**Field notes**

**by Aïché Danioko**

As a 2022 IHDW intern from the Global Health Scholar program at McGill University, Ms. Danioko, who is of Malian origin, got the chance to interact and participate in a research session held in Mali with researchers from the the Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (ULSHB). Here, she recounts her experience in the form of field notes, a research strategy often practiced and encouraged in the field.

On Friday, May 13th, the day began with a training session on sexual harassment, which was followed by an introduction to the PREAM project, its research goals and its aims. Seated at the very back of the room by the lead researchers, Dr.Fatoumata Keita, Dr. Moriké Dembelle and Dr. Seidou Loua of the Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (*ULSHB*), positioned me as distinct from the prospective interviewers who were interacting directly with the children. Although they were considerably more experienced researchers and scholars than myself, my proximity to the primary researchers at ULSHB, with whom I would spend most of my time, gave me a distinct status. My affiliation to McGill University (and by extension, Canada) also contributed to this. For the first time while being in my hometown, I was introduced as a McGill student first.

The most notable part of that day was the translation session of the questionnaire. We were joined by Bamanankan linguists and presented the questions in French. Then, Dr. Dembélé would play an audio of the tentative translation to the speakers. From the first question, there were vocal disagreements about the translation. Students questioned the translations of their professors, who also disagreed among themselves and it resulted in a very lively discussion. Like many people in the room, I realized that although I was fluent, I did not know the language as well as I thought. Regardless, I was very happy to be able to learn from, and sometimes participate, in this conversation.

This process allowed me to think about the process of translation in general and its position in the project. Because French is so different from Bamanankan and Dogonsso, there is invariably an alteration of the question when it is translated. Often during this process, translations would be rejected on the basis that they did not effectively represent the original French sentence. Many questions could not be effectively translated by a single sentence and required the addition of some layers of nuance by the interviewer to allow the child to understand. It brings to the fore whether the questions and ideas explored would be different if they had initially been formulated in Bamanankan and Dogonsso?

The following day, the ULSHB technical specialist and I led the training session on the use of the data collection software, SurveyCTO, on the tablets. I was surprised that in less than a few days, I had gone from seeing the software for the first time to being considered an expert in it. This allowed me to understand expertise as something that is enacted rather than held, something that must be acknowledged by an audience (Carr, 2010). As an “expert”, I was also tasked with testing and grading the prospective interviewers during an exercise with the tablets. My performance of expertise and the grading of the training attendees that followed contributed to the authority with which I was regarded. This was a bit disorienting because I was in a familiar place (Bamako) but I occupied a position that was unfamiliar, as I was introduced as a McGill student and an expert in SurveyCTO. Nevertheless, it was a valuable and enjoyable experience, like the rest of my time working alongside the ULSHB team.