

Doing Research in **MALI**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 2026



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The Global Development Network is a public international organization that supports high-quality, policy-oriented social science research in low- and middle-income countries to promote better lives.

ROCARE-Mali is a non-governmental organization focused on educational research. It aims to promote national expertise in educational research and a culture of research in order to improve educational policies and practices in Mali. This expertise encompasses the strengthening of research capacity, the dissemination of knowledge, and collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of education.

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Introduction

Against a backdrop of major socioeconomic, security, and political challenges, strengthening the social science research system in Mali is a strategic priority for generating reliable knowledge, informing public policy, and promoting sustainable development. Despite its growing importance, research as a sector remains insufficiently structured, funded, and studied, which limits its influence on decision-making processes and national reforms. It is with this in mind that the Réseau Ouest et Centre Africain de Recherche en Éducation (ROCARE-Mali), in partnership with the Global Development Network (GDN), conducted an assessment of the national social science research system as part of the global Doing Research (DR) initiative.

The DR Assessment in Mali constitutes a systematic analysis of the national social science research landscape. It is based on a methodology validated internationally in 2017 and adapted to the Malian context in 2024. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining literature review, quantitative data collection, and qualitative investigations. The process was structured around three main stages: analysis of the national context, mapping of research system stakeholders, and conducting surveys with key informants, including researchers, institutional leaders, and public policymakers.

Beyond the institutional assessment, the report highlights the structural constraints and opportunities likely to influence the development of social science research in Mali. In particular, it examines institutional capacities, funding mechanisms, dynamics of scientific collaboration, knowledge dissemination practices, and the interactions between research and public policy.

Key Findings

Low institutionalization of the use of the social sciences in public policy. The study highlights a major paradox: although the social sciences are widely recognized as useful for public policy development, their effective integration into decision-making processes remains limited. Nearly 90% of the policymakers surveyed consider the social sciences to be useful or very useful; however, exchanges between researchers and policymakers remain poorly structured, weakly institutionalized, and often ad hoc. Consequently, research findings are rarely systematically integrated into the formulation, implementation, or evaluation of public policies.

Geographic concentration and weak national research capacity. National research capacity remains limited and heavily concentrated in the Bamako district. Mali has approximately 117 social science researchers per million inhabitants, or 1,171 researchers representing nearly half of the national research workforce. Furthermore, 92.74% of researchers work in Bamako, which exacerbates territorial imbalances and limits the production of knowledge rooted in local realities outside the capital.

Persistent gender inequalities in research. The study reveals significant gender inequalities within the research system. Women account for only 12.13% of social science researchers and 14.29% of administrative officials. This underrepresentation also affects access to scientific leadership roles, funding, mentoring opportunities, and career advancement prospects.

Structural underfunding of scientific research. Research funding remains largely insufficient. National research and development spending accounts for only 0.18% of GDP, a level well below the 1% target set by the African Union. This structural weakness affects research infrastructure, access to documentary and digital resources, scientific publishing capacity, and doctoral training.

High dependence on external funding. The study highlights a high dependence on external funding. Approximately 50.2% of research funding comes from international partners, while some institutional estimates indicate a dependency of up to 90% in certain fields, with national resources primarily allocated to payroll expenses. This situation contributes to aligning scientific priorities with donor agendas rather than national needs.

Low scientific output and low visibility of knowledge. Scientific output and the dissemination of knowledge remain low. On average, each researcher produces 0.14 peer-reviewed publications, while only 18.87% of scientific work is available via open access. This low visibility is due to the limited number of national scientific journals, the lack of digital platforms, and a weak culture of science communication.

Leverages for Transformation

1. Strengthen the interface between research and public policy

The report highlights the need to establish sustainable structures for interactions between researchers and

public policymakers. The creation of institutional mechanisms for knowledge transfer—particularly research-policy liaison units within universities, research centers, and ministries—would facilitate the incorporation of scientific findings into public policy. The establishment of permanent frameworks for dialogue would also promote better knowledge exchange among scientific, institutional, and social stakeholders.

2. Strengthen national research funding

The report recommends establishing a stable, transparent, and sustainable national funding mechanism to reduce dependence on external funding. The creation of a national fund dedicated to social science research would support projects aligned with the country's strategic priorities. A gradual increase in public investment in research and development also appears indispensable.

3. Strengthening Institutional Recognition of the Social Sciences

The study recommends the development of a national evaluation framework specific to the social sciences, complementary to the existing AMAQ-SUP mechanisms. This framework should value not only scientific publications, but also the societal impact of research, outreach activities, and contributions to public policy.

4. Professionalizing research and scientific communication capabilities

Developing skills in scientific communication, outreach, and knowledge transfer is a major challenge. The report recommends integrating specialized modules into training programs as well as establishing mentoring programs for young researchers and female researchers.

5. Developing a collaborative and open research ecosystem

The report highlights the need to strengthen synergies between universities, research centers, public administrations, the private sector, and civil society. The creation of a National Research Coordination Council, under the auspices of the CNRST, would help improve the coherence of science policies and institutional coordination. The development of a national open science portal would also promote access to scientific data and the visibility of national research outputs.

Conclusions

The study concludes that Mali's social science research system has significant strategic potential but continues to face persistent structural weaknesses. Despite the existence of an active scientific community and policymakers' growing interest in evidence-based knowledge, several constraints still limit the system's effectiveness: chronic underfunding, heavy reliance on external funding, geographical concentration of research capacity, weak scientific infrastructure, and inadequate mechanisms for knowledge dissemination.

The analysis also highlights a lack of coordination between research, public policy, and society. Scientific findings are still not sufficiently translated into operational decision-making tools. However, the report emphasizes that a coordinated reform of the system—based on increased national funding, improved scientific governance, the professionalization of research communication, and the institutionalization of the dialogue between science and policy—would make it possible to sustainably strengthen the contribution of the social sciences to national development.

Key Data Points

- **Overburdened university faculty:** 73 students per faculty member in higher education, compared to a UNESCO standard of 25:1.
- **Low national density of researchers:** 117 social science researchers per million inhabitants.
- **Excessive centralization of research capacity:** 92.74% of researchers concentrated in the Bamako district.
- **Underrepresentation of women in research:** 12.13% of social science researchers are women.
- **Insufficient public funding for research:** 0.18% of GDP allocated to research and development.
- **High dependence on external funding:** 50.2% of research funding provided by international partners.
- **Low accessibility of scientific output:** only 18.87% of publications are available via open access.

Strategic Recommendations

A. Strengthen the governance of the research system

Establish a National Research Coordination Council under the supervision of the CNRST to improve the coherence, strategic direction, and coordination of the national research system.

B. Modernize scientific infrastructure

Invest in digital libraries, document management platforms, anti-plagiarism software, scientific databases, and digital research infrastructure.

C. Promote gender equity

Implement targeted mentoring, funding, and support policies for women researchers to reduce structural inequalities in access to scientific careers and institutional leadership roles.

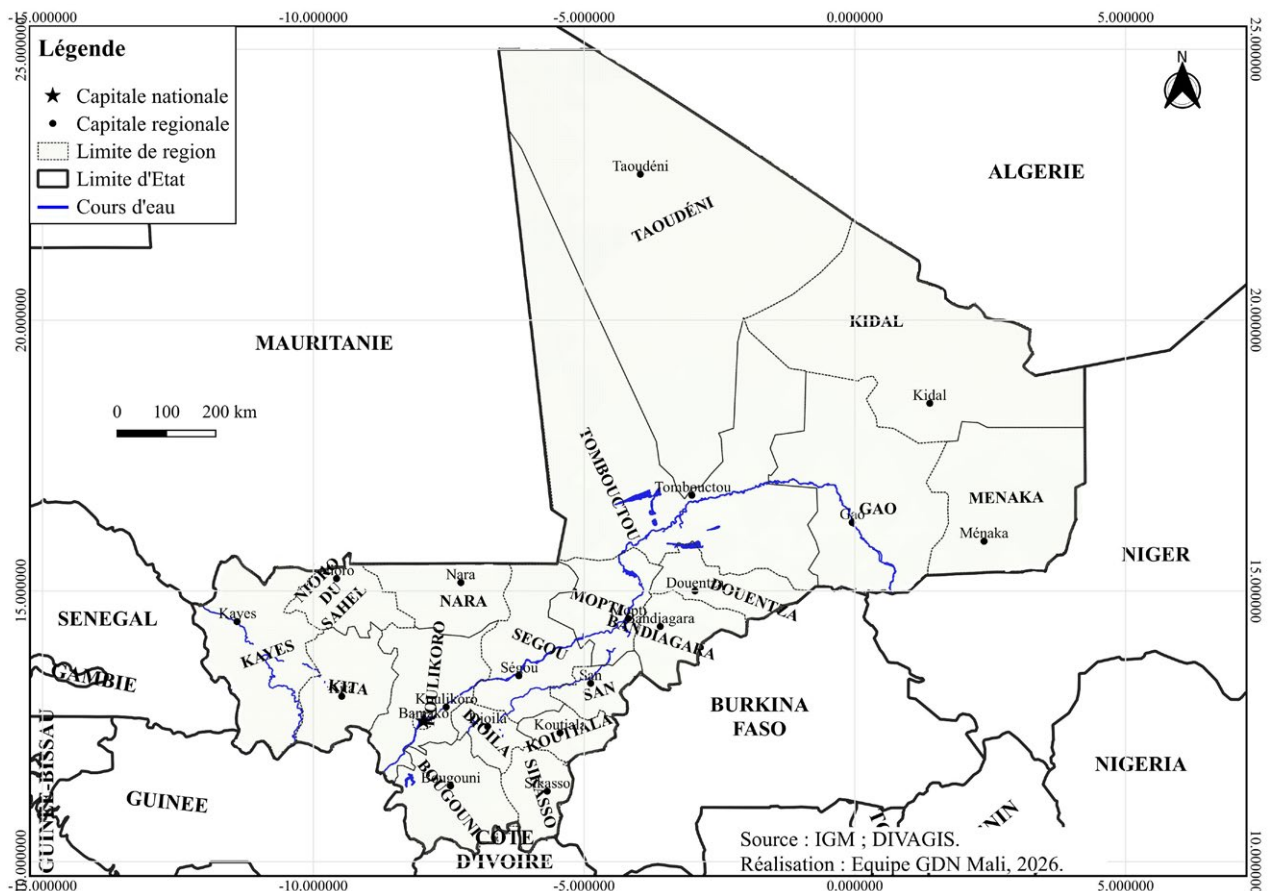
D. Rebalancing teaching and research workloads

Revise the teaching loads of faculty members to allow them more time for research activities, scientific publication, and participation in academic networks.

E. Develop a national open science policy

Create a national open science portal designed to centralize, archive, and disseminate Malian scientific output in order to enhance its visibility, accessibility, and impact.

Map of Mali





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