

**Targeting in social protection systems: comparative study  
on two “HEA” methods and a “PMT” targeting method for  
cash transfer programmes in Gao circle, Mali, 2016-17**

*- Summary of the qualitative study report -*

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## Main findings

**a. The Household Economy Approach (HEA) used in Tilemsi by Oxfam** is based on a method that emphasises rapid targeting and resource saving, that largely delegates to communities the choice of beneficiary households, and that is also designed to prevent head-on conflicts with local leaders. In reality, this “guideline” is reinforced by the team itself, very concerned and respectful of community practices, but who is not actually trained or resourced to impose protocols or procedures on communities, and who do not feel the need to be. The counting process coupled with targeting is limited in terms of critical operations for a single community identification session. The influence of leaders, which, by custom, is very little contested and exists mainly in small fractions, is reinforced by the weakness of counter-powers (unlikely presence of observers due to security issues, very limited de facto General Assemblies, permanent committees, inefficient corrective mechanisms). The communities, including beneficiaries, have very poor knowledge of cash transfer programmes and of its targeting process. The possibilities of inclusion or exclusion are thus high. However, two prominent practices, that we could qualify now as customary<sup>1</sup>, undermine the principle of targeting as defined by the “doctrine” of cash transfer programmes:

- Sharing assistance by changing beneficiary households from one targeting to the other according to a “rotation” principle,
- Non-compliant distributions: changes of beneficiaries, sometimes partial amounts, suspicions of embezzlement. There is de facto a high degree of opacity with regard to distributions.

The main features of the implementation of this methodology are:

- Few resources for governance (protocols, formalisation, partners...),
- Discontinuity of the targeting as regards to areas (criteria that are very discretionary, specified by communities/leaders of each fraction) and time (rotation of targeting and of distributions),
- “Permanent” adaptation of the protocol to the reality, knowing that this protocol is forged on a very adaptive principle (purely community-based, unique phase, corrective mechanism based on culturally connoted practices).

The variations between the method used in 2014-15 and that used in 2016 (simplification of the procedure to one assembly and discontinuation of the principle of double targeting committee) indicates rather marked pragmatism. This methodology, compared to the other two analysed in this study, is the one that is the most largely based on a “laissez-faire” strategy, as it anticipates the capacities of the communities to manipulate aid programmes before or during the targeting, and to adapt them according to their own conceptions.

The implementation of this methodology, apart from the combination of the counting and targeting itself, is quite faithful to the theory, and even constitutes a very successful version of it.

In terms of acceptance, this methodology is ambiguous: although it rests on community principles, it

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<sup>1</sup> Whether it is the commune of Tilemsi, with a majority of Tuareg fractions, or the commune of Gounzoureye, with a majority of Sonray villages, both the internal logic of each environment and the differences between the two are, in a striking way, very similar to those observed during the study on local dynamics between the Tuareg-dominated context in Rharous and the Sonray-dominated context of Diré; this is also the case for the effective modalities of cash transfer distributions. These principles determined by community governance are confirmed independently of the method provided by the cash transfer stakeholder. They thus influenced the three targeting methods under study.

seems to generate discontent within the population (something that is little documented by researchers, but recounted by stakeholders themselves: it is probably due to the complicated relationship between populations and the outside world, or even with their leaders, and to the community management of the “complaint”). This seems to resonate with community mechanisms that are ultimately impartial.

**b. The HEA method implemented in Gounzoureye by ACF** is based on a methodology that strives to balance the rapidity of targeting and resource saving on one hand, with the conformity to “doctrinal” principles of targeting on the other. It provides for adaptation to criteria and to community realities, via the HEA tools and the counting, data collection and beneficiary household selection by village assemblies. It nevertheless institutes the principles that make it possible to channel, where necessary, inclusion and exclusions loopholes: an “ad hoc” statistical method that provides a pre-list for the NGO, a double targeting committee. In reality, this guideline is carried out by a rather technical team who, while taking into account community representations, attempts to impose (convince, negotiate, arbitrate) the planned protocols and who is endowed with internal (training) or external (surveyors, more regular presence of observers/partners) resources. The targeting methodology is divided into distinct and progressive steps: counting, statistical treatment and stricto sensu targeting. The influence of leaders, who are traditionally less authoritarian in the river valley than in pastoral areas, is counterbalanced by countervailing powers (the communities themselves, observers), and also by the principle of double committee and the necessity to deal with the NGO “pre-list”. Communities, including non-beneficiaries, have a relatively high level of knowledge of the cash transfer programme and its targeting process. The possibilities of inclusion or exclusion thus seem to be mastered. Nevertheless, implementation can vary between sites according to the way the statistical list is proposed to committees (before their own targeting and then for triangulation). The community counting does not guarantee against risks of exclusions, whether due to omission or to manipulation, and criticism has been expressed in this respect. The “ad hoc” statistical treatment requires a very high degree of rigour in the elaboration of the formula (each weighting significantly modifies the list of beneficiaries), or, in the absence of a reliable scientific or statistical advisor, the latter can designate less relevant groups of beneficiaries. The committees that are set up can be “permanent” committees or be recomposed for the occasion, but not ad hoc for the programme; in fact, these committees have a tendency to rest on customary practices and, as in Tilemsi, to share the assistance by replacing beneficiary households from one targeting to another according to a “rotation” principle, even if the distributions seem to be more in line with the principles of good governance.

The main features of implementation of this methodology are:

- Substantial resources for governance (teams, tools, protocols, partners...),
- Continuity of targeting in space (more uniform criteria, especially due to statistical treatment), but not necessarily in time (rotation of targeting),
- Relatively standardised or even imposed procedures. By providing the pre-list established by the NGO to targeting committees before they make their own decisions, it seems that their “community” choices are strongly influenced.

The variations between the method used in 2014-15 and that used in 2016 (discontinuity of corrective mechanism) indicate a form of internal “validation” of the method, and, pragmatically, the acceptance of a certain margin of error. This methodology, compared to the other two analysed in this study, rests on a strategy of balance between the community and the intervention structure, but with the clear desire to “keep control”, by notably anticipating a certain respect of protocols (“democratic” communities,

“abled” teams). However, the triangulation principle of statistical and community lists raises a fundamental question:

- Either the NGO list is predominant, in which case the method would be more similar to “PMT” but with different technical bases and stable procedures, due to a breach of governance and a note of balance that is more superficial and formal than effective,
- Either the community lists are predominant (which would be encouraged if the presentation of the pre-list was made once the committees had finished deliberating), in which case the method would be more similar to “HEA” as in Tilemsi, but with protocols that enable more accuracy: exhaustive counting, separation of phases, possibility of making up for exclusions or inclusions through the triangulation of lists<sup>2</sup>.

The implementation of this methodology is quite faithful to the theory; however, compliance with the triangulation protocol of lists strongly determines governance and strategy, and, ultimately, the very qualification of the methodology and reliability of targeting.

In comparison, the “HEA Gounzoureye” method is the one which better solves:

- Cases of exclusion: the exhaustive statistical treatment of the population (and not partial as is the case with the “PMT+”) makes it possible to integrate all households in the relative ranking and to reintegrate any household potentially seen as excluded during validations,
- Cases of inclusion, through the triangulation of lists during General Assemblies, which provides an opportunity to question the disputed choices.

In terms of acceptance, this methodology seems to be well received by populations, in terms of trusting the stakeholder (renowned, image of reliability, of conscientiousness) and of validating the methods (systematic, community mechanisms).

**c. The “PMT+” method carried out in two communes by Jigisèmèjiri** is based on a methodology that favours the accuracy and the formalisation of targeting, with a significant investment in time and financial and human resources; it is also designed to “overcome” conflicts with local leaders. In practice, it is reinforced by a relatively “bureaucratic” conception of the process (regional committees, circle, town, village, formalisation of each stage and sub-stage, complex validation and registration process of the related documents) with the delegation to two field structures: the first one, a local structure (Stop Sahel), in charge of implementing the community phases, including the pre-targeting, and the second (INSTAT) responsible for doing the quantitative and statistical part of the methodology. This method is characterised by its complexity in terms of both the formulation of targeting and the relationship with communities. Both the presence of NGO agents and the training-formalisation phases with the municipalities and village committees initially led to community ownership of the targeting. The fact that the conventions signed with the municipalities mentioned provisional quotas that were not in line with the very formal nature of the methodology was not problematic in this initial context of good relations between communities and programme. The delay in programme implementation may not be considered as a governance issue when considering the sequence of technical steps, but may be so when considering the commitments made with communities, the fact that the relative timing of transfers and support measures were modified and that communities’ understanding of targeting was weakened. The governance issue at stake is related to the fact that household surveys were, at least partially,

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<sup>2</sup> It would be interesting in this sense to compare pre-lists and final lists for the different sites.

done in “public” areas and not in respondents’ homes. The targeting in three steps (census by NGOs, community pre-targeting led by the NGO and statistical targeting done by INSTAT) is a “funnel” methodology, of which each component is considered relevant by stakeholders and communities. Leaders were able to exert their influence on the counting/community targeting; nevertheless, the quantitative method, which is based on data collected at the individual level (and in private, at home, with the possibility to verify certain declarations and data coherence according to the procedure), gives power, in the end, to the population itself. Communities, including beneficiaries, have a very uneven level of knowledge of the cash transfer programme and its targeting process. Inclusion possibilities are planned during the pre-targeting (approximately 40% of households are in the waiting list) but there is no mechanism to correct potential cases of exclusion at this stage (these households will not be taken into account in the household survey and will not be informed). The agreement with other stakeholders in the area specifies that the targeting done by Jigisèmèjiri conditions two aspects:

- As a matter of principle, this programme provides for a sharing of assistance as it imposes that beneficiary households are not included in other programmes, which is similar to the “rotation” principle,
- It targets “the poorest” but not the “poorest of the poor”, who are supposed to have been targeted by NGOs. However, given the targeting practices, it is possible that 2016 NGO beneficiaries were not systematically selected from among the “poorest”, and that some of them were selected again for this programme. In this perspective, the effective targets of these two types of programmes could be more similar than what the “two process” theory sought (poorer beneficiaries for NGOs, who have done their targeting first).

The main features of implementation of this methodology are therefore:

- Very substantial resources for governance (teams, protocols, formalisations, partners...), but perhaps a very bureaucratic (too much for the local level?) and formalistic (i.e. delay in contracting) set-up, to the detriment of the programme itself (cash transfers),
- A normalisation of targeting in space (very discretionary criteria specified by communities/fraction leaders) and in time, nevertheless conditioned by NGOs’ effective modalities of targeting that largely determine the targets,
- A very well thought out and elaborated methodology but with a low capacity of adaptation to the reality, its protocol being based on strict procedures. The lack of anticipation of implementation conditions can be illustrated by the fact that surveys are not done in local languages but with a translator and in public areas.

The implementation of this methodology is thus faithful to the theory, mainly because of its complexity and the impossibility of adjusting to the constraints due to the rigidity of the procedures:

- The workshop in Sévaré and the conventions with municipalities were done before the final decision on the quotas allocated to the programme for the circle, probably due to the impossibility to postpone this extremely formal workshop,
- Effective implementation of the community pre-targeting in the absence of a calendar for the next phase (a year went by between the two phases),
- Implementation of support measures before the first transfers,
- Household survey elaborated without considering the realities of the field; during the interviews done in Bamako following the household survey, it appeared that the UTGFS

considered that INSTAT had used the RSU questionnaire (12 pages), which INSTAT denied, declaring that they had used the questionnaire validated during the test done in Koulikoro and Kolokani. Generally speaking, it seems that the complexity of the institutional set-up and of the process had reduced the effectiveness of the communication between stakeholders,

- INSTAT counted the lists per municipality and not per village, which compelled Stop Sahel to make modifications that did not comply with its attributions,
- Necessity for Stop Sahel to directly send the reports to INSTAT.

At the time of the study, the programme suffered from a real problem of acceptance at all levels, with important misunderstandings, including by local stakeholders, elected representatives, leaders and populations. However, it does not seem that this acceptance issue is linked to the formulation itself, whose different components are actually validated, but rather to transfer delays and the laborious methodology, multiple phases of population involvement, with two “unfortunate events” in this context:

- The provision of support before the actual transfers,
- The conduction of the household survey by exogenous persons, and the question of photography in public.

## **Food for thought on the optimisation of targeting processes**

### **a. Dilution of the methodology in community practices**

The principle of sharing assistance by “rotating” beneficiaries within a majority of households or through distributions dissociated from targeting, and the reaction of some “disadvantaged” households, reflect the ambiguity between collective perception and individual views and the superposition of two forms of “rights”: that of stakeholders and that of the community, with a certain level of conflict between the two. The community custom seems to prevail in the end. The analysis of the three methodologies would probably have produced different results if a “first” targeting had been done by one stakeholder per zone, without beneficiaries being shared between several programmes. The 2016-17 targeting was conditioned by the 2014-15 targeting (beneficiary rotation) and their complementarity (hence the fact that it was not necessarily the most vulnerable households who were targeting during the HEA, despite it being the “first component” of the NGO-State articulation).

In this perspective, one possible conclusion is that a complex, time-consuming and resource-intensive (human and financial) method is useless, since, in the end, communities will produce similar lists regardless of the method used. The frequency of targeting (by the same stakeholder or by several stakeholders) and programmes undermines the governance and reliability of each method. In other terms, in this context, the multiplicity of stakeholders and programmes on the long term is detrimental to the effectiveness of each targeting from stakeholders’ point of view, because, paradoxically, it enables the community to limit the targeting mechanism (prioritisation of the destitute but inclusion of all “poor” people in general) by excluding part or whole families that are not in need. A “simple” community targeting method using village committees seems to provide as much guarantee than a very complex and expensive method that will be bypassed no matter what.

### **b. Optimisation of the accuracy of the methods: in which dimensions/which strategy?**

The optimisation of methods must take into account the conditions in which they are formulated, i.e.

time and resource constraints, the necessity for accuracy and acceptance. As the context of intervention conditions these priorities, there is no “best methodology”. Each of the three propositions under study are the result of a series of arbitrations. From this point of view, the “HEA Tilemsi” methodology seems to be more appropriate for an emergency response: rapid, simple, ensuring acceptance by leaders, potentially at the expense of accuracy. On the contrary, the “PMT+” methodology seems to be the less adapted to emergency, but it is based on accuracy criteria and aims at a long-term perspective, sometimes at the expense of acceptance (e.g. photos of non-recipients).

The criterion of accuracy is more important in situations of multi-annual transfers with a very limited number of stakeholders (if not just one). Beyond the governance of the different phases, the conditions necessary for accuracy include control over the population (the target), leaders (the main stakeholders) and distributions (the action). In this perspective, the positive elements to remember are:

- A complete population census with the constitution of a database,
  - o The exhaustiveness of a household survey would allow the PMT method to address potential exclusion mechanisms,
  - o The cost (time, HR, funds) is proportional, but on the long-term, and similarly to what was done in the circle in 2014-2016, the counting/household survey can be done differently and serve different stakeholders, whether governmental or not.
- Control over community targeting, as it can be, in the end, the “weak link” of accuracy, notably when articulated with statistical treatment and the integration of a “formula” step,
  - o Either through triangulation (Gounzoureye)
  - o Either through a “funnel” mechanism (PMT+).
- A strengthened “accounting” system for distributions. This phase should be integrated in the targeting methodology (even if it is *stricto sensu* dissociated from it) as communities can bypass the targeting during transfers. Securing beneficiaries’ identities (cards with photos, identity documents) reinforces the whole process, including in the eyes of populations.

### **c. Communication is to be considered as a component of the process: information and training.**

Information generally encourages acceptance, but also the governance of process involving diverse stakeholders, councillors, leaders and citizens who can be counter-powers. It seems illusionary to associate information to accuracy, especially in view of the propensity of communities to share the assistance (in view of disagreement on targeting terms between assistants and assisted). Nevertheless, misunderstanding is one of the sources (if not the only) of non-acceptance, and the PMT case is unfortunately emblematic of this, when technical implementation issues disrupt the assimilation of the method without explanation. In this respect, communication appears to be a relational mode that can help stabilise certain aspects of the targeting process. Community targeting is harder to manipulate in the face of a large and well-informed General Assembly. The supervisory/coordination bodies (communal and village committees) are more efficient when formalised (implementation of simple protocols), with the involvement of different types of persons at different levels, and the sharing of a common overall vision of the process. This implies mass communication (radio) and/or a method of information dissemination (focal point, dissemination/decentralisation to more local levels).