

Mali on the brink

Insights from local peacebuilders on the causes of violent conflict and the prospects for peace

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About this report

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Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-------|---|---------|--|
| ACLED | Armed Conflict Location and Event Data | ISGS | Islamic State in the Great Sahara |
| AJCET | Association of Youth Against Recruitment into Terrorism | FAMa | Malian Armed Forces |
| AQIM | Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb | MINUSMA | United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation | MNLA | Azawad National Liberation Movement |
| DDR | Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration | NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organisations | UN | United Nations |
| | | WANEP | West Africa Network for Peacebuilding |

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Executive Summary

Mali is facing an escalating violent conflict that has spread from the peripheral Sahel regions in the far northwest to the centre of the country. In 2018, the country is faced with a situation where violence is more intense and widespread than during the widely publicised 2012–2013 crisis.

Mali is not experiencing a civil war in the conventional sense but a complex, multidimensional security crisis of interlinked micro-conflicts. Communities are fragmenting into competing armed factions and mass atrocities are becoming commonplace. In 2013, international military intervention took place, followed by a democratic transition. Yet, five years on, the presidential election due on 29 July, poses a short-term risk to political stability, as well as a long-term opportunity to rebuild the Malian state and society.

Peace Direct began working in Mali in late 2017, in collaboration with the national office of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). With over 500 member organisations across West Africa, WANEP is well placed to increase coordination between local civil society and women led organisations in the region. Peace Direct will be supporting WANEP in its aims to increase the sense of security and social cohesion among communities, through enhanced capacity and coordination of local civil society organisations.

This report presents the findings of Peace Direct's first Peace Exchange workshop in Bamako, a practitioner led conflict analysis workshop, (subsequently referred to as 'Peace Exchange'), bringing together 20 representatives from grassroots peacebuilding organisations from across Mali to discuss the drivers of violent conflict, opportunities and challenges. It also draws on results from a qualitative survey that was distributed to participant organisations to share among their respective local peacebuilding networks across Mali, as well as three in-depth interviews with participants from the Peace Exchange. In addition, the report refers to quantitative data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project Database to present a bottom-up picture of the challenges Mali's people and communities face in building a safe and dignified future.

The main findings

Malian peacebuilders identified three primary, long-term drivers of violent conflict in Mali, namely:

- The limited presence of the state in almost all areas of the country, including administrative, police and justice institutions, as well as the provision of basic social services like healthcare and education.
- The poor quality of governance and justice experienced by Malians, not least corruption and impunity.
- Pervasive poverty, under-development and unemployment, especially the impact this has on young people.

In addition, dynamic drivers of violent conflict were identified by local peacebuilders, of which the main was the spread of radical ideologies. This is not merely a reference to radical Islamist movements, which have become more active in Central, as well as Northern Mali this decade, but also to radical ethnically defined political and armed groups, such as the Azawad National Liberation Movement (known as the MNLA). Other dynamic factors include the impact from violent conflicts elsewhere in Northern and Western Africa and its influence on arms and drugs trafficking, migration (in, through and out of Mali), as well tensions around elections.

During the Peace Exchange it became clear that perceptions of the main challenges facing Mali differ across Mali's regions. Northerners and Central Malians are more concerned about armed groups and ethnic conflict than Southerners, reflecting the former's direct experience of violence. In addition, Northerners are more likely to be concerned about criminal impunity and economic insecurity, whereas Central Malians are concerned about ethnic tensions and land conflict.

Southerners on the other hand are worried about corruption and economic security. In terms of a gender divide in the perception of challenges, the differences in views expressed by men and women did differ somewhat, with female respondents being more likely to raise concerns about sexual and gender-based violence and abuse by government agents or security forces.

The Peace Exchange concluded that given the fragmented, decentralised nature of violent conflict in Mali, there is great value in the work of grassroots peacebuilding organisations.

Four key strengths of local peacebuilders were identified:

- Their local knowledge that functions as “the eyes and ears of the community”.
- Their local legitimacy as “the first victims” of local violent conflict.
- Their capacity for rapid response, often in the absence of any effective state presence.
- Their cultural sensitivity, speaking the local languages and understanding the traditional forms of authority and conflict resolution used locally.

This said, the challenges facing local peacebuilders in Mali are significant. Most directly, they may be physically threatened or targeted by violent actors. They also face resource challenges, including access to financial resources, lack of trained human resources, logistical constraints and a lack of information sharing from government and security forces. Levels of distrust will need to be overcome between civil society and local politicians and new connections will have to be established between the national government, national security forces, international donors and local peacebuilding organisations to ensure relevant information sharing.

Recommendations

As a result of the Peace Exchange, Mali's local peacebuilders made the following recommendations towards building a more stable and peaceful Mali and how best to support local peacebuilding organisations in their vital work:

1. Recommendations for national actors

- Prioritise civic education, focusing on developing a shared “spirit of peace”.
- Create employment opportunities across Mali, especially for young people.
- Accelerate the pace and scope of reintegration of ex-combatants, including the economic and social dimensions.
- Ensure the implementation of the ‘national countering violent extremism strategy’¹ through supporting community-level initiatives.
- Create reliable and trusted mechanisms to enhance information sharing between the national security forces, civil society and the local population.
- Reinforce dialogue frameworks between the state and civil society organisations (CSOs) at the national, regional and communal levels.
- As a minimum, uphold the legal levels of participation of women and youth in implementing the ‘Algiers peace agreement’.²

2. Recommendations for international actors

- Look beyond military actions towards building a more resilient Malian society and state, that include responses from beyond the security sector, such as investment in infrastructure, education and healthcare.
- Commit to support the consolidation of a functional state presence across all the communes of Mali, upon which it can gradually build an extension of its state services.
- Support peace and reconciliation as a national priority, not just in the North and/or between the North and South.
- Prioritise women, young people and grassroots organisations as fundamental constituents of building a more peaceful Mali, the majority among a largely rural population, and the future potential of Mali.
- Visit Mali's regions and local CSOs to better understand local political, economic and social contexts.
- Provide training and coaching to build the capacity of local peacebuilding organisations across Mali.

¹ In January 2018, the Government of Mali adopted the National Policy on the Prevention and Combating of Violent Extremism and Terrorism and its plan of action. The policy is based on the principles of good governance, gender equality, the promotion of human rights and the protection of victims of terrorism, and will be implemented and monitored with the support of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office, and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Mission (MINUSMA).

² Signed in June 2015, the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was the result of two years of the so-called Algiers Process, with Algeria playing a key role in peace negotiations. This agreement will hereon be referred to as the Algiers peace agreement.



1. Introduction

Mali is not faced with a national civil war in the usual sense, but a series of loosely linked local conflicts. What began as largely localised conflict in the northern regions of Mali in 2011-2013 subsequently escalated to a nationwide conflict in 2015, with the current situation being a series of interlinked micro-conflicts involving local, national, regional and international actors.

In spite of the increase and spread of tension and significant security threats, steps have been made to bring peace and reconciliation to Mali. In June 2015 the 'Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali' was signed, following two years of the so-called Algiers Process, a period of negotiation between the Malian government and armed groups intended to bring about peace and stability in the country. Since the agreement was signed, further progress has been made in establishing a National Policy on the Prevention and Combating of Violent Extremism and Terrorism, which was adopted in 2018.

To explore these dynamics, Peace Direct, in collaboration with its partner the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), brought together 20 local peacebuilders in a 'Peace Exchange' Workshop in May 2018 in Bamako. This report explores the violent conflicts faced by Mali through the voices of local peacebuilders present at the Peace Exchange. During the Peace Exchange, participants assessed both the risks of conflict in Mali, and the local capacities that exist to build peace. These discussions form the basis of the analysis and recommendations developed in this report, and which are outlined in the executive summary.

Section 1 of the report provides a background overview of the conflicts in Mali, including noting the main areas experiencing tension, and the external influences that have contributed to the spread and escalation of violence.

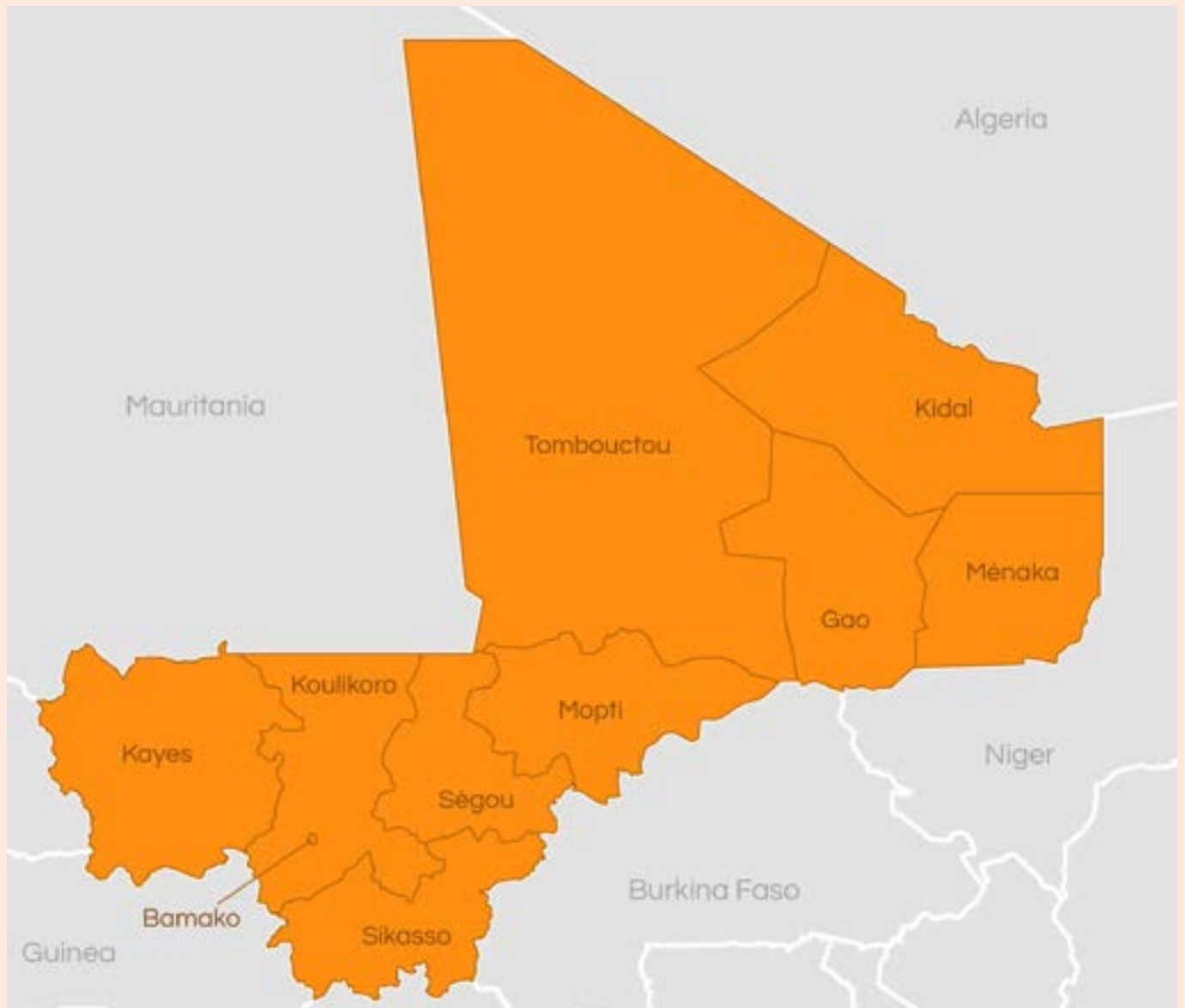
Section 2 outlines the key challenges for peace in Mali, as identified by local Malian peacebuilders, taking into consideration the social, environmental and economic obstacles that hinder building peace and stability in the country.

Given that Mali's current crisis is characterised by multiple conflicts and diverse experiences of security, it is not surprising that local peacebuilders record rather different perceptions of peace and security according to their location. To this end, Section 3 provides an overview of how perceptions of challenges to peace and security in Mali vary by gender and by geographical zone.

As well as providing a platform for participants to share the challenges they face and their perceptions of the country's situation, the Peace Exchange was an important opportunity to bring together peacebuilders from across the country to exchange local solutions to building peace in their communities. Civil society organisations, in their ability to identify the context-specific drivers of violence, have significant potential to create the spaces and the solutions to lead to grassroots change and lasting peace. Section 4 looks at the value of local peacebuilders, as well as the challenges they face and the strategies they have developed to respond to and prevent violent conflict.

Recognising the unique advantages that local peacebuilding organisations enjoy, as well as the very significant challenges that they face in Mali, the final section of the report puts forward a number of specific recommendations for national and international actors towards building peace and stability. Investing in education and training, prioritising young people and women, and reinforcing dialogue between the state and civil society were all seen as priorities to enhance prospects for peace in Mali, and to best support local peacebuilding organisations in their vital work.

Mali Key Facts



Mali is a landlocked country in the Sahel region in West Africa, made up of

9 regions

Population stands at

18,541,980

GDP per capita in Mali

\$824.5

Average GDP per capita in Sub-Saharan Africa

\$1,553.8

Human development index (HDI) is 0.442, leaving it in

175th place

among the countries published

According to 2017 figures from the World Bank





2. Methodology

Participants of the Peace Exchange in Bamako, Mali. May 2018

This report is based on the discussions that took place during the Peace Exchange workshop organised by Peace Direct with its partner the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Bamako between 8–10 May 2018.

The workshop brought together 20 Malian representatives from 18 grassroots civil society organisations, who work in Bamako and seven of Mali's nine regions.³ The purposeful selection of participating organisations was based on previous civil society research and mapping of peacebuilding activities conducted by Peace Direct, WANEP and Tic Sult to ensure a broad range of organisation and ranged from women's organisations, think tanks, community mediators etc. Gender was also taken into account and half of the participants were male and half female. For three days a facilitated discussion took place on local peace building needs, opportunities and challenges.

Additional materials were obtained from a qualitative survey completed by 39 peacebuilders working in the Bamako and Gao, Kayes, Koulikoro, Mopti, Ségou and Tombouctou regions. The findings of the surveys, which were completed before and after the Peace Exchange, served to validate the outcome of the discussions that took place. These provided information about the perspectives and perceptions of civil society activists on the challenges and conditions faced at a local level. The sample is not large enough, nor randomly sampled, to provide a representative picture of Malian civil society perspectives. Rather, it gives an indication of the attitudes and priorities of local practitioners across 7 out of 9 regions in the country.

Case studies presented here are based on additional semi-structured interviews conducted at the end of the Peace Exchange by the author and Peace Direct staff with Peace Exchange participants, to provide further insight into the work of local peacebuilders in Mali. The analysis in this report was produced from a compilation of perspectives from local peacebuilders on the issues discussed during the Peace Exchange, and the main arguments were reached by consensus throughout the discussion. Consent was given verbally by participants, who were willing for their insights, comments and photos to be included in the findings of this report. A full list of participating Malian civil society organisations can be found on page 36.

The contents of this report are the responsibility of Peace Direct. The text in this report should not be taken to represent the views of any individual participant or Malian organisation.

³ It was not possible to bring in anyone from Kidal or Ménaka regions, due to a lack of response to our open call for applications for the Peace Exchange. One more region, Taoudénit, was legally constituted in 2016 but has not yet been functionally separated from Tombouctou region and was therefore treated as one in the same in this report.

A woman in traditional dark clothing is walking away from the camera on a paved road. She has a baby strapped to her back and a large, colorful bundle balanced on her head. In the background, a line of military trucks is parked or moving slowly. The lead truck is a large, olive-green vehicle with a canvas-covered cargo area. Behind it, a smaller military vehicle with a red cross on its front is visible. The scene is set in a dry, open landscape under a clear sky.

3. A background to Mali's conflict

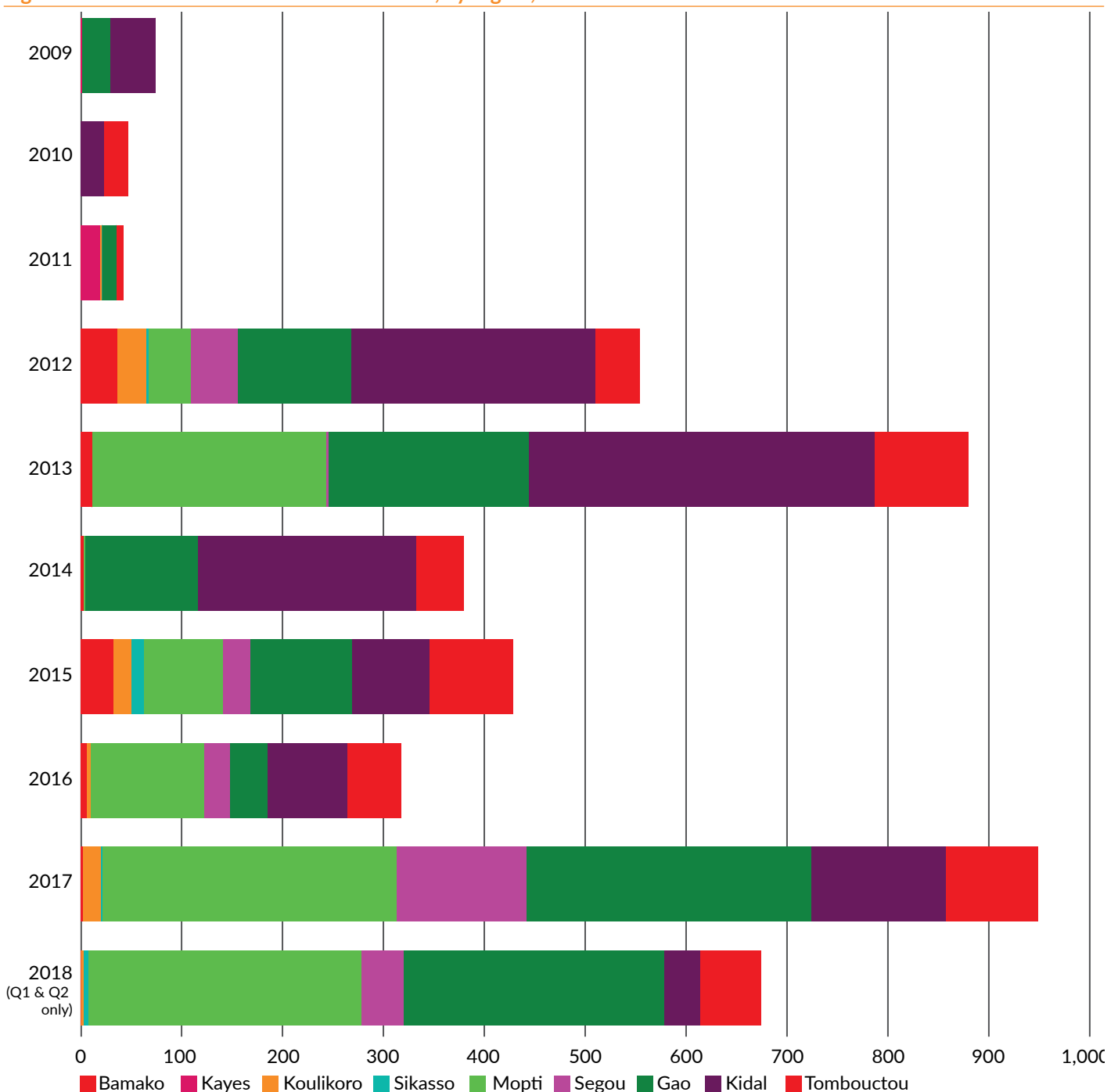
Violent conflict in Mali is multi-dimensional and is significantly more complex than most media outlets have reported to date. The conflict is escalating significantly in terms of number of violent incidents, fatalities and geographic spread. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project's (ACLED) figures from June 2018, 2017 recorded 949 fatalities and 2018 has already seen 750 fatalities in the first half of this year, which are higher than any time in Mali's modern history.

- What began as a violent conflict within the northern regions in 2011–2013, spread to a nationwide conflict in 2015. For example, since 2016, over 45% of fatalities have been outside the northern region.
- The violent conflict in Mali is characterised by a series of localised, sometimes interlinked micro-conflicts, involving multiple local, national, regional and international actors, as opposed to one conflict affecting the country.
- Many of these localised conflicts pre-date the crisis of 2012–2013, yet there is a marked trend

towards greater violence since the crisis of 2012, and since 2017 a worrying trend of mass atrocities is emerging.

To understand the detailed nature of the violent conflict it is worth elaborating on some of the more commonly articulated events of the Malian conflict. This chapter draws on the views of participants in the Peace Exchange, as well as data from the ACLED database, and the author’s own research and analysis since 2012, and sets out the main different conflicts that have and are taking part in Mali.

Figure 1. Number of fatalities in armed conflict, by region, 2010–2018



Source: ACLED data retrieved 08 June 2018.

Different interpretations of the Malian conflict

A North-South conflict

Historically, violent conflict in Mali has been most common in the northern three regions of Gao, Kidal and Tombouctou. It consisted of sporadic attempts by the Tamasheq (often referred to as Tuareg) and Arab communities (sometimes referred to as Maur), located in the Sahel region, to establish a form of autonomy or independence from the rest of Mali. This is rooted in its geographic isolation and its ethnic and cultural distinctness from Central and Southern Mali. In addition, perceptions of economic and political neglect by Bamako played a role. The wish for northern independence was the dominant explanation for the violent conflict in northern Mali in the early 1960s, as well as from 1990–1995 and, at much reduced scale, from 2007–2009.

When violent conflict in Northern Mali escalated again in early 2012 and the North-South perspective was the dominant explanation. The Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) – mainly comprised of Tamasheq and Arab combatants – ousted the Malian national army and declared ‘the independent state of Azawad’. Yet, this separatist northern coalition soon fragmented, and it became clear that the armed groups represented a variety of interests and demands. Since 2015, the MNLA and other former separatist groups have broadly made peace with the national government in Bamako, accepting an ill-defined autonomy within it. Yet, the recent conflict has seen a rise in fatalities in Gao region, as can be seen in Figure 1.

A secular-extremist conflict

Parallel to the 2012–2013 crisis was a conflict between the Malian state and radical Islamist groups, comprised of fighters from Mali and the wider West Africa region. In 2012 the regional al-Qaeda franchise collaborated with a Malian Islamist group, Ansar Dine, and the secular MNLA, to assume control of the state of Azawad. However, control of the northern region subsequently fragmented between Islamist and secular nationalist factions.

In January 2013 the French posed a military intervention (Opération Serval), which reversed the advance of foreign-led Islamist factions into Central Mali. They formed an alliance with the MNLA and other secular factions in the North. Yet, since 2013 there have been consistent armed attacks on French, Malian, United Nations (UN) and regional (Joint Force G5-Sahel) security forces by groups ostensibly favouring the imposition of an extreme form of Islam in the Northern region. These include factions of both al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State.

According to the secular-extremist perspective, this was the main cause of the violence that erupted in the period from 2013–2016 and includes the spread of violence into Central and Southern Mali. However, the spread of violence has been accompanied by an inter-communal dimension, whereas links to international Islamist armed groups are being alleged to demonise local rivals.

An intra-Northern conflict

Much of the violence from 2012–2015 can be characterised as a civil war within Northern Mali. During this period, the vast majority of violent incidents and fatalities occurred within the North and mostly featured clashes between a myriad of northern factions of various separatist, loyalist and Islamist hues. These included the ethnic militia of Tamasheq and Arabs, as well as Peulh, Songhai, Bambara and other groups.

Whilst such intra-northern violence continues and seems to be intensifying, it occurs in parallel to violent conflict with national and international armed forces in the North, and the spread of violence outside the Northern region. As Figure 2 shows, since 2016 nearly half of all conflict-related deaths in Mali have been outside the North, with Mopti (situated in the Centre) being consistently Mali's most violent region.

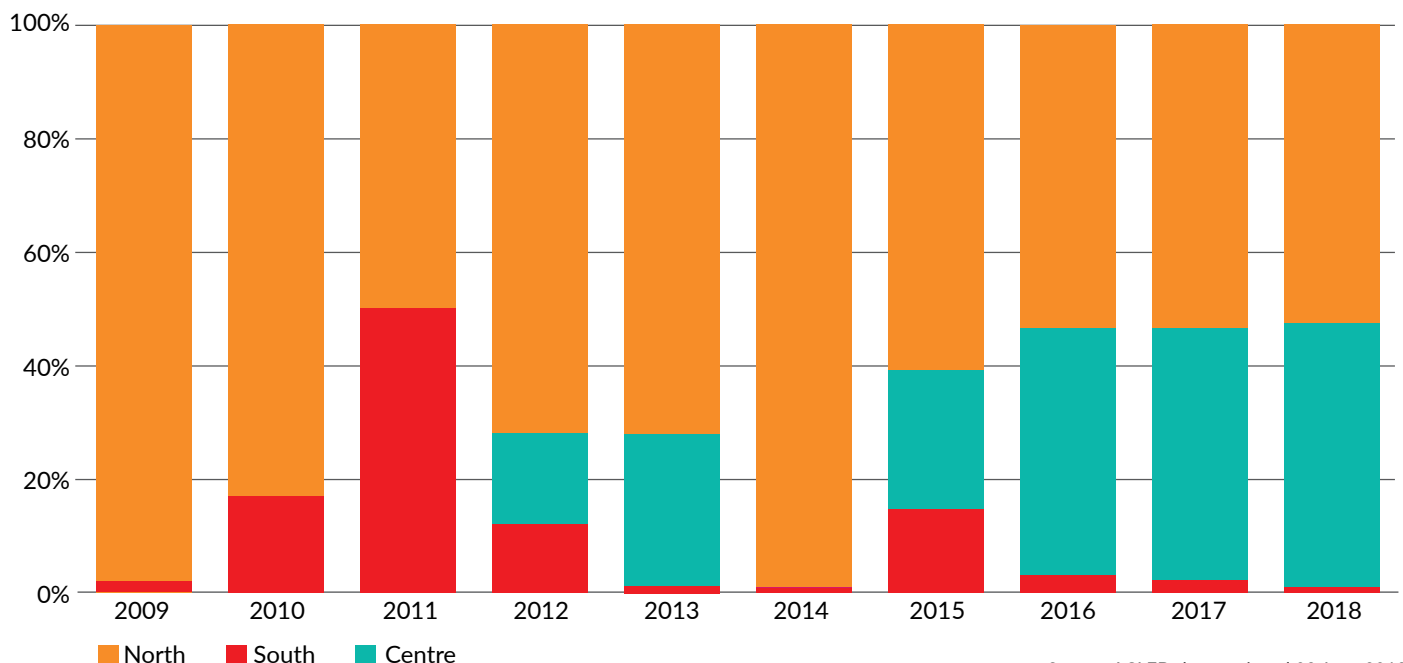
The South, including Bamako, saw several incidences of violence in 2011, when al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was pushed out of southeast Mauritania. In 2015, when AQIM-affiliates targeted foreigners in Bamako and communities along the Burkina Faso border, an increase in violence in the South was also recorded. Since 2016, incidences of violence in the South have been rare and localised.

External influences and interventions

The flaring of violence in Northern Mali in 2011–2012 was influenced by two significant external factors. One was the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya and the arrival of many well-armed Tamasheq, who had previously served in his security forces. The other was the implantation and expansion of AQIM in the Kidal region during the 2000s, and the subsequent influx of regional (northern and western African) fighters to 'Azawad' in 2012. Many Malians, including participants in the Peace Exchange, refer to such factions, including the recent offshoot of the Islamic State in the Great Sahara, as 'foreign extremists', disputing the religious or Islamic nature of their cause.

Yet, the core of the Northern rebellion was Malian Tamasheq, Arabs and others. The spread of the conflict in recent years has largely responded to local circumstances and arguably with a greater Malian component of radical groups. Still, some Malians blame the crisis and lack of progress in resolving it on foreign actors (most frequently France and Algeria) with perceived interests in keeping Mali weak, divided and/or occupied. France, as the former colonial power is sometimes alleged to have neo-colonial ambitions to establish a permanent military presence in Mali, such as it has long had in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Senegal. Algeria is sometimes seen to favour proxies in Mali that would be hostile to any presence of its traditional rivals, Morocco and France.

Figure 2. Proportion of fatalities in armed conflict, by geographical zone, 2009–2018



Source: ACLED data retrieved 08 June 2018.

State failure and fragmentation

A less told narrative is that the Malian state ‘failed’ in 2012, with the de facto secession of the North and the overthrow of the elected government in Bamako by the national army, and that it has not yet been functionally re-established. Whilst there is still much work to do in rebuilding state institutions and recovering from the destruction of public infrastructure in Northern Mali, especially in the Kidal region, this view tends to overstate both the historic presence of the state in rural Mali and the degree to which the national government in the Southern and Central regions ceased to operate during the 2012–2013 crisis. Overall, it should be noted that the Malian experience has been quite different from that of, for example, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, when the state ruled little more than the capital.

Yet, the very weak presence of state institutions and services across Mali has been a long-term problem and significantly undermined peace and stability in the 2010s. Indeed, where violence flared in Central Mali in the last two years, the retreat or collapse of state authority has been a more significant issue than during the 2012–2013 crisis.

Towards mass atrocities

Violent conflict in Mali is now worse than at any time since the early 1990s. It is also more geographically widespread than at any time since independence in 1960. The 2017 recorded death toll was 949 (ACLED figures), higher than during the major hostilities of 2013 when 880 fatalities were recorded. The trend for the first half of this year (over 750 deaths) suggests that 2018 will be significantly more violent than in 2017.

All of the events described above continue to have some validity within a very complex context. Yet, there is also an alarming trend towards mass killings of civilians defined by their ethnicity or perceived allegiance to an armed or political faction. In the days prior to and after the Peace Exchange convened in May 2018, multiple such killings were reported in the Ménaka and Mopti regions. For example:

- On 27 April, an attack by Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS) reportedly killed 31 Tamasheq in the Ménaka region;
- On 28 April, traditional hunters (‘Dozo’) of the Dogon people reportedly killed 10 Fulani civilians in the Mopti region;
- On 1 May, ISGS reportedly killed 11 Tamasheq in the Ménaka region;
- On 14 May, the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) reportedly killed 11 children in the Mopti region;
- On 15 May, FAMA reportedly killed 10 Fulani civilians in the Mopti region;
- On 19 May, FAMA reportedly killed 12 civilian prisoners in the Mopti region.

This is the context in which Mali’s local peacebuilders operate. Mali’s conflict is not a national civil war in the usual sense, but a series of loosely linked local conflicts. As such, there is no national strategy alone that can bring peace and stability and the importance of local level peacebuilding initiatives is more crucial than ever.





4. Key challenges for peace in Mali

Participants in the Peace Exchange identified a myriad of challenges that face their communities, regions and country in building peace and stability. Some of these are unique to their localities, but others are clear themes that cross-cut the regions and on which the participants reached a broad consensus.

Four key challenges were identified, three of which were considered long-term and the fourth a more dynamic challenge. In addition, several other dynamic challenges were identified, as a result of new or emerging phenomenon or circumstances both internal and external to Mali.

1 Absence of governance and social services

A common and long-standing feature of Mali is the extremely limited presence of state government, justice and security institutions across most of the country. Whereas the state presence collapsed entirely in the occupied Northern regions in 2012, and many state employees fled from frontline areas, such as Mopti and Ségou during the fighting of 2012–2013, the distribution of state administration across these regions and the rural South was never very extensive. Outside Bamako there were and continue to be few government offices, civil servants, courts, police stations or hospitals, clinics and post-primary educational facilities. The crisis of 2012 and subsequent bouts of fighting have greatly worsened the situation, but it should be noted that the pre-2012 situation was already over-stretched.

2 Poor governance and justice

Many participants during the Peace Exchange felt that the quality of governance and justice provision in Mali was as poor as its quantity. Again, this was rarely felt to be a new factor. Rather, it was seen as either an enduring feature of governance, or one that had degenerated over several decades before the 2012 crisis. Corruption and criminal impunity are visible manifestations of this problem, with the justice sector seen as being particularly prejudicial to common interests. Contrary to the absence of government, this was a greater concern for urban Malians than the rural Malians, where the latter are often ruled by traditional authorities.

3 Poverty, unemployment and resource conflicts

Poverty is the enduring context of modern Mali. It is officially classified as a Least Developed Country and ranks in the bottom 25 globally for per capita income and human development according to the World Bank and UN Development Programme, respectively. Whilst growth, income levels and livelihood opportunities have fluctuated, and Bamako clearly has more opportunities than the rest of the country, the country's economic hardship is long-term and nationwide. Participants felt that it was hard for most citizens to live in dignity and that the problem was particularly acute for young people searching for employment or a sustainable livelihood.

4 Radical influences

Many participants saw the most dynamic challenge facing Mali as being the rise of radical or extremist influences and groups. This included both religious identities and attitudes to ethnic belonging. Amongst the Peace Exchange participants, there was no consensus that this was a problem of religion per se. Over 90% of Malians are reckoned to be Muslims and different religious traditions have co-existed in harmony over generations. Mali's many ethnic or tribal groups are to a great extent inter-dependent and generally have a shared history dating back to the medieval empires of the Niger valley.

Rather, the contemporary issue is seen as one of destabilising external influences, including violent Islamist groups, as well as radical secular influences, such as ethnic nationalism. Libya, Algeria and other Sahelian states, especially Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria, are typically viewed as the countries most likely to have a destabilising influence on Mali.

New and dynamic challenges

Coping with the spread of more fundamental or radical interpretations of Islam or ethnic identity was felt to be the most acute new challenge to Malian society and this was recognised across all regions. However, other dynamic challenges were also mentioned and included:

- **Arms proliferation** was widely identified as a problem outside of Bamako and was reported to have worsened since the 2012 crisis, not least due to the flow of weapons from Libya's looted arsenals;
- The impact of **international conflicts** was of particular concern to Northern participants, with events in Libya and Algeria referenced.
- **Immigration** was of concern to some Southern and Central participants, both in terms of migration into Mali from poorer rural populations of other West African states and the passage of migrants from West Africa through Mali en route across the Sahara.
- **Drug trafficking** was also referenced by Northern participants, although it is not clear what the dynamics of smuggling are.
- **Electoral conflict** was identified as a key challenge by Southern and Central Malian participants. This concern was topical, given the national elections due in July 2018.

4.1. Absence of governance and social services

Mali is a big country with an average sized (but fast-growing) population and a very small economy and state budget. Like most other Western African states, it has always struggled to meet the needs of its dispersed and still largely rural population. This includes providing them with basic administrative, justice and security provisions through local authorities, courts and police, as well as providing the bare minimum of social provisions like healthcare and education.

Whereas attention and criticism has focused on the deficit of public administration in the far North and the flight of civil servants and destruction of public infrastructure during the 2012–2013 crisis there, the situation is far from ideal across Mali. Moreover, the initial post-2013 return of public services has been reversed in the North. And on top of that, many civil servants have fled from postings in Central Mali over the past two years.

Local Peacebuilding Responses

Almost by definition, Malian CSOs exist to deliver services that the state is unable or unwilling to deliver. This cannot cover governance, security and justice in a normal sense, but CSOs can play an important role in connecting and reconciling communities in the absence of a functioning state.

Case Study: Building resilience in the fragmented North

TASSAGHT, meaning “link” in the Tamasheq language, is a Gao-based local peacebuilding organisation that was founded in 1988. It has historically intervened in the north of the country, but increasingly focusses its activities in Mopti and Ségou, as instability has spread into Mali’s central regions. The organisation’s main activities focus on structuring and mobilising pastoralist organisations to promote peace in their communities.

According to Abdoul Aziz Ag Alwaly, TASSAGHT’s Programmes Coordinator, the biggest threat to social cohesion and peace is the proliferation of armed groups. Some have political or religious aims, while others are criminal groups engaged in the drugs and arms trade. “Many of these radical groups often recruit foreign fighters in their ranks, including the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. They capitalise on the absence of the state to establish themselves and sow discord in communities.”

To counter their influence in the absence of state protection, many communities have formed self-protection militias. This has had an unintended consequence: many of these groups were formed along ethnic lines, engendering inter-communal tensions between previously peaceful ethnic communities. “Clashes between these groups have led to a significant increase in the number of casualties in Gao in the past few years.”

In response to these issues, TASSAGHT in partnership with Norwegian Church Aid is



currently undertaking a conflict sensitisation campaign, tied in with a capacity-building programme that seeks to reinforce traditional mechanisms for managing conflict. “This is a process that helps communities ‘repair’ themselves. It relies heavily on the active role of village chiefs, ‘chefs de fractions’, marabouts (Muslim religious leaders), representatives of women and youth associations, etc. – people we call *resource persons*.”

TASSAGHT works to establish and train representative and inclusive committees that use non-violent mediation techniques and conflict transformation mechanisms. “We help them form and structure a committee focussed on preventing inter- and intra-communal conflict. This involves helping them to develop a common framework of consultation and advising them on a variety of issues.” These committees are best-equipped to identify strategies that will bind communities together.

4.2 Poor governance and justice

Poor quality of governance and justice provision is a context that most of the participants in the Peace Exchange recognised as being an issue in their local communities. This differs from a lack of presence of governance and justice institutions, although it is often linked to how these institutions are over-stretched due to the very limited economic resources available.

Key concerns include corruption at all levels, as well as impunity from justice of some political and armed actors, both by the regular state security forces and various armed groups linked to political interests. This leads to not only a failure of the courts to adjudicate fairly, but a perception that the state or local government may be working against the interests of citizens and communities, or is aligned with a particular ethnic group. The result is that citizens are less likely to turn to the state for help

and more likely to use their own resources, which can include forming armed “self-defence” militia.

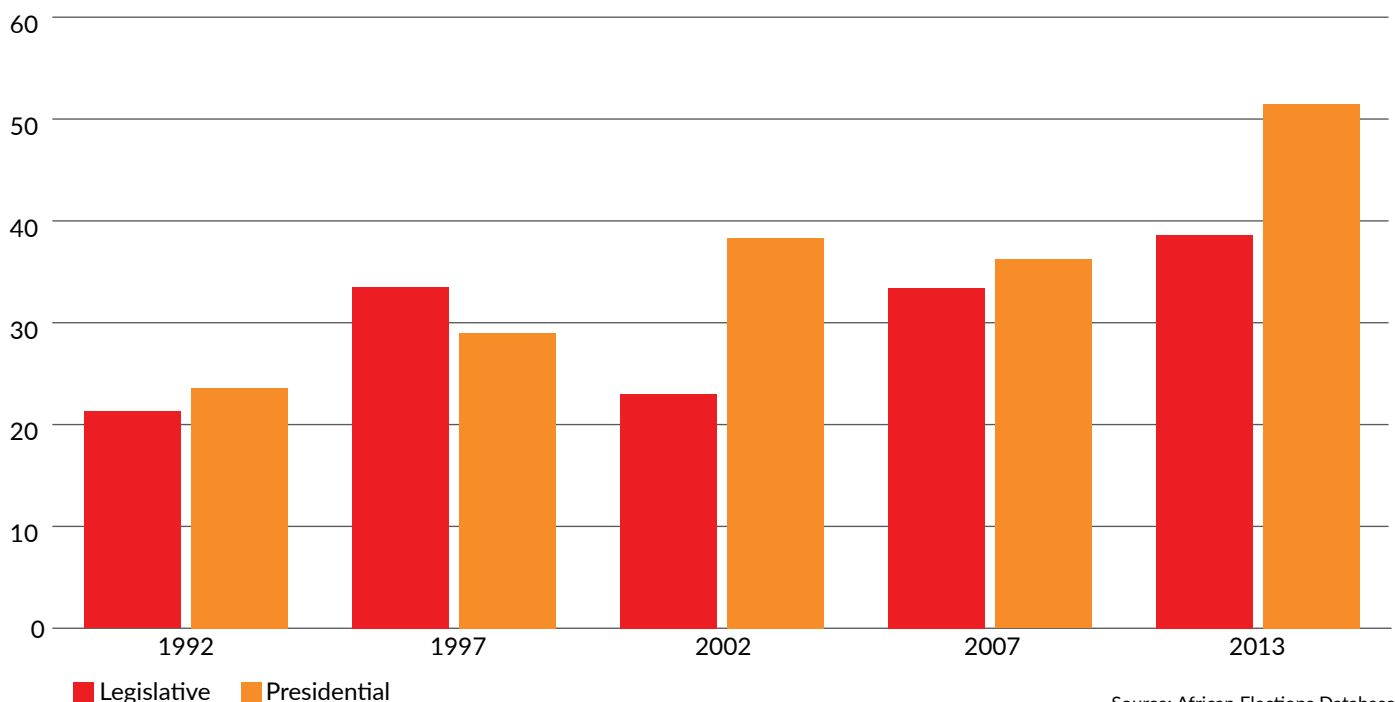
Accordingly to a peacebuilder from the Koulikoro region, “The government often engages in corruptive practices, especially around land disputes, and stigmatises certain ethnic groups in the process”

Local peacebuilding responses

Local CSOs can have an impact on local governance and justice as and when they have access mechanisms to authorities who are willing to listen. However, the right skills and training are often necessary. This could be paralegal support to courts and detainees, or consultative mechanisms for discussing performance of local government and working collectively to redirect its priorities. Developing information sharing platforms with local police and military was felt to be a priority by several participants, as this could develop trust and confidence between CSOs and security forces.

“The government often engages in corruptive practices, especially around land disputes, and stigmatises certain ethnic groups in the process”

Figure 3. Turnout of voters in Malian national elections, 1992-2013 (% of registered total)



Source: African Elections Database

Case Study: The evolution of governance in Mali, 1960–2010s

One peacebuilder from central Mali shared a perspective on the evolution of governance in Mali over his lifetime. When Mali was created from French Sudan in 1960 it had a good spirit of openness and patriotism and many believed in President Modibo Keita's Pan-African socialism, but a single-party system was quickly adopted that could only be voted for or against. After the 1968 coup d'état there was more oppressive single-party rule and far less ideological commitment, so corruption and impunity gradually got worse over two decades. The 1991 coup d'état restored some accountability, but the people lost interest as it was clear that the revived political parties were not interested in much outside the Bamako political bubble.

When non-party candidate President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was returned to power in 2002, Mali's international partners thought that it was a sign of political maturity that the parties in parliament joined his grand coalition government. Malians understood that the system

had swallowed the opposition and there were no restraints on the politicians doing and taking whatever they liked.

The crisis of 2012 was proof of how rotten the system had become. Yet, the positive side to this is that now the problem is out in the open. Everyone recognises the lack and malfunctioning of the government and must work to rebuild a properly functioning democratic system with checks and balances on corruption and accountability.

However, it should be noted that Mali does stand out from other neighbouring states in having recorded extremely low levels of political participation at all elections since the multi-party transition. With a turnout of 30% on average amongst Malian voters in national elections, this is less than half the West African average. However, the good news is that the trend of voter participation is rising and the post-crisis presidential election in 2013 was the first to gain the participation of a majority of registered voters.



4.3 Poverty, unemployment and resource conflicts

Modern Mali has always been a poor country in a poor region. Headline growth in recent decades has been quite concentrated in the capital and in the gold-mining sector, which employs very few people. Ordinary, and especially rural, Malians have suffered chronically from a number of factors including decline in terms of trade of agricultural commodities, climate and environmental change and greater population pressure on usable farming land and pasture. More recent efforts to regulate trans-Saharan trade (“trafficking”) and the devastating impact of the 2012–2013 crisis on the tourism industry, have had a major impact in the North and Centre of Mali, respectively.

In consequence, many young Malians feel greatly frustrated at their economic situation and are vulnerable to becoming involved in organised crime or joining armed groups. This ties in closely

to the impunity and corruption problems. Failure of the courts to adjudicate fairly in land disputes is cited as one common cause of land conflicts and inter-communal violence. The position of women is also more precarious economically and there is reportedly an increase in female-headed families in Ségou and Mopti in response to recent violence and the flight, recruitment, disappearance or death of many husbands and fathers.

Local Peacebuilding responses

Many Malian CSOs specialise in micro-level initiatives to create employment or livelihood opportunities for women and young people. For some the emphasis is very much on an alternative to involvement in armed groups, as well as the reintegration of former combatants. For others, it is more simply about avoiding destitution. All the participants agreed that the government needs to do more to increase employment opportunities for young Malians, but that there are few easy answers for how to do this without major foreign assistance.

Case study: Land conflicts in the Ségou region



Bintu Kamara is a local peacebuilder from Macina, a small town in Ségou region, central Mali. In her community, two groups, the sedentary Bambara farmers and Fulani herdsmen (*Peulh* in French), have historically disputed land use, especially for

grazing. These tensions turned violent within the current context.

According to Bintu, “all it took was once incident. A Fulani man entered the shop of a Bambara with a rifle and killed him. This led to a spat of revenge killings over the following 15 days, where more than 20 Fulani were killed, ultimately forcing the Fulani community to flee from Macina.”

As tensions eased, Bintu and other Macina women from a local blacksmith caste pleaded with local Bambara leaders to stop the fighting and to invite leaders from the Fulani community to engage in constructive dialogue. Eventually, the leaders relented. Over the following days, members of the two groups held an open dialogue, and the Macina women organised a public cultural event to celebrate their renewed friendship. “It involved music and dancing and lots of food. Everyone was there. The children even performed a sketch on reconciliation,” says Bintu. “Everyone cried, including the head of the village, who expressed deep regret for not having attempted to reconcile the community.”



4.4 Radical influences

Mali has traditionally been a diverse and relatively tolerant country in which different groups have co-existed in harmony. Institutions often cited as promoting social cohesion include the lingua franca of French (the official language of state and education) and Bambara (the local language spoken by most along the Niger valley and delta), the tradition of *cousinage* (an accepted Sahelian tradition of mockery or “leg-pulling”), and the fluid interpretation of Islam through Sufi traditions. However, more radical influences have recently permeated society, especially in the North and increasingly in the Centre. Both religious and ethnic identities tended to become more strict and exclusionary. This undermines social cohesion in all but the most homogeneous areas.

“Poverty and unemployment have left young people with few options. Armed groups see them as ‘easy targets’ and try to recruit them with money”

Facing chronic unemployment and a deteriorating security situation, young people have become an extremely vulnerable segment in Malian society.

Weak governance has left few social support structures in place to cope with this insecurity, and many young people see few viable livelihood options. Disaffected young people are considered prime targets for criminal and radical groups, who try to lure them with short-term incentives and sometimes recruit them into their ranks.

The reasons why young people become involved with these groups are complex and multi-faceted, varying from one individual, group, locality and time to another. Some cite their experience with injustice and corruption as motivators for joining armed groups, while others see armed groups as a stepping-stone to joining the Malian military. Whatever their motivations, young people often occupy lower ranks and find themselves at the frontline.

Local Peacebuilding responses

Local peacebuilders have many projects for building social cohesion and discouraging radicalisation of young people. These range from micro-scale livelihood opportunities to working with communities to accept and reintegrate members who have joined and left extremist groups. CSOs are also actively engaged in dialogue and mediation activities between communities in conflict.

“Poverty and unemployment have left young people with few options. Armed groups see them as ‘easy targets’ and try to recruit them with money.”

Case study: Working with prisoners to prevent radicalisation in the Mopti region



A local organisation based in Mopti, the Association of Youth Against Recruitment into Terrorism (AJCET in French), has long worked with young people between the ages of 15 to 25 in Mopti to prevent them from joining armed groups. Those who join armed groups face a higher chance of getting arrested and being sent to prison, where they are exposed to harsh conditions, overcrowding, lack of access to healthcare and prolonged periods in pre-trial detention. This can create a context in which depression and radicalisation can flourish. “We teach them to be autonomous, to go to school and find work, to have a positive outlook about their prospects,” says Amadou ‘Samba’ Cissé of AJCET.

AJCET also works with young people in prison, many of whom are affiliated with armed groups. They recognise young people’s specific vulnerabilities and attempt to sensitise them about the risks of engaging in criminal activities. They try to prepare them for life after prison. Their ultimate

goal is to successfully reintegrate these disaffected young people back into their communities. “We need to help them as Malians, as human beings.”


To that end, AJCET engages in vocational training programmes, placing young people in apprenticeships with trades such as carpentry and plumbing. They also help them locate their birth certificates, which allows them to attend schools in Mali. These actions aim to empower them and help them integrate fully in Malian society.

Thus far, they have successfully trained and reintegrated over 100 young people. Of those over 50 have volunteered to support other young people still in prison, telling them about their experiences and encouraging them to engage actively in the training and reintegration programme. “Many of the young people are making a promise not to go back to prison once they’re out.”

By far the most challenging aspect of their work is working with affected families and communities that have rejected these young people and refuse to accept them back into the community. “We are a mediator and convener. We spend a considerable amount of time talking to traditional leaders and families to recognise how these young people have changed and let them return home.”

The project has largely been self-financed since 2015, and it has proven a successful and cost-effective way of providing social support structures for disaffected youth and reintegrating them back into their homes. “This programme is cheap and can be replicated elsewhere. It should not only be in Mopti. We need to spread it to neighbouring countries too. We all face the same problem.”

AJCET is currently working with contacts in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Ethiopia to share best practices and help establish similar training and reintegration programmes in those countries.



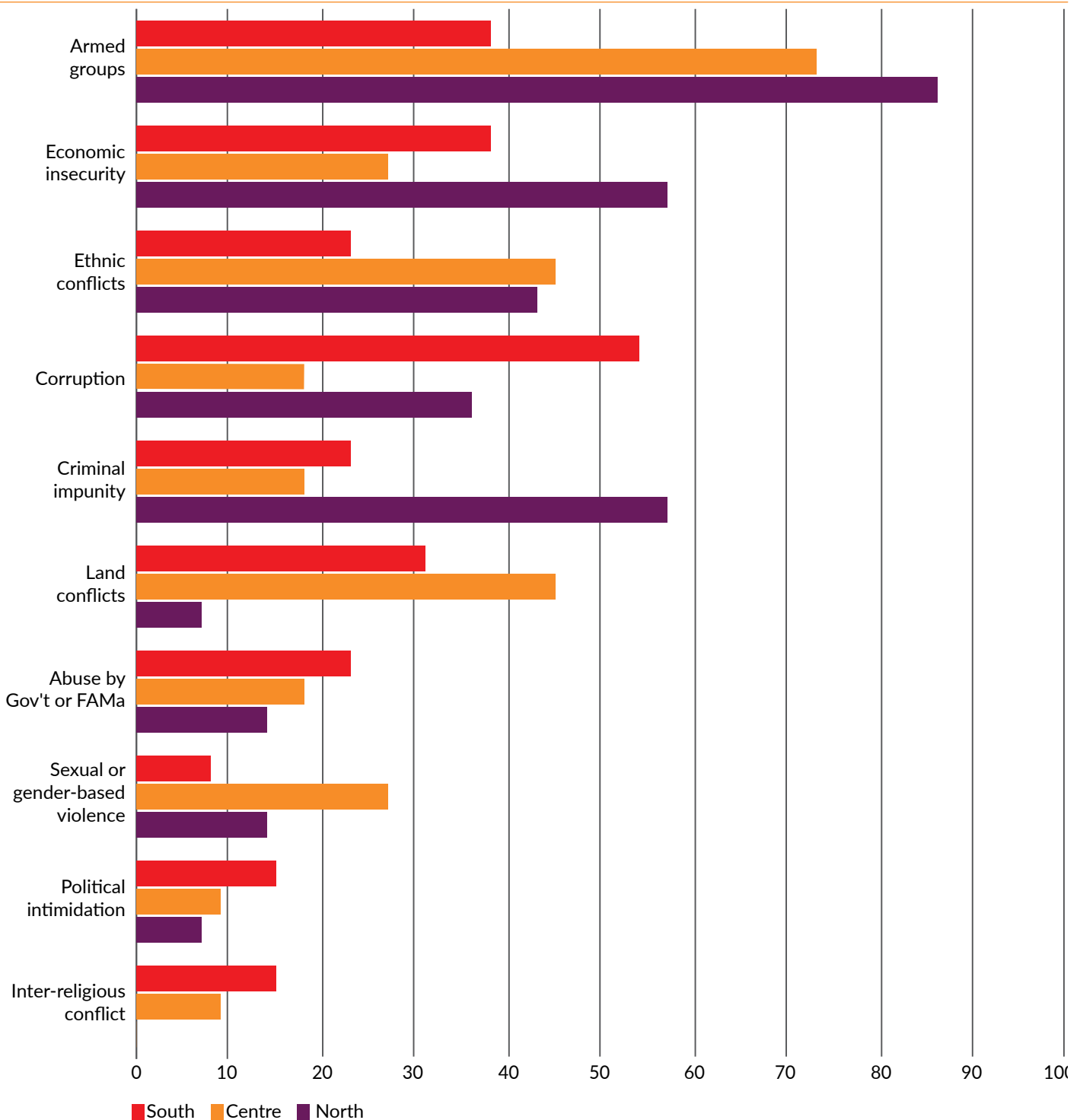
5. Regional and gender perspectives on Mali's situation

Given that Mali's current crisis is characterised by multiple conflicts and diverse experiences of security, it is not surprising that local peacebuilders record rather different perceptions of peace and security according to their location.

A gender perspective was also taken into account regarding perceptions of the situation in Mali which showed one notable difference. Our online survey amongst 39 Malian peacebuilding practitioners (of which the breakdown in the gender of respondents was 61% men to 38% women) gave an indication of how their perceptions vary, and this was validated by discussions in the Peace Exchange workshop.

Aggregating the views of Malians according to three broad geographical zones provides a regional insight. For the North the regions of Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Tombouctou regions were analysed. The Centre consisted of Mopti and Ségou regions and the South included Bamako plus Kayes, Koulikoro and Sikasso regions. The data shows a few key differences in perceptions of local challenges to peace and security, which are further explored below.

Figure 4. Peace and security concerns by geographical zone, % of respondents identifying among top three issues, May 2018



Source: Results of survey completed by 39 peacebuilders in Mali, conducted before and after the Peace Exchange.

Northern Mali

Peacebuilders in Northern Mali referenced armed groups as the main challenge, reflecting the experience of armed conflict and occupation across these regions since 2012. Interestingly, while over 40% of northerners saw ethnic conflict as a leading challenge, none identified religious conflict as a primary concern. They were also far more likely than other Malians to identify economic insecurity and criminal impunity as key challenges. This could be rooted in the fact that the economic output in the North is marginal compared to the other parts of Mali and has the weakest state presence in terms of administrative and justice institutions. Land conflicts seemed to be a significantly lesser concern in the North.

Central Mali

Respondents from Mopti and Ségou also expressed concern about armed groups, albeit somewhat less than their Northern neighbours. This could be explained by the dramatic spread of violent conflict into central Mali since 2016.

45% of the respondents saw ethnic conflict as a key challenge. However, they were notably less concerned about economic insecurity, corruption and impunity than Northerners, perhaps reflecting a greater state and economic presence in this more densely populated and agriculturally developed area. Central Malian respondents identified land conflicts, sexual or gender-based violence and economic insecurity as key concerns.



Southern Mali

Respondents from Southern Mali had fairly different views of Mali's main peace and security challenges than the Northern and Central regions. This could reflect the absence of violent conflict from most communities in the South. Less than 40% of Southerners saw armed groups as their top three concern, even though it was among the top three concerns overall.

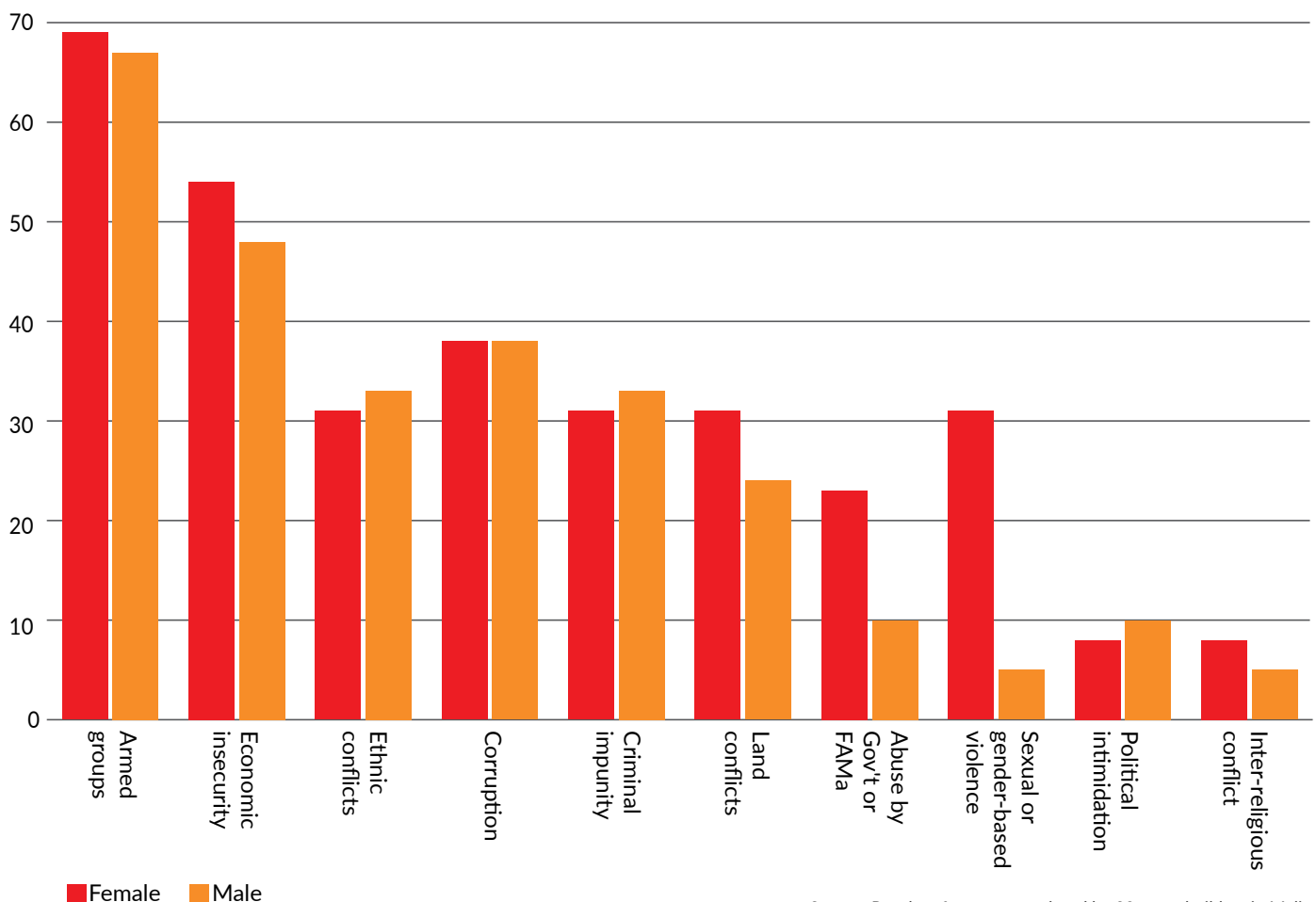
The main concern for Southerners was corruption, followed by economic insecurity. Less than a quarter of respondents identified ethnic conflict; considerably lower than the Northern or Central regions. Land conflicts were reported as some concern and Southerners (albeit a small minority) were the most likely to worry about political intimidation, religious conflict and abuse by state agents or security forces. Another concern that was discussed during the Peace Exchange by peacebuilders from the South and Centre was the concern about migration into Mali, particularly from Burkina Faso and Guinea.

Gendered dimensions

When disaggregating the data by male and female, there were few major differences between the security perceptions of Malian men and women. However, most notably, women expressed significantly more concern about sexual or gender-based violence than men. They also showed a greater concern about abuse by the security forces or government. A smaller, but still recognisable difference was that women were also somewhat more likely than men to identify land conflicts and economic insecurity as key issues. This perhaps reflects their more precarious economic position in society.

More surprisingly given the dynamics of Mali's conflict overall, and the specific security concerns, almost all participants said they felt optimistic about Mali having a more peaceful future.

Figure 5. Peace and security concerns by gender, % of respondents identifying among top three issues, May 2018



Source: Results of survey completed by 39 peacebuilders in Mali, conducted before and after the Peace Exchange.



6. The role of Local Peacebuilders

Local peacebuilders in Mali have long engaged in efforts to bridge divisions in their communities. The Peace Exchange was an important opportunity to bring together peacebuilders from across the country to share the challenges they face, and exchange local solutions to building peace in their communities. Although obstacles remain in managing and responding to violent conflict, civil society organisations, in their ability to identify the context-specific drivers of violence, have significant potential to create the spaces and the solutions to lead to grassroots change and lasting peace.

6.1 The value of Local Peacebuilders

The Peace Exchange was an opportunity for peacebuilders from all over Mali to get together for the first time at the national level and to reflect on what it is that makes their work uniquely valuable at the local level. Four key benefits were recognised.

Local knowledge

As one participant put it, “We are the eyes and ears of our communities. We are present and know what is happening locally.” This makes local peacebuilders ideal for early warning not just of situations of violent conflict, but of the build-up of tensions that precedes violence. Local peacebuilders have networks in their communities and know who to reach out to and include in dialogue that might avert wider conflict.

Local legitimacy

As other participants stated, “we are the sons and daughters of the territory”, and “we are the first victims of conflict”. This confers a legitimacy and capacity to act locally. Local peacebuilders are not just among the first to suffer when violence occurs, but among the last to leave the area thereafter. Quite simply, they have a greater interest in resolving conflict than external actors and because of this are likely to have a different attitude to risk to undertake necessary interventions.

Rapid response

Because local peacebuilders have local presence, knowledge, networks and trust, they are also ideally situated to be early responders to conflict. As one participant said, “we are implanted in every community; we are already working there.” Given Mali’s widely dispersed geography, its weak state presence and the rigidity of donor-funded programming, this capability can be absolutely crucial to managing situations in the short-term.

Cultural sensitivity

Mali is a diverse country and requires local knowledge and cultural sensitivity to respond effectively to its challenges. Few donors or international analysts understand more than French (the official and educational language) or, very occasionally, Bambara (the national lingua franca). Local peacebuilders work in all of Mali’s languages and understand the fears and expectations of their communities, as well as the mechanisms traditionally used to manage conflict.

6.2 Challenges for Local Peacebuilders

Despite their advantages, local peacebuilding organisations in Mali face many challenges in being able to work effectively to manage conflict and respond to incidents of violence.

1. Security threats

Most fundamentally, peacebuilding is dangerous work. If violence delivers the interests of conflict entrepreneurs, there may well be powerful interests set against those who work for peace. Several workshop participants reported fears for their own safety. Some feel more exposed because they are not connected to powerful national figures, or they do not expect the protection of security forces.

2. Resource challenges

Several participants explained that local peacebuilders do their work because they want their communities to live in greater peace and would do this regardless of resources available.

Financial resources are fundamental to working effectively. Local peacebuilding organisations are usually cut off from potential sources of funding and cannot rely on local government for financial support.

Suitably skilled and trained **human resources** are another key component. Few Malians are formally trained in conflict resolution or in Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) management, especially outside of Bamako and the North. Those that are will often be recruited to work for International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) or organisations such as the United Nations and/or they move to the capital to pursue higher income jobs.

Mali’s geography and under-development also present specific problems of access due to a lack of **transport or logistical resources**. Whereas most INGOS and UN staff have easy access to off-road vehicles, local organisations use unreliable public transport or motorbikes.

Information resources are also often lacking. While local peacebuilders are plugged into their own communities, many workshop participants reported that they lack verifiable means to know what is happening in surrounding areas, or at the regional level. The limited access to reliable internet sources or mobile phone networks in several communities

leads to a reliance on traditional communication methods, which can further delay or restrict the exchange of information. Most pressingly, local security forces (national or international) do not share information about attacks, which can lead to rumour, disinformation, panic or failure to evacuate.

3. Disconnects and distrust

While local CSOs can often lay claim to the support and trust of their host communities, our mapping of actors in the peace, security and conflict sphere highlighted that they are by no means connected to and trusted by all.

Most glaringly, **few local level peacebuilders have much connection to, or understanding of, Mali's national government** or regional administrations. Some do not see the government as a powerful or relevant actor that they need to engage with. Others do not know how to approach it, whilst a few see it as hostile towards civil society.

Several participants highlighted that there is a **lack of trust between some local political figures and civil society** based on an understanding that NGOs represent an extension of party political or personal interests. This problem seems to have been exacerbated since 2012 by a proliferation of new NGOs, especially in the North.

Most participants reported that they found it **difficult to engage with the national security forces**, who generally declined to share important information on local security conditions. Civil society and the security forces tend to distrust one another, resulting in a lack of communication. This disconnect may be felt most acutely in the North, where the security forces have a poor reputation for upholding human rights.

Local level peacebuilders have **weak connections to international donors**, which are mostly based in embassies or missions in Bamako. This makes it difficult for them to access funding streams available to larger, national NGOs. Donors were felt to be risk-averse and unwilling to engage in more peripheral or unstable regions as opposed to large programmes in known zones.

Finally, local civil society was felt to be **poor at communicating within its own sector** as there are few local coordinating bodies. Communications with nearby towns and regions are infrequent, and connection to national level networks under-developed.

To understand and counter the challenges faced by peacebuilders across the country and to establish a base of engaged, coordinated and supportive local actors, Peace Direct's continued work in Mali since late 2017 has mapped out information on around 200 peacebuilding organisations from five regions. In collaboration with WANEP, Peace Direct will follow on from its mapping exercise by providing direct support to enhance the capacity among local organisations to prevent and respond to violence locally. When the challenge remains among local organisations who often find themselves cut off from funding sources, sub-grants will be distributed to directly support the development of sustainable and effective projects. The next phase of Peace Direct's activities in Mali will also include advocacy training and tailored capacity building support, so civil society actors can better engage with local authorities and other stakeholders.

6.3 Malian CSOs and the State

The mapping by actors involved in Malian peace and security illustrates the difficulties of local civil society actors in engaging with potential partners in other sectors. Not surprisingly, the easiest partners to access were considered to be other non-state actors at the local level. Also, relatively easy to reach were national level civil society forums and customary chiefs, communal level administrations and, for some, regional councils and governors.

More difficult to engage was the local security sector, although police were felt to be more accessible than the military, and the national level government. Indeed, few participants felt that Malian national government and policies had much impact on the peacebuilding work they did at a local level. The hardest connections to make were with the national and international security forces and donor institutions.

Asked to identify actors that they wanted to be able to engage with, but were unable to do so, participants identified the following:

Armed Groups

- Mali's national Armed Forces (FAMa) and other security agencies, especially those deployed in local areas.
- Extremist or radical groups, both armed and unarmed, who are not engaged in community dialogues and events. Foreign extremist groups were felt to be the most difficult to engage.
- International security forces, such as MINUSMA (UN peacekeepers) and the regional G5 Joint Force, which may undertake local patrols or deployments.
- Other armed groups, including local "hunter" or "self-defence" groups and separatists.

Participants also identified the following, which they felt were missing from their work:

- International donors and technical partners
- Some local politicians who do not want to engage with CSOs.

Perhaps more revealing were the actors not mentioned. Few local CSOs felt they had a good understanding of/or relationship with national government actors, but very few felt that this was a significant omission other than in relation to the national security forces.

| | | Sector | | |
|-------|---------------|---|---|---|
| | | Security | Civil Society | Governmental |
| Level | International | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MINUSMA • EU Training Mission • G5 Sahel • French Forces • Foreign armed groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International NGOs • Foreign non-state donors • Foreign Media • Regional CSOs (e.g. WANEP) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN • African Union • ECOWAS • Other States • International Donors |
| | National | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mali Armed Forces (FAMa) • Rebel armed groups • Ministries of defence, security and interior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Youth Council • Islamic High Council (HCIM) • National Media • Trades Unions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • Ministries • National Assembly • High Council of Collectivités Territoriales (Regional Authorities) • Higher courts |
| | Local | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Police • Locally deployed armed forces • 'Traditional' hunters • Rebel factions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local CSOs • Religious leaders • Traditional communicators • Women's and Youth groups • Local media (radio) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors • Regional Councils • Commune Councils • Local Authorities • Customary Chiefs • Local justice/courts |



7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The escalation of Mali's security crisis in the last two years has gone almost without comment in the international media. For most, the Malian conflict was settled with the French intervention of January 2013 and the deployment of thousands of UN peacekeepers.

If the enduring conflict has captured headlines at all since 2013 it is the few incidences of violence directed by al-Qaeda affiliates against Westerners in Bamako and other West African capitals since 2015. Yet for many thousands of Malians what was a remote, isolated conflict has become a violent reality within their communities. The war in the North has become more complicated and violence has spread to other parts of the country, most notably the Central region.

Participants at the Peace Exchange workshop in Bamako in May 2018 clearly stated that no commune or community in Mali must be left behind in the steps to build a more peaceful Mali. Many hundreds of ordinary Malians commit themselves to doing extraordinary work within their communities to prevent, recognise and respond to conflict in their midst, often in isolated and dangerous conditions. They are the first victims of conflict and its first responders.

Recognising that there is no one civil war in Mali is a crucial first step to future progress. While efforts to heal conflict within the North and between Northerners and Southerners are crucial components of a national peace and reconciliation strategy, they are not the whole story nor the whole cure. Decentralised efforts need to be made to address the myriad of local conflicts destabilising Mali and to rebuild an effective covenant between peoples and government. The elections of 2018 are an opportunity to begin that process, and local peacebuilders must be at the centre of a truly national response.

Recognising the unique advantages that local peacebuilding organisations enjoy, as well as the very significant challenges that they face in Mali, the Peace Exchange generated a number of recommendations for national and international actors.

“If even one commune or province is not at peace, then the whole of Mali cannot be at peace.”

Recommendations for national actors

- **Prioritise civic education** in the national school curriculum, focusing on the shared experience of Malians and a “spirit of peace”. The post-war experience of Cote d’Ivoire provides one example of how this kind of nation-building through education might be achieved.
- **Create employment opportunities** across Mali so that young people have productive, constructive and dignified work to occupy them. This must be a nationwide endeavour, intrinsic to every commune, however peaceful, not just a response to violence in certain regions.
- Make the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) policy a reality and **accelerate the reintegration of ex-combatants into society**, incentivising those who turn to peace and supporting communities to reintegrate them.
- **Ensure the implementation of the national counter-violent extremism policy** to help ensure that more young Malians do not join armed groups, focusing on the micro-level and what CSOs and community initiatives can achieve.
- **Create reliable and trusted mechanisms for information sharing between the security forces, civil society and the population at the local level.** This should include contextually relevant public channels through which the security forces can responsibly share information on security threats and incidents. This should also include frameworks for CSOs and citizens to provide feedback on the performance of the police and security forces.
- **Reinforce dialogue frameworks between the state and CSOs at the national, regional and communal levels.** Such frameworks do exist in Mali, especially at the national level and in the North; but their application is very patchy and lacks strategic impact. A more cohesive, strengthened framework at all the regional levels is required to connect to a meaningful national dialogue. No commune, however apparently peaceful, should be left behind.
- **Uphold as minimum legal levels of participation of women and youth (30% minimum)** in the implementation mechanisms for the Algiers peace agreement as well as all other peace processes; and work towards parity of representation in the longer term.



Recommendations for international actors

- **Look beyond military actions for stabilising Mali and towards building a more resilient society and state.** While Mali has a large number of physical security challenges and a weak national security sector, its fundamental challenges are much broader and require far greater resourcing of responses outside of the security sector, such as investment in infrastructure and prioritising education and health services.
- **Commit to support the gradual extension and consolidation of a functional state presence across all the communes of Mali,** not just in conflict-affected parts of the North. Focus on the quality and impact of basic administrative, security and justice provisions at the local level. Social providers, including health and education, will not come (back) without an administrative presence.
- **Support peace and reconciliation as a national priority, not just in the North or between the North and South.** A comprehensive approach to building peace needs to be applied across Mali, recognising that any region or commune excluded from resourcing and attention could be the next to experience violent conflict.
- **Prioritise women, youth and grassroots organisations** as fundamental constituents of a bottom-up reconstruction of a more peaceful Mali. In a young and still largely rural population they are the majority and the future potential of Mali. Focus on young people, who are especially vulnerable to being recruited into armed groups, to prevent further marginalisation and radicalisation. Increase engagement in the specific concerns that disproportionately affect women, such as gender-based violence and economic precarity.
- **Make the effort to visit Mali's regions to engage with communities and civil society** to better understand the political, economic and social contexts. Explain how they might access funding for peacebuilding work and how it fits (or doesn't fit) with donor strategies and priorities. There are risks involved in decentralised programming, but the greater risk lies in the of failing to engage with local actors with local influence.
- **Provide training and resources to build the capacity of local peacebuilding organisations across Mali.** Grassroots CSOs will prioritise the development of local human capital, but they lack access to practical training on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Participating Organisations

Allô Governance

(Allô Gouvernance) is an association supporting initiatives that highlight the actions and visions of youth and women. In particular, it focuses on the promotion the values of citizenship through awareness raising, reconciliation and social cohesion.

The Association against the recruitment of young people into terrorism

(Association des jeunes contre l'enrolement dans le terrorisme, AJCET) is a local organisation created in 2015 that fights against radicalisation, violent extremism and the recruitment of youths in armed groups. Though it runs activities in 5 regions in Mali, it focusses most of them in Ségou and Mopti.

The Association for the Promotion of Women and Children in Mali

(L'Association pour la promotion de la femme et de l'enfant au Mali, APROFEM) works primarily on women's and children's issues in Mali. It strives for overall peace and social justice, while focusing on the rights of its target group: strengthening their social, political and economic situation in order to provide truly sustainable livelihoods.

The Association of Women for Peace Initiatives

(Association des femmes pour les initiatives de paix, AFIP) is a local organisation created in 1998 that works on peace and security issues by building the capacity of local communities and using an integrated development framework to settle disputes through dialogue and non-violence.

The Association for Supporting Community Development

(Association d'Appui à l'auto Développement Communautaire, AADeC) is a non-profit Malian organisation that promotes inclusive community development through capacity building and advocacy at the local and national level. It focusses its activities in Mopti, Koulikoro and the District of Bamako.

The Benkadi Association of Women from Sector V of Kayes

(L'Association Benkadi des Femmes du Secteur V de Kayes, BENKADI) is an organisation established in 2014 that focuses on strengthening women's socio-economic and cultural development through income-generating activities, business management training and hygiene and sanitation.

The National Network for Democratic and Patriotic Awareness

RENEDEP (Réseau National pour l'Eveil Démocratique et Patriotique) is a network that works on citizenship issues, focussing on promoting civic responsibilities on all matters related to national interest and development. Working with the Malian government and multiple NGOs to promote socio-economic development and democratic process.

Peace One Day Mali

Is a national NGO created in 2011 that works in education, peacebuilding, health and nutrition. Their primary objective is to foster and strengthen learning, dialogue and coordination with regards to development strategies, humanitarian response and peacebuilding.

REJEFPO

Is a local Malian organisation created in 2015 that promotes the economic, social and political empowerment of young women through women's leadership programmes and women- and youth-led solidarity networks. They have since run capacity building workshops for young women in Bamako.

The Research Initiative for Development Support

(Initiative Recherche Appui au Développement, IRAD) is a Malian think tank that works to support a solidarity network among vulnerable and marginalised groups focussing on social cohesion, and sustainable, participatory local development.

The Save Malian Education Organisation

(L'Organisation Sauvons l'Éducation Malienne, CEWA) is a local organisation that aims to raise awareness around the need to improve the quality of education and vocational training in Mali, and to promote the education of girls and children displaced by conflict. The organisation also conducts campaigns on gender-based violence and conflict prevention.

The Tangassane Development Association

(L'Association de développement de Tangassane, ADT) strengthens local capacity and is dedicated to the promotion of a culture of peace and human rights in Mali. It supports local initiatives in a participatory approach, working specifically to target vulnerable groups and marginalised sections of society, including women, children, the poor and victims of the conflict.

TASSAGHT

Meaning “link” in the Tamasheq language, is a Malian peacebuilding organisation founded in 1988. The first national organisation based in Gao, its vision is of a caring and responsible society based on the principles of freedom and justice. It has historically intervened in the north of the country but is increasingly focussing its activities in Mopti and Segou.

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The Benkadi Association of Women from Sector V of Kayes

(L'Association Benkadi des Femmes du Secteur V de Kayes, BENKADI) is an organisation established in 2014 that focuses on strengthening women's socio-economic and cultural development through income-generating activities, business management training and hygiene and sanitation.

The Yélimane City Youth Association

(L'Association de la jeunesse de la ville de Yelimane) focuses on empowering youth through local development work, in order to cope with the rising unemployment rate, the erosion of cultural identity and youth vulnerabilities.

The Youth Association for Civic Education

(L'Association des jeunes pour l'éducation civique, AJEC) is a local youth organisation created in 2006 that engages in the promotion of civic education activities with young people of all backgrounds.



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Peace Direct works with local people to stop violence and build sustainable peace. We believe that local people should lead all peacebuilding efforts, and this report is the third in a series canvassing local views on violent conflicts around the world in an effort to highlight local capacities for peace and local expertise.

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