thematic or geographical focus. Nevertheless, robust data systems are required to inform decision-making for all steams of programming. **In the case of MTI, while the team should certainly be credited with introducing various innovative research techniques (e.g. the hotline and 'blogging' data and the media monitoring), far improved evidence could have been gained through these and traditional research methods (see both *Table 10* and *Annex V*).** In addition, greater efforts should have been made to systematically 'triangulate' evidence, i.e. to gather related data from multiple sources for cross-validation. **Furthermore, to the extent possible MTI should have developed indicators through which to determine success in contributing to their intended effects.**

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[81] OTI Field Guide Book, Program Goal and Objectives, available at https://otianywhere.net/field-guide/program-goal-and-objectives, accessed 27 January 2016.
[82] Staff interview, 20 January 2016.

Table 10: Selected Potential Additional Research Methods that MTI may have Applied

Elections	**Interviews and focus groups** to determine ways in which members of the public fail to understanding the voting system; **Market research** to test various messages about the importance of voting and/or information about how to vote (although the time required to undertake this research may have been prohibitive).[83]
Peace Process / Ensemble	**Interviews** with political leaders to determine the extent to which they were influenced to sign and remain loyal to the peace process by MTI rallies and other events; **Micro-surveys** to determine changes in the extent to which the population was informed about the peace process, support for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, perceptions of the Tuareg in Bamako, etc.; **Market research** to test messages about peace and/or information about the peace accords; **Media monitoring** to track media support for the peace process before/after major MTI events.
Normalcy	**Micro-surveys, interviews (including through hotline/blogging) and focus group discussions** conducted in remote locations to determine perceptions of key concepts such as 'social cohesion' and 'normalcy.'
CVE	**Micro-survey** in Kaji village only as an economical/more rigorous alternative to a full survey throughout Gounzoureye (see *Annex V*).

While it may be the case that research capabilities are limited in Mali, not all of the methods require 'high capacity.' In particular, qualitative research techniques are not overly technical, and the same is applicable to the hotline and blogging tasks once these have been suitably established. It may also be the case that there are few research companies based in Mali capable of conducting micro-surveys, market research and so on, but external agencies could likely have plugged this capability gap.[84]

LESSON V: FILLING THE 'MISSING MIDDLE'

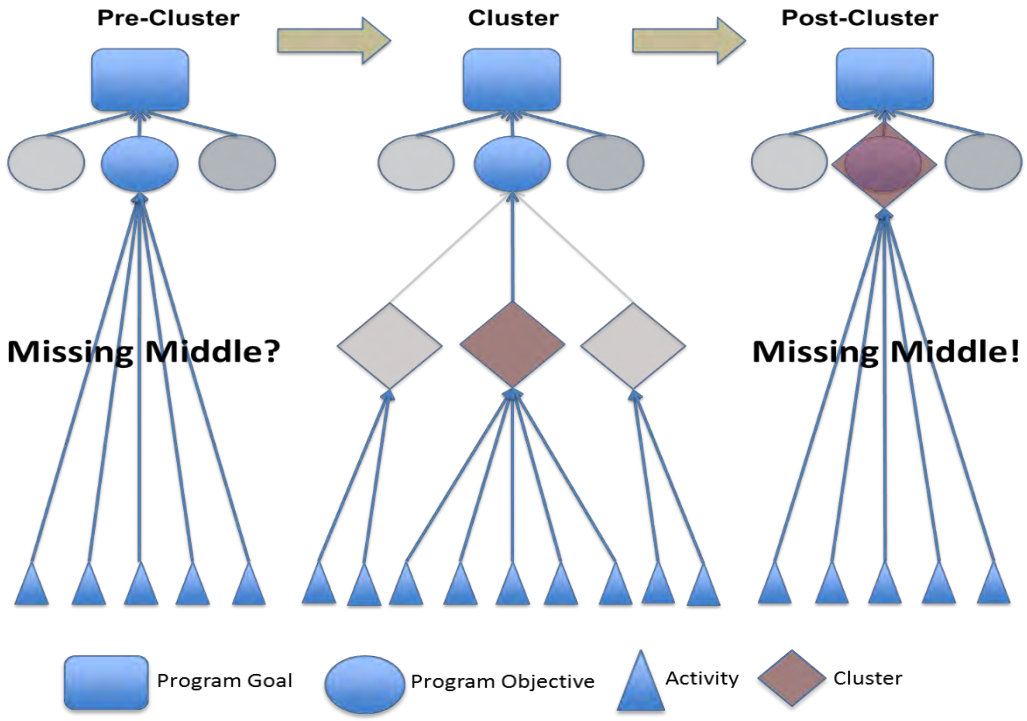
Clusters serve a simple yet critical task: to connect activity level outputs to higher-level outcomes. In providing an intermediary level (the so-called 'missing middle'), they help staff conceptualize how grants at the local level 'roll up' into something bigger. It is entirely reasonable to ask how a comedy sketch in Niafunke contributes to the peace process in Algiers, and clusters can serve as the bridge between what would otherwise appear as distant points on a map. **Such intermediate layers also serve a critical M&E function – an analysis of the achievements and failures at this level may offer explanations in cases where a program fails to sufficiently contribute to one of its intended upper-level objectives.**

For MTI, the clusters did not serve their purpose well, in short because they failed to provide the missing middle. Instead, they were elevated to the level of objectives, and in the last iteration of the program strategy, 'restoring a sense of normalcy' and CVE served both as clusters and as program

[83] It should be recognized that collecting data against the upper-level effects of the *Election* stream would have been highly challenging as the so-called 'attribution problem' looms particularly large in this case (see *Section 5.1*).
[84] It should be noted that major surveys do occur in Mali, e.g. the 'Afrobarometer' survey is administered, and the MTI grantee Studio Tamani contracted a major survey to determine its radio listenership.

objectives. The evolution of the normalcy cluster provides an excellent example of how this unfolded. In the fall of 2013 and early into 2014, MTI designed and implemented a host of activities to broadly promote social cohesion and reconciliation. Each activity had its own lower-level objective, which, collectively, were to contribute to the program objectives (see *Figure* 3, 'Pre-Cluster'). Through a participatory process led by an M&E TDY, staff reviewed activities implemented to that point and developed what would come to be known as the *Normalcy* line of programming. At this stage there was a brief discussion about dividing *Normalcy* along geographical lines (i.e. establishing *Normalcy* clusters for Timbuktu, Goundam, Niafunke, and so on). **The middle diagram below ('Cluster') shows how this would have functioned, correctly and in line with OTI guidance.** However, by the end of the summer a new framework was introduced in which 'restoring a sense of normalcy' became simultaneously a cluster and an objective ('Post-Cluster'), and the 'missing middle' went missing once again.

Figure 3: Restoring a Sense of Normalcy Cluster Evaluation



While geographical clusters offer one option to fill the missing middle, thematic clusters provide another. In this scenario the clusters provide 'building blocks' selected to collectively maximize the likelihood of success of the higher-level objective. For instance, activities under the CVE line were informally grouped as (a) 'responding to urgent needs,' (b) 'strengthening connections within and between communities,' and (c) 'engaging in the battle of ideas.' These could have been formally converted into thematic clusters. As such, they would have served the functions discussed above, i.e. firstly, suppling conceptual clarity to the team to help ensure a united purpose. And, secondly, offering an intermediate level for evaluation had evidence shown that MTI was failing to contribute sufficiently to its intended CVE objective.

As discussed in *Section 4.2*, the *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* lines of programming point to a different issue in the formulation of clusters. It was certainly correct to separate out the numerous activities under the objective labelled 'supply and demand for a peaceful resolution to the conflict,' but the division chosen by

MTI was suboptimal. Specifically, this is because the team did not categorize activities by their intended effects (as would have been in accordance with OTI guideline), but instead created an *Ensemble* cluster in which the activities were united by being implemented by an umbrella civil society group. This is not to suggest that this was the only distinction between these two streams, but it was the most prominent. While certainly not the only solution, a more logical division would have been to categorize the activities into 'supply of information' and 'demand for peace' clusters.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Evaluation Team offers the following recommendations:

1. **Country teams in post-conflict environments should design programs that contribute simultaneously to promoting peace *and* preventing instability.** As noted, while the MTI clusters were all strategic in their own right, they also provided a concrete package to contribute to both aims – the *Elections*, *Peace Process* and *Ensemble* clusters focused on promoting progress towards a stable society, whereas *Normalcy* and *CVE* sought to prevent backsliding to instability and violence. This breadth was a substantial asset as it allowed the team to operate strategically, for instance, via efforts to increase information about the electoral and peace processes, and to enhance demand for a formal settlement to the conflict. While at the same time it also enabled them to contribute to 'putting out fires' as necessary, such was the case in Menaka (as is discussed in the body of the report). In practical terms, this recommendation requires that country teams are capable of combining distinct modes of operating – being able both to deliver long-term, iterative program lines, and to respond in a nimble and timely manner.

2. **Country teams should diversify their reliance on specific sets of partners.** MTI relied on a diverse range of implementing partners, and while the program successfully nurtured a range of relationships with state and non-state actors, it was never overly reliant on specific groups for implementation. As will invariably be the case, not all of the MTI partnerships proved to be equally fruitful, but the potential negative consequences were substantially reduced as a result of MTI's deliberate efforts at diversification.

3. **Country teams should ensure that they draw on adequate specialist and technical advice.** As a consequence of their breadth, OTI programs inevitably involve implementing in thematic areas that fall outside of the 'comfort zones' of the team members. While OTI does run a 'bullpen' to offer such support, MTI would likely have benefitted, for instance, from specialist advice relating to CVE and messaging campaigns as both of these themes formed substantial elements of the program. This is also applicable to technical expertise for quantitative surveys, particularly in light of the fact that MTI's sole survey (a social network analysis study) suffered methodological issues.

4. **OTI should ensure that its country programs have adequate internal M&E capacity.** At a minimum, this should involve embedding an M&E TDY expert for at least three months during the start-up phase, and again at regular intervals as the program develops. Preferably, however, resources should also be available for the implementing partner to hire an experienced, full-time M&E manager – with an expat being selected if local candidates are unsuitable or inexperienced, as was the case with MTI. This individual would be tasked with designing data collection systems, training and mentoring staff, and broadly incorporating M&E into the culture of the program.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK

PDQIII Task Order #10
Activity #3: Mali Transition Initiative Final Evaluation
Scope of Work

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: August 14, 2015 – March 4, 2016

BACKGROUND

In January 2013, USAID/OTI launched the Mali Transition Initiative (MTI), also known as Programme d'Appui à la Transition du Mali (PAT-Mali), to help support the transition to democracy and long-term development. In line with the rapidly evolving situation in Mali and in support of the U.S. Government's foreign policy objectives, USAID/OTI's overall goal is to assist Mali in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. OTI's objectives in support of Mali's transition have evolved over the life of the project to reflect changes in Mali's political landscape, and currently include:

- **To increase the supply and demand for a peaceful resolution to the conflict:** MTI is providing support to the Malian Government, and in particular the Ministry of Reconciliation, to improve strategic communications and implement national reconciliation initiatives. In addition, the program is working with Malian civil society to create a visible demand for peace through advocacy which combats negative stereotypes while encouraging key stakeholders to continue work towards the signature and implementation of a definitive peace agreement.

- **To restore a sense of normalcy in strategic areas in the North:** The brutality of the 2012 occupation created levels of mistrust, fear, and trauma in communities, which undermined a return to normalcy and national reconciliation. MTI is working to reconnect communities through local dialogue, encouraging the resumption of economic activities and the provision of public services, and supporting cultural events which revive a shared community identity and pride.

- **To counter violent extremism through inclusion of marginalized communities:** The occupation of 2012 demonstrated the vulnerability of select communities to extremist ideology. MTI is working to counter this trend in strategic areas by increasing the social, economic, and political inclusion of marginalized communities who are vulnerable to messaging from violent extremist groups.

MTI is slated to close out on March 31, 2016.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to conduct an independent performance evaluation of MTI, from its launch in January 2013 to the present. The findings will evaluate the strategic approach, relevance, and impact that MTI had on the political transition in Mali and provide a product that concisely explains achievements and lessons learned. The final product will be shared with the Malian government, U.S. government agencies, and other interested groups. The evaluation should leverage the learning tools MTI has developed throughout the life of the program, including regular reporting, program cluster evaluations, media reports, social network analysis, and reports in OTI's activity database, and take into consideration key events in the political transition to determine whether MTI's focus, conceptualization, and objectives were as appropriate as possible.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation report shall seek to answer the following evaluation questions:

1.) To what extent did the MTI's evolving strategy address and reflect the most critical issues related to the success of Mali's democratic transition? (40% LOE)

> In answering this question, the evaluators should consider OTI's success in identifying, anticipating, adapting to, and responding to relevant changes in the political context in a timely fashion and the extent to which the program's geographic targeting was appropriate.

2.) To what extend did MTI contribute to the achievement of its stated goal and objectives? (50% LOE)

> In answering this question, the evaluators should examine the program's goal through the lens of its objectives and draw upon the findings of existing cluster evaluations. In addition, the evaluators should consider whether the program had a coherent and logically connected set of assumptions about how change would happen, the extent to which the program was implemented in line with its goal, and whether resources (both funds and staff) were effectively allocated to maximize impact.

3.) What lessons can be gleaned from MTI that are applicable to other efforts to support peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion and to counter violent extremism in Mali and in the region? (10% LOE)

> In answering this question, the evaluators should consider whether the program effectively utilized technology to implement and monitor its activities.

The LOE percentages noted above are approximate and are meant to reflect OTI's prioritization of these questions for the evaluation team.

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation will be non-experimental and largely qualitative in nature, but mixed methods may be used as appropriate. In answering the evaluation questions, the contractor shall utilize data that is disaggregated and analyzed by sex, whenever such data is available. Methodological specifics will be agreed upon among the evaluators, OTI/Mali, and OTI/Washington, and the evaluators are encouraged to suggest creative approaches. OTI's activity database is a rich source of information on individual projects. The program has also conducted "cluster" evaluations, media analysis, social network analysis, and individual grant evaluations and these data must be studied and utilized in a very substantial way for this evaluation.
The evaluation should not focus on questions that often concern more traditional development programs. As a small grants program that uses experimental approaches to produce short-to medium-term effects on localized violence, long-term sustainability should not be a primary area of focus.

Possible methods for the evaluation include but are not limited to the following:

- Facilitated workshop with key program staff to reflect on program implementation, challenges and successes;
- Field visits to the implementation areas;
- Interviews with key program stakeholders, including U.S. Embassy and USAID staff, community leaders, government officials, and beneficiaries;

- Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with beneficiaries, grantees, and others;
- Direct observation; and
- Documentation review, e.g., cluster evaluations, information in OTI's database (activity notes and activity final evaluations), hotline data, quarterly and annual reports, reports from Strategy Review Sessions (SRSs) and Program Performance Reviews (PPRs), perception surveys, and other existing data.

TEAM COMPOSITION

The evaluation team should be comprised per the specifications described below. The positions to be filled by Social Impact require OTI concurrence of the proposed candidates. Candidates for all positions shall possess fluent written and spoken English and French to be able to conduct field work, prepare a written evaluation, and present briefings. In addition to two evaluators engaged by Social Impact, Ami Morgan, a Program Analyst with the Office of Program, Policy, and Management in USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA/PPM), will participate in the evaluation as a third team member.

- A **senior lead evaluator** with experience designing, implementing, and evaluating activities with specific knowledge of OTI-type programming. The senior lead evaluator will serve as the team leader and will be responsible for the field review, interviews, the draft and final evaluation reports, debriefs in Mali for the MTI Senior Management Team, USAID senior leadership team and, if appropriate, the U.S. Embassy. In addition, the team will present to various audiences in Washington, DC.

- A **senior evaluator** with research and/or evaluation experience in complex political crises. Knowledge of OTI-type programming is preferred. The senior evaluator will support the team leader and participate in the field review, interviews, the draft and final evaluation reports, and debriefs in the field and potentially in Washington, DC.

TIMELINE and LEVEL OF EFFORT (LOE)

The field work of the evaluation will take place over approximately three weeks. The team will travel to Mali on/about January 9, 2016 and depart on/about January 31, 2016. In addition, the team will have a total of two weeks of LOE in advance of departure for reading and some Washington-based interviews in November and December. In addition, this activity will include 18 days of LOE for writing and completion of deliverables. In total, OTI envisions up to 55 days of LOE per member of the evaluation team per the timeline below:

Dates	**Task**	**LOE**
November 15-December 31, 2015	Reading on Mali context. Key materials to be provided by OTI. Key Washington-based interviews.	10 Days
December 1-3, 2015 (precise dates TBD)	Kick-off meetings with OTI team to refine evaluation questions, methodology, travel and logistics; database training, consultations with OTI Senior Leadership, AECOM leadership, and others in the USG interagency.	5 Days (including travel)
January 9-10, 2016	Travel to Mali	2 Days

January 11-29, 2016	Field-based interviews and analysis, debriefs to senior management, staff and USAID mission as appropriate.	17 Days
January 30-31, 2016	Travel from Mali	2 Days
February 1-12, 2016	Report writing; submit draft to OTI by COB February 12, 2016	10 Days
February 17-23, 2016	Receive comments from OTI by COB February 17, 2016. Submit final report by February 23, 2016	5 Days
March 1-4, 2016	Debriefs with OTI, AECOM and USG interagency as determined by OTI.	4 Days
		TOTAL: 55 Days LOE

A six-day work week is approved during the field work for this activity.

TASKS and DELIVERABLES

The evaluation team, under the direction of the team leader, is responsible for completing the following Tasks and submitting the following Deliverables:

- Proposed interviewee list (so OTI can provide contact information);
- Summary of proposed data collection methods;
- Summary of out-briefing before departing Mali;
- Draft evaluation report for comments (content and structure), due February 12, 2016;
- Debrief summary (handout or presentation);
- Debrief(s) with OTI, AECOM and USG interagency as determined by OTI; and
- Final evaluation report, due February 23, 2016

All deliverables will require OTI concurrence prior to their finalization. The final evaluation report will be posted on the USAID's Development Exchange Clearinghouse (DEC) website by Social Impact.

Social Impact will be responsible for the following logistical matters with respect to the two evaluation specialists engaged through this activity:

- Social Impact is responsible for all scheduling, arranging meeting locations, and confirming times/dates/locations with the team and interviewees and grantees. OTI will provide references, but Social Impact is responsible for all scheduling. While the evaluators are in country, OTI's partner AECOM will be responsible for transportation and security. AECOM will make available a conference room in its office for the evaluators to use in Bamako, Gao, and Timbuktu. However, meetings in hotel lobbies, bars, and gardens are sometimes preferable and convenient. USAID/OTI will facilitate access to the U.S. Embassy for meetings with other USAID and Embassy officials, and arrange conference rooms in the Embassy.
- Social Impact shall arrange and purchase all international and U.S. travel. TOCOR concurrence is required for all international travel not included in the original activity budget;
- Social Impact shall provide per diem (lodging and M&IE) for the evaluation team in Mali;

- Social Impact shall fund in-country air travel and ground transportation;
- Social Impact will obtain visas for international travelers; and
- Social Impact and the evaluation team will work with OTI and implementing partners to arrange interviews in Washington, DC and in Mali.

USAID/OTI will arrange international travel, provide per diem, secure lodging, fund in-country air travel, and obtain a visa for the DCHA/PPM member of the evaluation team. Social Impact will, however, be responsible for including the OTI staff member when making ground transportation arrangements for the team while in Bamako. Due to security restrictions in northern Mali, the DCHA/PPM member of the evaluation team will likely have to remain in Bamako when the other evaluators travel to Gao and/or Timbuktu. Social Impact should develop its evaluation plan with this limitation in mind.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The evaluation report should adhere to USAID guidelines and be structured as follows:

- Cover Page with photo
- List of Acronyms
- Table of Contents, which identifies page numbers for the major content areas of the report.
- Executive Summary (2 to 3 pages): should be a clear and concise stand-alone document that gives readers the essential contents of the evaluation report, previewing the main points in order to enable readers to build a mental framework for organizing and understanding the detailed information within the report. Thus, the Executive Summary should include: major lessons learned; maximum of two paragraphs describing the program, summary of objectives and intended outcomes; areas of meaningful under- or over-achievement.
- Methodology: Describe the data collection methods used including strengths and weaknesses, inclusion of stakeholders and staff, rough schedule of activities, description of any statistical analysis undertaken. This section should also address constraints and limitations of the evaluation process and rigor, including what can and cannot be concluded from the evaluation. All actual or potential conflicts of interests among members of the evaluation team should be noted in this section. In accordance with ADS 203, the report should also state why a performance evaluation was conducted in lieu of an impact evaluation.
- Findings: The evaluation team should determine how best to organize this section based on the evaluation questions. In some cases, it is helpful to organize the report against program's objectives, but in other cases it may make more sense to organize the report against evaluation questions.
- Synthesis, Recommendations and Lessons Learned: This is space for the evaluation team to discuss the data and results, and make concrete recommendations for project improvements/changes, pull out organization lessons learned, and generally comment on data and results.
- Contribution to Mali's political transition, including the program's objectives restoring a sense of normalcy in the North, peace process support, and countering violent extremism (CVE).
- Annexes: Data collection instruments in English and French; list of stakeholders interviewed with number and type of interactions; the scope of work; qualitative protocols developed and used; any data sets can be provided in electronic format; any required photos; and participant profiles or other special documentation needed.

POINT OF CONTACT

The OTI/Mali Program Manager in Washington will serve as the point of contact for overall coordination of the Washington meetings. There will be some occasions where he/she arranges the meeting and

location and others where he/she may provide contact information for the consultants to arrange their own logistics. The TOCOR will remain the point of contact for all technical direction and requests requiring formal concurrence

ANNEX II: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Each KII and FGD was tailored to draw on the specific knowledge of respondents, and as such the following guides are intended to be for demonstrative purposes only.

KIIs with grantees

1. Can you please describe your relationship with MTI?
2. Can you please describe the activities you conducted that were supported by MTI?
3. Who benefitted from these activities, and in what way?
4. How do you know what impact your activities had? Can you give examples of this impact?
5. Why was it important to conduct these activities? What would have happened had the activities not occurred?
6. If you could conduct the activity again, would you make any changes? What lessons did you learn while conducting the activity?
7. Are you aware of any unintended negative effects caused by the activity?

FGDs with beneficiaries

1. Can you please describe the activities you were involved in through [*insert activity name*]?
2. What is the best thing about [*insert activity name*]?
3. The intended aims of [*insert activity name*] were to [*insert intended objectives of the activity*]. To what extent do you think that [*insert activity name*] achieved these intended objectives?
4. [*If respondents reply positively to Q3*] What were the critical factors that helped [*insert grantee name*] achieve this success?
5. [*If respondents reply negatively to Q3*] What were the critical factors that hindered [*insert grantee name*] success? How could [*insert grantee name*] have achieved more success?

ANNEX III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The following individuals were interviewed for the purposes of the evaluation:

Name	Role
USG/AECOM D.C.	
Alzouma, Dana	USAID Country Development Officer
Deschamps, Colin (Skype interview)	OTI Deputy Team Leader Africa (former)
Ethridge, Will	AECOM Program Coordinator
George, Stacia	OTI Acting Director
Hall, Andrew	OTI Team Leader, Applied Best Practices & Coordination
Litwin, Joshua	OTI Program Manager, Africa Team
Mamula, Megan	OTI Africa Team Leader
Nattrass, Kate	OTI Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist
Rivera, Flor	AECOM Senior Program Officer
Sherman, Justin	OTI FPD Chief
USG/AECOM Mali	
Boure, Yaya	MTI M&E Officer (former)
Bryant, Jess	OTI Deputy Country Representative
Carnero, Alejandro	MTI Regional Program Manager
Folmsbee, Paul (Ambassador)	US Ambassador to Mali
Fomba, Abdoul Kassim Ibrahim	MTI Program Officer (Bamako)
Gerard, Olivier	Chief of Party
Hirst, Joel (phone interviews)	OTI Country Representative
Mahamadou, Ibrahim	MTI Project Specialist (Gao)
Mahamane, Ahmadou	MTI Project Specialist (Gao)
Mahamd, Mohamed Illy Ag (phone interview)	OTI Cash for Work Manager, Menaka
Pacific, Erin	USAID Deputy MD
Salihou, Adizetou	Cash for Work Manager (Gao)
Tanguy, Andre	MTI Project Specialist (Timbuktu)
Sissoko, Karim	MTI Program Officer (Bamako) (former)
Walet, Zeinabou	MTI Project Specialist (Timbuktu)
Willett, Amanda (Skype interview)	MTI Chief of Party (former)
Yacouba, Maiga	MTI Project Specialist (Timbuktu)
Yattara. Almahady	MTI Projects Officer (Timbuktu)
Young, Andrew	US Deputy Chief of Mission

Name/Organization	Involvement/Role
KIIs with program partners/grantees/consultants	
Action Group for Blocking the Way to Injustice	Grantee for *Peace* activities
Academie Enseignement	Grantee for *Normalcy* activities
Alhousseinyi Maiga, Mohamed	Reconciliation consultant
Allahidou Youth Association	Grantee for *CVE* activities
APEM	Grantee for an *Elections* activity
Association Lassalterey-Horey	Grantee for a *Normalcy* activity
Barbosa, Andrea (Skype interview)	*Peace* / *CVE* cluster evaluator
Benalla, Zineb (Skype interview)	CVE and civil society consultant
Chamady Comedie	Grantee for *Elections* / *Peace* activities
Club de la Jeunesse du Monde	Grantee for a *Normalcy* activity
Community Sanitation Organization, TIMBUKTU	Grantee for *Normalcy* activities
Cramer, Jake (Skype interview)	Social network analysis consultant
CSO Representative, Ansongo (phone interview)	Stakeholder
Director of Culture, Timbuktu	Stakeholder
Ensemble (original committee)	Grantee for *Ensemble* activities
Ensemble (present committee)	Grantee for *Ensemble* activities
Headmaster, Douenza High School	Grantee for *Normalcy* activities
Mayor of Ansongo (phone interview)	Stakeholder
Mayor of Goundam	Stakeholder
Mayor of Gounzoureye	Grantee for *CVE* activities
Mayor of Menaka (phone interview)	Grantee for *Normalcy* activities
Mayor of Timbuktu	Stakeholder
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Grantee for *Peace* activities
Ministry of National Reconciliation	Grantee for *Peace* activities
President of Douenza Council (phone interview)	Stakeholder
President of Menaka Council (phone interview)	Stakeholder
Prado, Amalia (Skype interview)	*Normalcy*/*Ensemble* cluster evaluator
Regional Council of Youth, Gao	Grantee for a *Peace* activity
Safaa, Youness	Strategic communications/media monitoring consultant
SOS-Democratie	Grantee for *Elections* activities
Spiritual Leader, Kaji	Stakeholder
Studio Tamani	Grantee for *Peace* activities
Think Peace	Grantee for *Peace*/*Ensemble* activities
Timbuktu Communal Youth Council	Grantee for *Normalcy* activities
Timbuktu Urban Commune	Grantee for *Normalcy* activities
Village Chief, Kaji	Stakeholder
Youth Chamber of Mali	Grantee for *Elections* activities
Youth Community Chief, Gounzoureye	Grantee for a *CVE* activity
FGDs with Activity Beneficiaries/Participants	
Peace garden beneficiaries, Timbuktu	*Normalcy:* MTI081/MTI249
Cash-for-work beneficiaries, Gounzoureye	*CVE*: MTI130/MTI194
Public debates on peace process participants, Bamako	*Ensemble*: MTI155/MTI190
Public debates on UN role participants, Bamako	*Peace*: MTI264

ANNEX IV: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES WITH THE SNA STUDY

The following methodological issues with the Social Network Analysis study were apparent:

- Only two female enumerators were used in the second wave. This places question marks on the data gained from women in general given the issues associated with males interviewing females (and *vice versa*) in such environments. While these issues may be dependent on the context, in many locations women are less likely to provide responses to male researchers.

- The survey instrument was excessively long, presenting likely issues with 'respondent fatigue' that may have distorted the latter portion of data in particular. This is difficult to demonstrate through data in this instance, but survey specialists argue that respondents may give less thought to their responses after a variable amount of time.

- Rather than adopting a recognized 'starting point' technique, in certain locations the researchers began by interviewing the village chief and 'fanned out' from this initial location. This may have caused the sample to become unrepresentative in that it was disproportionately comprised of the 'types' of individuals who happen to live near villages chiefs, e.g. potentially in terms of occupation, wealth, and so on.

- In one neighborhood the researchers were required to conduct interviews in the mosque, rather than at the doorsteps of the respondents. This may have introduced (a) a bias towards religiously inclined individuals (i.e. those not present at the mosque would not have been sampled), and (b) a bias towards more conservative responses as individuals may have elected to reply in a manner consistent with the teachings of this particular mosque.

- In certain locations the research teams were required to be accompanied by escorts, potentially decreasing the likelihood that the interviewees provided open and honest responses.

- The consultant expressed doubt that the specific technique used to randomize the respondent at the doorstep was applied consistently, leaving the possibility that 'heads of household' or family members who happened to be present during the study process (i.e. individuals whose principle occupation occurs within the home) were overrepresented in the sample. An inconsistency in the application of this technique between locations could have driven the gender and age irregularities noted in *Section 5.4*.

The following somewhat broader issues are also worth highlighting:

- The survey waves were only separated by eight months, providing little opportunity for changes in perceptions or behaviors to have occurred. With sufficient planning, the research should have begun prior to the initiation of the CVE line of programming, i.e. thus providing a baseline against which future patterns could have been measured.

- There is a strong case that the instrument should specifically have referred to MTI activities, for instance, asking about the impact of the football tournament on community relations. There is a risk that such questions may have distorted the wider data (e.g. through encouraging individuals to provide positive replies in the hope of increasing future MTI funding), but this could have largely been avoided through leaving such questions until the final stages of the instrument.

ANNEX V: CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING MTI DATA COLLECTION

As observed in *Lesson IV*, improved evidence could have been generated by MTI through a number of modifications to their research methods:

- **Qualitative Research:** While qualitative research was utilized by MTI (e.g. through the cluster evaluations), interviews and focus groups could have provided a comparatively inexpensive route through which to systematically collect critical data, e.g. on perceptions of 'normalcy' or 'social cohesion' in remote locations such as Ansongo or Menaka, or on the extent to which political leaders were influenced to sign or remain faithful to the accords by the *Peace Process* or *Ensemble* efforts. Additional qualitative research would also undoubtedly have helped the MTI team better understand in greater detail why certain members of the public continued to oppose a negotiated settlement.

- **Micro-surveys:** While the SNA survey was of questionable value (see *Section 5.4*), it is entirely possible to conduct rigorous quantitative research in environments such as Mali. Micro-surveys arguably offer a more suitable method than major polls, both for budgetary reasons and as their smaller size helps ensure methodological consistency. For instance, this could potentially have been achieved through a survey of Kaji village, rather than Gounzoureye in its entirety. Of course, the trade-off is a reduction in the extent to which broad inferences can be made given the localized nature of micro-surveys. Nevertheless, a longitudinal micro-survey of perceptions of the Tuareg in specific regions of Bamako, for instance, could also have offered indicative evidence of progress of the *Ensemble* campaign. Irrespective of size, surveys are sufficiently technical to require specialists throughout the design, implementation and analysis phases.

- **Market research of messaging campaigns:** While messaging efforts are notoriously difficult to evaluate, one option would have been to apply experimental market research techniques on small samples of listeners/viewers. For instance, these could have been used to test the efficacy of messages on voting procedures or understanding of the peace accord. More ambitiously, it may also have been possible to test a range of messages against different individuals to determine which of these delivered the greatest results in terms of improved knowledge or attitudes. While there are always concerns regarding the extent to which findings from such techniques are applicable outside of 'laboratory conditions,' and time-constraints would likely have limited their applicability, such approaches may have been informative. As with surveys research, such methods are technical and thus require specialists throughout the design, implementation and analysis phases.

- **Media monitoring as an evaluation tool:** While MTI used media monitoring, for instance, to track broad changes in sentiment towards the Malian government, it was not applied specifically as an evaluation tool. This could have been achieved through monitoring changes in attitudes in the local media (e.g. towards the peace accord) before and after major MTI events such as rallies or marches, and again three and six months subsequently to determine the extent to which the observed changes were lasting. Of course, questions remain regarding the extent the media leads or is led by public opinion, but nevertheless this could have provided one additional research tool against which to triangulate others.

- **Optimizing the hotline data:** MTI established a hotline through which members of the public could communicate with the program. The hotline number was advertised in relation to specific activities, and dedicated hotline staff returned the calls of those who contacted MTI. The hotline respondents were unrepresentative of the population of beneficiaries as they were self-selecting,

and as such the resultant data was largely unsuitable for numerical analysis.[85] Nevertheless, it had substantial value as a qualitative research tool, and the Evaluation Team concludes that its worth could have been further enhanced through:

  - Ensuring that none of the questions were phrased in a 'leading' manner.[86]
  - Ensuring that greater nuance was captured, potentially through transcribing the calls.
  - Calling selected members of the public back after a period of perhaps three or six months to determine the extent to which effects (for instance, on perceptions of Tuareg or other communities) were sustained.
  - Ensuring that adequate feedback systems were in place to ensure that relevant program staff routinely saw the key information gained through this system, and as such were able to make programmatic adaptations.

- **Optimizing the 'blogging' data:** MTI also established a cadre of 'bloggers' who interviewed participants of specific MTI activities often in areas where there was not enough coverage for the hotline. Issues with representativeness were also apparent with much of the blogging data, and as such many of the recommendations for the hotline are also applicable to this tool. However, this is not the case, for instance, for training events and cash-for-work initiatives as lists of participants were available, and thus bloggers would have been able to select representative samples of respondents, e.g. using techniques such as selecting every third individual on the list. In such instances it would have been appropriate to use the blogging data as a quantitative tool, and statistical analysis could have been undertaken to show changes in knowledge or attitudes.

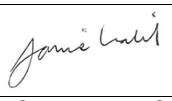
[85] The *Ensemble Cluster Evaluation* (2015, 4) provides an example of inappropriate numerical analysis of hotline data that will likely have mislead certain readers.

[86] Examples of leading questions include: "Do you think that these people can play a role in the reconciliation and social cohesion process at the local level?" (MTI136), and "Do you think that the small infrastructures activities that employ members of your community promote local reconciliation and peace?" (MTI030).

ANNEX VI: DISCLOSURE OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

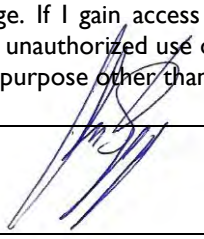
Name	James Khalil
Title	Senior Lead Evaluator
Organization	Social Impact
Evaluation Award Number *(contract or other instrument)*	Q011OAA1500012
USAID Project(s) Evaluated *(Include project name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)*	OTI PDQ III TO10 Act 3: Mali Final Evaluation
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: *Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:* *1. Close family member who is an employee of the USAID operating unit managing the project(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* *2. Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose projects are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation.* *3. Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the project(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the project design or previous iterations of the project.* *4. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* *5. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* *6. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular projects and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation.*	

I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Signature	
Date	12 Febuary 2016

Name	Oren Ipp
Title	Senior Evaluator
Organization	Social Impact
Evaluation Award Number *(contract or other instrument)*	Q011OAA1500012
USAID Project(s) Evaluated *(Include project name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)*	OTI PDQ III TO10 Act 3: Mali Final Evaluation
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	No
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: *Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:* *7. Close family member who is an employee of the USAID operating unit managing the project(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* *8. Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose projects are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation.* *9. Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the project(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the project design or previous iterations of the project.* *10. Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the USAID operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* *11. Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* *12. Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular projects and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation.*	

I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Signature	
Date	12 Febuary 2016

ANNEX VII: OTI STATEMENT OF DIFFERENCES

4/19/2016

Statement of Differences – Mali Transition Initiative Final Evaluation

USAID/OTI welcomed the external final evaluation by Social Impact of its Mali Transition Initiative (MTI) and was eager to receive an independent assessment of the program's relevance, impact, and lessons learned. After an exchange of drafts, the evaluation report now provides a reasonably thoughtful assessment of the program, but significant differences remain between USAID/OTI and the evaluators. USAID/OTI's primary concern is that the evaluators were unable to adequately respond to the mutually agreed upon scope of work. A draft version of the evaluation revealed that the evaluators' responses to two of the three evaluation questions fell short of USAID/OTI's expectations. The evaluators focused on OTI's overall program design and monitoring and evaluation systems, neither of which were mentioned in the scope of work nor identified as areas of interest to OTI for the final evaluation report. These shortcomings were not for lack of support by the MTI team in Mali, who provided all necessary logistical support and requested documents.

A second substantial difference is that the evaluators seemed to reject out of hand the qualitative evidence of program contributions to upper-level effects (Lesson IV – Inadequate Evidence Collection). Without consideration of this large body of evidence, the program appears substantially less effective than USAID/OTI believes it to be. Given the fast-changing nature of programming and complexity of the environments in which USAID/OTI works, it is often difficult to build in quantitative program measures such as traditional baseline surveys. Considering the constraints, the Mali program's "clusters" (strategic groupings of activities around shared results) and their evaluations – carried out by independent consultants – incorporated extensive qualitative data from beneficiary interviews, database activity notes, activity evaluations, and smartphone surveys conducted during activity implementation. The program even established an innovative activity hotline to incorporate real-time feedback into each activity and employed creative quantitative measures, such as social network analysis in an area of northern Mali once considered too dangerous and inaccessible to even begin working in.

USAID/OTI appreciates the revisions made by the evaluators after receiving comments on the first draft of the evaluation, and finds the second version to be much improved. Nonetheless, the evaluators have not fully adhered to the requirements set forth in the scope of work, resulting in a product to which USAID/OTI takes significant exception. The evaluators assert it was impossible to make conclusions about the program's higher-level impact, but never indicated that the time or resources allotted to this activity posed a constraint to completing the SOW. Instead, the evaluation team chose to focus on issues

outside of the SOW and USAID/OTI regrets that the collective effort of MTI staff and that of the evaluators themselves did not result in a thorough assessment of a highly successful program.

ANNEX VIII: AECOM STATEMENT OF DIFFERENCES

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April 6, 2016

This document captures the statement of differences in response to the Final Evaluation report on the Mali Transition Initiative delivered by Social Impact on 08 March 2016.

Through a task order under the SWIFT IQC with USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, AECOM International Development implemented the three-year Mali Transition Initiative (MTI). The program, initiated in January 2013, sought to support the country's political transition to bring an end to the political crisis which resulted from civil war in the North, a coup in the South, and occupation of two-thirds of the country by extremists.

During the last eighteen months of programming, MTI developed a pilot program to counter violent extremism in Gao Region. The program's theory of change for this objective was: if MTI worked to increase social integration and decreasing marginalization, then communities would be less vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists. As a result, among the many monitoring and evaluation tools the program used to measure program impact, MTI used social network analysis (SNA) methodology to measure its impact on increasing social cohesion in its target areas. AECOM hired Jacob Cramer, PhD to design and conduct a quantitative SNA survey over two distinct time periods in Gounzoureye Commune, Gao Region.

This statement of differences presents an alternative to the evaluation team's finding that the SNA study suffered "major methodological issues" such that there was sufficient basis on which to reject the findings (section 5.4 CVE) is incorrect. In fact, the SNA survey was appropriately designed and methodological best practices were used. The limitations pointed to in the evaluation owe primarily to the reality that the survey was administered in a region recovering from war, and in fact still embroiled in conflict. Additionally, the region is culturally extremely conservative, and the target community has been marginalized for decades. These limitations were noted in detail in the SNA report, and the analysis as offered takes them into account.

In particular, AECOM believes it necessary to provide supplemental clarification in relation to the following issues highlighted by the evaluators:

Disproportional gender representation

"…(T)he proportion of female respondents in the second wave ranged from 39 per cent in the village of Kaji (63 of 162 respondents) to 65 per cent in Tacharane (112 of 172), two figures that are improbable from a statistical perspective had the research methods been sound.[1]" (page 29) and "…In any case, there is a strong argument that the consultant should have introduced a selection criterion to ensure a 50:50 split of males and females in all locations." (footnote 79)

AECOM Clarification

In fact, all efforts were made to accurately sample the population in Gounzoureye, however this was complicated due to the active conflict being fought in northern Mali. In some villages – Tacharane for example – it was reported that finding male respondents was difficult, since the males were "out fighting." Moreover, small sample sizes in each particular village exacerbated this issue. (This was intended to be a survey of Gounzoureye Commune first, and of individual villages second.) Thus, although there is a disparity in male versus female respondents, this is not due to methodological or survey administrative issues, but rather to realities on the ground. Furthermore, in response to Footnote 1, the decision was made that the survey sample should accurately reflect the actual composition of the population. Artificially imposing a 50:50 split would have given respondents a weight unreflective of the population demographics. In areas like Tacharane, where females are more prevalent than males, it is important to accurately capture sentiment and opinions of the town according to its composition at the time of the survey.

Age difference between survey rounds

"…Methodological issues are also revealed by the fact that the average age of the respondents inexplicably increased from 38 in the first wave to 43 in the second, a difference that alone could easily account for the supposed changes in perceptions over time."

AECOM Clarification

The figures cited are not correct. According to the data, the average age of respondents was 41.5 in the first round; and 43 in the second round. Considering that 8 months passed between the first and the second round, the difference in average ages was not considered to be statistically significant.

Choice of survey technique

"…The selection of methods should also be suitable to the environment, and in this particular case a micro-survey would have arguably been more appropriate (see Annex V)." (page 30)

"…CVE: Micro-survey in Kaji village only as an economical/more rigorous alternative to a full survey throughout Gounzoureye (see Annex V)." (page 33)

AECOM Clarification

A micro-survey would not have been an appropriate research design given the goals of the study, which were to understand the connectedness in Gounzoureye Commune, by looking at the relationships between and within the villages of the commune. Conducting a survey only in Kaji, while certainly able to provide interesting information, would not have begun to speak to marginalization in Gounzoureye as a whole. For decades, the villages have based their interactions—or justified their isolation—based on religious beliefs. Generalizing the prevalent dynamics between sectors of Gounzoureye Commune based on a survey in only one village would have been irresponsible. Moreover, surveying in Kaji alone would have greatly skewed the data, since Kaji is considered to be the birthplace of the Reformist sect in the Gao area.

Lack of female enumerators

"…Only two female enumerators were used in the second wave. This places question marks on the data gained from women in general given the issues associated with males interviewing females (and vice versa) in such environments. While these issues may be dependent on the context, in many locations women are less likely to provide responses to male researchers." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

AECOM acknowledges this likelihood. Only two female enumerators were used in the second wave. In spite of efforts to the contrary, the local firm engaged to administer the survey was unable to find additional females to employ. In light of this limitation, the stipulation was made that female enumerators had to conduct some surveys in each of the thirteen villages. Further, we received assurances from the male enumerators that they were not having any recurring or systematic issues in surveying females. This issue was addressed to the best extent possible, in light of the difficulties that the local firm experienced in hiring female enumerators.

Length of survey

"The survey instrument was excessively long, presenting likely issues with 'respondent fatigue' that may have distorted the latter portion of data in particular. This is difficult to demonstrate through data in this instance, but survey specialists argue that respondents may give less thought to their responses after a variable amount of time." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

The survey instrument was piloted prior to both the first and the second rounds. In each pilot, the enumerators and participants agreed that the survey length was appropriate. It is worth noting that the average second round survey was completed in less than 25 minutes, a reasonable duration aligning with field survey norms. The evaluators' assertion that the "survey instrument was excessively long" demonstrates their lack of familiarity with the survey tool and the environment in which it was employed.

Sampling Technique 1

"Rather than adopting a recognized 'starting point' technique, in certain locations the researchers began by interviewing the village chief and 'fanned out' from this initial location. This may have caused the sample to become unrepresentative in that it was disproportionately comprised of the 'types' of individuals who happen to live near villages chiefs, e.g. potentially in terms of occupation, wealth, and so on." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

A recognized "starting point" technique was not a design option available to the program. In order to gain access to the villages, it was a requirement that we begin our survey process with the village chief. Respect and tradition are extremely important in conservative settings such as Gounzoureye. Thus, in order for our enumerators to gain access to the villages, and for village residents to be willing to interact with the enumerators, approval from the village chief was required. Had survey work not started with the village chief, the program would have been unable to survey *anyone* in the village. Moreover, since the villages are relatively small, and since the concept of "household" in Gounzoureye is different than Western definitions (in Gounzoureye, a "household" may include an entire extended family living in a larger compound area), enumerators surveyed the expanse of every village in order to get enough respondents. In sum, it was entirely necessary to begin the survey with the village chiefs, however that issue is moot, as the sample was *not* "disproportionately comprised of 'types' of individuals who happen to live near the village chiefs." As with previous points, this point reflects the evaluators' lack of familiarity with the sociocultural aspects of the survey zone and their impact on survey implementation.

Sampling technique 2

"In one neighborhood the researchers were required to conduct interviews in the mosque, rather than at the doorsteps of the respondents. This may have introduced (a) a bias towards religiously inclined individuals (i.e. those not present at the mosque would not have been sampled); and, (b) a bias towards more conservative responses as individuals may have elected to reply in a manner consistent with the teachings of this particular mosque." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

Yes, this is true. In one neighborhood of one village, enumerators were required to conduct the interviews in the mosque. The key word here is "required." This was not an oversight on the part of the design team or the survey administrators, rather, in order to survey this area, enumerators were *required* to survey respondents in the village's mosque. While the program fully recognized the potential bias of surveying individuals in the mosque, the neighborhood in question – Dar es Salaam – was central to the extremist population in Gounzoureye, and in turn a very important place to conduct surveys. This is a limitation that should be noted, however it was an extremely small portion of the broader survey, and it was entirely necessary in order to capture the spectrum of views and opinions from this area.

Sampling technique 3

"In certain locations the research teams were required to be accompanied by escorts, potentially decreasing the likelihood that the interviewees provided open and honest responses." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

Escorts were required in some cases to gain *access* to the village, and for introductions to the village chiefs. However, there are *no reported instances* of the escorts following the enumerators into individual household compounds to be on hand during survey implementation.

Timing of survey rounds

"The survey waves were only separated by eight months, providing little opportunity for changes in perceptions or behaviors to have occurred. With sufficient planning, the research should have begun prior to the initiation of the CVE line of programming, i.e. thus providing a baseline against which future patterns could have been measured." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

The program acknowledges that more time between survey rounds, or additional survey rounds, could have better captured changes in perceptions or behaviors. However, two realities prevented this approach. First, the generation of a baseline, or anything close to it, was not possible due to the dynamics of the target zone and communities. The program first had to establish trust with extremely conservative and closed communities. Until the program was able to achieve an "opening," survey efforts were not possible, and once opened, the program was compelled to benefit from what could have been a very limited window of opportunity in which to engage. Second, the MTI program timeline required that grant clearances and implementation end well in advance of program close-out. As a result, there was limited time for implementation between survey rounds.

Connection of survey to MTI programming

"There is a strong case that the instrument should specifically have referred to MTI activities, for instance, asking about the impact of the football tournament on community relations. There is a risk that such questions may have distorted the wider data (e.g. through encouraging individuals to provide positive replies in the hope of increasing future MTI funding), but this could have largely been avoided through leaving such questions until the final stages of the instrument." (page 46)

AECOM Clarification

A core concept is social network theory is social capital, and how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In designing and implementing the surveys, AECOM was intentional in not asking about MTI activities. The program sought to assess indirect attitudinal shifts and connectedness in the villages, which required the survey to refrain from discussing specific MTI programming. The program wanted to see if villagers were becoming more connected and integrated, *without directly realizing it*. Had we of included questions regarding MTI programming, we maintain that that effect would have be lost. This point as presented by the evaluators reflects their lack of familiarity with the theoretical underpinnings of this effort.

Summary

In summary, AECOM believes that *none of the issues raised by the evaluators warrant the conclusion that there is a* "sufficient basis on which to reject the findings." Rather, the issues raised demonstrate both the lack of contextual understanding of Gounzoureye Commune, as well as the actual circumstances that challenged survey implementation.

The decades of marginalization of the Gounzoureye community left it extremely conservative and suspicious of outsiders. The program was fully aware of these issues, and adapted methods where possible in order to successfully implement the surveys. These modifications were referenced in the SNA report. Indeed, the program took measures necessary – without compromising methodological integrity – to be able to gather data from an extremely difficult area. AECOM believes that the fact that any survey was able to be carried out in Gounzoureye is a considerable feat, and is due to the tireless efforts of the program team prior to, and during, survey implementation.

The evaluators' lack of familiarity with the conditions and context on the ground made it very difficult for them to evaluate what they considered to be the perceived shortcomings and limitations of the survey. In reality, these implementation features were necessary and intentional adaptations which permitted the survey's successful administration.

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