



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACEBUILDING IN MALI

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I. Introduction

In January 2012, rebel groups including the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad, MNLA) launched an armed conflict against the Malian Government. In separate signings in May and June 2015, the Malian Government and two coalitions of armed groups that were fighting the government and each other—the Platform coalition of armed groups (the Platform) and the Coordination of Azawad Movements (Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad, CMA)—endorsed a peace agreement. At the year's end, however, peace and security in Mali remained fragile and the peace agreement had yet to be implemented, despite its official endorsement by all the parties to the conflict. In order to consolidate Mali's nascent peace, there is an urgent need for continued efforts to establish a broadly shared understanding of the problem issues and build genuine consensus on the options available for their resolution.

With its potential to promote an inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders, and to increase societal capacity for peaceful coexistence and the resolution of conflict, civil society has an important role to play in building peace in Mali. Opportunities for civil society contributions to the ongoing peace process arise from the conflict's dynamics and the measures specified in the 2015 Peace Agreement. These measures revolve around the reinforcement of human security, the establishment of inclusive and participatory governance, the socio-economic development of the northern regions of Mali, and strengthening transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights and the fight against impunity.

This SIPRI Insight on Peace and Security identifies the peacebuilding potentialities arising from the momentum of the political settlement and discusses the related opportunities and challenges for civil society contributions. In this context, it considers the policy implications for civil society initiatives aimed at supporting the peacebuilding agenda in Mali. Section II is a brief summary of the conflict's dynamics and the terms of the 2015 Peace Agreement. Section III discusses opportunities for civil society to contribute to the ongoing peace process; and section IV discusses the challenges facing

SUMMARY

● Peace and security in Mali remained fragile at the end of 2015, despite the official endorsement in May and June 2015 of a peace agreement by all the parties to the political conflict. In order to consolidate Mali's nascent peace, there is a need for continued efforts to establish a broadly shared understanding of the problem issues and to build genuine consensus on the options available for their resolution. Civil society has the potential to promote an inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders and to contribute to other peacebuilding activities. Opportunities for civil society contributions to the ongoing peace process arise from the conflict's dynamics and the measures specified in the 2015 Peace Agreement. This SIPRI Insight on Peace and Security discusses some of the opportunities and challenges for civil society contributions to the ongoing peace process, and the policy implications for effective civil society contributions to the peacebuilding agenda in Mali.



such contributions. Section V outlines the policy implications for civil society peacebuilding activities in Mali.

II. The context for civil society contributions to peacebuilding in Mali

The 2015 Peace Agreement recognizes the recurring nature of the crises that have affected the northern regions of Mali and indicates a commitment by the parties to the conflict to undertake the necessary measures to address their root causes, within a framework of respecting the unitary form and territorial integrity of the Malian state as well as the diversity of Malian society. Some of the key root causes of the crises recognized in the agreement include the lack of socio-economic development in the northern regions and the inadequacy of governance mechanisms and structures, especially with regard to ensuring inclusive and equitable participation by the diverse social groups in Malian society in the management of the country's affairs.

This recognition is stated in the preamble to the agreement, where among other things the parties commit themselves to:

- Definitely address the root causes of conflicts and promote a national reconciliation premised on a re-appropriation of the past through a national unity respectful of the human diversity of the Malian nation;
- Implement an accelerated economic development strategy for northern Mali;
- Establish a governance system that takes into account the geo-historical and socio-cultural conditions of the northern regions; and
- Restore security and translate into reality the rules of good governance, with an emphasis on transparency in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights, as well as justice and the fight against impunity.¹

Mali became an independent state on 22 September 1960, following the end of French colonial rule in what was then called French Sudan. Like many other post-colonial states, Mali's population is comprised of several ethnic groups. Of these, the Arabs and Tuaregs have traditionally been based in the northern regions of Mali: Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. These regions are also home to other ethnic groups, such as the Songhoy and the Peuhl. Although ethnic tolerance and interdependence have traditionally characterized relations among the various communities, in both the north and the south of the country, social and occupational distinctions between nomads and sedentarists have sometimes led to communal tensions, especially around the use of shared land and water resources.

Other sources of tension stem from the social and political relations between the different Tuareg clans. The Ifoghas clan, for example, has imposed an aristocratic or ruling status over other Tuareg clans, such as the Imghad clan, and these intra-group tensions escalate and play out during the

¹ Government of Mali, Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali issu du Processus d'Alger [Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers Process], signed by the Malian Government and the Platform on 15 May 2015 and by the Coordination of Azawad Movements on 20 June 2015, <<http://photos.state.gov/libraries/mali/328671/peace-accord-translations/1-accord-paix-et-reconciliation-francais.pdf>> (English translation by the author).



national crises. This can be illustrated in the current peace process, where, along with the MNLA, the Ifoghas are at the helm of the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad, HCUA) and both are negotiating as part of the CMA. Meanwhile, the Imghads are opposing them and pursuing their own interests through the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defence Group (Groupe d'Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés, GATIA), which is negotiating as part of the Platform.²

Tuareg claims for autonomy started in the early years of independence—the first Tuareg rebellion against the Malian Government took place in 1963. A second rebellion began in 1990, coinciding with both internal and external pressures for democratization. Whereas the 1963 rebellion was solely driven by Tuareg groups, the 1990–96 rebellion was supported by other ethnic groups living in the north, as a reaction to the systematic socio-economic marginalization and political exclusion of northerners in the governance of the country. As Robin Edward Poulton and Ibrahim Ag Youssouf note, General Moussa Traoré's regime:

was unable to address 'development' beyond the capital city and the armed forces. The peasants were exploited, and the social services neglected . . . [N]ortherners suffered proportionately more than the rest of Mali from neglect and marginalisation. In addition to political neglect, the north suffered from the abuse of military governors, while at the same period (1965–90) a cycle of drought was causing huge economic and social disruption, especially to the Touareg population.³

In contrast to the military repression of the first two governments, democratic rule in 1992 brought with it a change of approach to the problems of northern Mali, in the form of dialogue and negotiation. A first peace agreement, the Tamanrasset Agreement, had been concluded with the People's Movement of Azawad (Mouvement du Peuple de l'Azawad, MPA) and the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad (Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad, FIAA) on 6 January 1991. However, this agreement, which had been negotiated in haste by the government of General Moussa Traoré shortly before its overthrow in a military coup, was never implemented because it did not include all the parties to the conflict. A second agreement, the National Pact, negotiated by the transitional government led by General Amadou Toumani Touré, involved more popular consultations in the form of a series of preparatory meetings with civil society and leading community figures. This second agreement, between the Government of Mali and the United Movements and Fronts of Azawad (Mouvements et Fronts Unis de l'Azawad, MFUA), was signed on 11 April 1992. The 1992 National Pact revolved around four key points: peace and security in the north; national reconciliation; special initiatives to promote socio-economic development in the north; and

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² United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali, S/2015/426, 11 June 2015.

³ Poulton, R. and Youssouf, I., *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking* (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR): Geneva, 1998), p. 13.



a special status for the north within the unitary state of Mali.⁴ Inadequate and insufficient implementation of these measures led to another rebellion in May 2006, which was settled by the Algiers Peace Agreement, signed on 4 July 2006. The 2006 Algiers Peace Agreement did not lead to a sustainable peace either, and a rebellion led by the MNLA began in January 2012.

Although the 2012 crisis started with a Tuareg rebellion by the MNLA, it quickly turned into a complex situation involving Islamic fundamentalist movements, most notably al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, MUJAO) and Ansar Dine. These external threats to peace and security should not, however, overshadow the systemic internal contradictions that underlie the different episodes of violence in the country. These internal issues include the claim for self-determination or autonomy pursued by the CMA movements, the socio-economic marginalization of the northern regions, pervasive corruption, impunity and the lack of inclusive mechanisms for the management of public affairs.

Despite the failure of previous peace agreements, most notably the 1992 National Pact and the 2006 Algiers Peace Agreement, valuable lessons have been learned that could inform the ongoing peace process. Particular events—such as the national conference that took place in 1991 which brought together around 2000 individuals representing a broad range of Mali's society to discuss the future of the country and establish the pillars of a democratic system—illustrate the significance of inclusive dialogue and how it is anchored in Malian traditions.⁵ Other mechanisms that underpin this tradition of inclusive dialogue include local, regional and national forums on issues of societal concern, such as those that took place in 1994 in preparation for the implementation of the 1992 National Pact and those that took place in November and December 2013 in connection with the Algiers negotiations that led to the 2015 Peace Agreement. In her analysis of Mali's politics, Susanna D. Wing has stressed that while the inclusiveness of these consultations 'can certainly be questioned, it remains true that dialogue is commonly referred to as a central aspect of Malian culture and conflict resolution, and that any strategy that avoids dialogue is often considered suspect'.⁶

This established tradition of dialogue may thus motivate and sustain civil society's engagement with enhancing the capacities and skills required to sustain a durable peace.

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The need for civil society engagement in peacebuilding in Mali

Whether it is about implementing economic development strategies, establishing new security and governance mechanisms, promoting good governance or reconciling people and communities, the sustainable implementation of any of the commitments stipulated in the 2015 Peace Agreement neces-

⁴ Lode, K., 'Mali's peace process: context, analysis and evaluation', *Conciliation Resources: Accord*, no. 13 (2002).

⁵ Lode (note 4).

⁶ Wing, S. D., 'Briefing Mali: politics of a crisis', *African Affairs*, vol. 112, no. 448 (July 2013), pp. 476–85.



sarily requires the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs). As these issues are embedded in society's structures and relationships, addressing them in a sustainable manner means engaging with the people, which is best achieved through their own associations and communities or, in other words, through civil society.

While civil society's capacities may be limited in relation to the contentious issues in Mali, Malian civil society is highly diverse, which in itself is a strength. For example, civil society is well populated with professional, women's and youth associations operating at the local, regional and national levels, as well as umbrella organizations of various types and levels. This diversity of CSOs carries with it a diversity of understandings of the issues, which sometimes results in the lack of a common, or shared, understanding on which to base activities. The Algiers negotiations on the 2015 Peace Agreement illustrate this situation very well. Instead of the CSOs establishing a common civil society position on the political conflict, three different delegations of CSOs contributed to the negotiations. These delegations (and their viewpoints) corresponded to the three respective parties to the negotiations: the Government of Mali, the CMA and the Platform.⁷ For CSOs to promote a common understanding at the community level of the issues causing conflict, they must first establish such a common understanding among themselves.

The negotiation process allowed for some degree of civil society participation and opportunities for the respective parties to discuss with the Malian population the terms of the agreement at different stages of its preparation—and included a dissemination campaign following its signing in May 2015.⁸ However, these opportunities for participation were limited in scope and were unlikely to have allowed for a proper understanding of the specific issues addressed and the mechanisms planned to implement the commitments made in the agreement. Consequently, broader and extended dissemination initiatives are required in order to create such awareness and knowledge.

This section has provided brief background to the prevailing context, which is characterized by the need to implement a peace agreement focused on re-establishing security; reforming governance mechanisms and structures in line with the norms of inclusivity and the participation of citizens; and addressing the socio-economic needs of citizens, in general, and the socio-economic marginalization of the northern regions of Mali, in particular. All these processes require the mobilization of citizens at the grassroots level and the enhancement of skills—processes that civil society can support and facilitate if its social networks are active and if it is able to deliver on its functions, in particular its participatory socialization and community-building functions. Section III identifies some of the opportunities for civil society activity that can be derived from the implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement.

⁷ United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali, S/2015/219, 27 Mar. 2015.

⁸ United Nations, S/2015/219 (note 7); and United Nations, S/2015/426 (note 2).



III. Opportunities for civil society contributions to the Malian peace process

Key characteristics of civil society in Mali

‘Civil society’ refers to any collective, voluntary and non-profit oriented organization outside the family and the state, established for the purpose of pursuing the collective interests of its members.⁹ Mali’s public institutions have nurtured an empowering environment and have invited civil society to participate in state-initiated programmes, such as the decentralization programme, security sector reform and the reconciliation programme. In so doing, they have conveyed a positive attitude and a commitment to the development of an effective civil society.

Differing definitions of what constitutes ‘civil society’ are expressed in the general literature on civil society and its role in peacebuilding. Some definitions exclude ethnic and religious groups as these are sometimes perceived as ‘not civil’ with respect to their values on tolerance, non-discrimination and non-violence. However, other authors suggest that there are risks associated with excluding such actors because they may in fact play an important role in the processes taking place in society.¹⁰ The context in Mali is illustrative of why an inclusive definition is helpful, as traditional leaders’ associations and faith-based groups, such as the Muslim Youth Association (Association de la Jeunesse Musulmane) and the Malian Association for the Unity and Progress of Islam (Association Malienne pour l’Unité et le Progrès de l’Islam, AMUPI), are heavily involved in various aspects of Malian society. The ethnic and religious characteristics of these associations do not affect their interaction or collaboration with other CSOs.

Moreover, contributions from traditional and religious leaders to the Malian peace process are seen as necessary by all stakeholders—the state, civil society and citizens—due to their role and influence in society, particularly in rural areas. In addition to the trust they enjoy and engender within their communities, traditional and religious leaders carry out many public administration and dispute resolution tasks, such as the delivery of justice on family matters and the management of land-related conflicts. Therefore, the involvement of these actors can assist peacebuilding, especially in terms of enhancing mobilization at the grassroots level and managing inter-community relations. The inclusion of traditional and religious leaders in civil society activities can also be an opportunity for them to gain access to information, skills and resources that can benefit their communities.

⁹ Edwards, M., *Civil Society* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2009); and Ehrenberg, J., *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York University Press: New York and London, 1999).

¹⁰ Spurr, C., ‘Understanding civil society’, ed. T. Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment* (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, CO, and London, 2010), p. 20.



Peacebuilding roles and opportunities for civil society in Mali's peace process

Civil society can ensure that there is a thorough understanding of the real issues behind a conflict and facilitate inclusive participation in the elaboration of appropriate solutions and their implementation. Despite the existence of a broad, shared understanding of the causes of conflict at the community level and among some of the parties to the conflict, a broader dialogue is needed within the communities to deepen this understanding. This would include a discussion of the measures proposed in the 2015 Peace Agreement and the development of mechanisms for their implementation. In addition, there is a need to engage in dialogue with all sides of the political conflict in order to achieve a common view of the proposed mechanisms for building inclusive socio-political structures that can support peaceful coexistence within the unitary state of Mali. In the light of the conflict dynamics identified in section I, and based on the existing literature on civil society, the civil society contributions and functions of particular relevance to the ongoing peace process in Mali will be: mediation and facilitation, participatory socialization, community building and integration, advocacy and communication, and monitoring of accountability and service delivery.¹¹ More specifically, civil society can contribute to the consolidation of peace in Mali by participating in the activities discussed below.

One strategy to ensure a proper resolution to the conflict and an adequate foundation for a durable peace would be to facilitate a shared understanding of the problems underlying the recurrence of crises in the country

Information and citizenship education

As part of its mediation and facilitation function, civil society can ensure that citizens are informed about public policies and that public authorities are adequately informed about citizens' concerns, including the facilitation of an inclusive and participatory dialogue between the two sides.

In the current context of a cessation of hostilities, one strategy to ensure a proper resolution to the conflict and an adequate foundation for a durable peace would be to facilitate a shared understanding of the problems underlying the recurrence of crises in the country and an understanding of the constructive mechanisms agreed on in the 2015 Peace Agreement. Initiatives to inform people about the details of the Peace Agreement would be particularly useful in this context, since an inadequate understanding of these types of details is often listed among the factors that led to the failure of previous peace agreements.¹²

Complementing the state's efforts in this regard, there is an opportunity for civil society to foster dialogue and discussion at all levels of Malian society, thereby increasing understanding of the issues that cause conflict as well as the measures agreed to address these issues. Positive experiences of the short-lived implementation of Mali's 1992 National Pact could inspire the current generation of civil society. According to Kâre Lode, for instance, 'it was not until local northern civil society leaders, with the government's

¹¹ Spurk (note 10), pp. 21–22.

¹² Lode (note 4); and Government of Mali, Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (note 1).



encouragement and support from a group of facilitators, took a primary role in peace-making at the community level, that the peace process began to consolidate'.¹³

Promotion of citizen participation in political, socio-economic and security governance

The 2015 Peace Agreement underscores that inclusive and participatory governance is one of the key strategies for resolving conflict and building a lasting peace in Mali. This is in response to citizen and community demands for appropriate mechanisms for active participation by citizens in the management of public affairs at the local and national levels. Despite the declared political will to promote inclusive and participatory mechanisms of governance, most notably through decentralization, the requisite knowledge and understanding of effective participation in such processes is lacking at various levels of society.¹⁴ Civil society could organize information-sharing and training activities focused on these topics. This is an opportunity for Malian CSOs to actively implement a socialization function and enhance citizens' capacities for meaningful participation in the democratic process.

In relation to the consolidation of peace in particular, it should be emphasized that citizens not only have rights but also have duties to state institutions and their fellow citizens. Assimilation of this perspective is necessary for effective citizen action, for example with regard to monitoring the performance of public institutions and strengthening the democratic process through policy debates on issues such as the adequacy of governance structures and the protection of human rights. One of the most crucial issues in need of proper and wider understanding is the notion of autonomy and its various dimensions, as different opinions exist among the Malian population when it comes to the form and level of autonomy claimed by the CMA and what has been granted in the 2015 Peace Agreement.

Promotion of citizen participation in local security governance and early warning mechanisms

The regular recurrence of armed conflicts has had an adverse effect on the Malian people and their communities, especially in northern Mali, not least in the form of threats to physical safety and personal property. Furthermore, these communities have been affected by the infiltration of militants from Islamic fundamentalist groups, which have sought to recruit unemployed young people to their ranks. The persistent risk of infiltration increases the need to promote citizen participation in security mechanisms, such as local early warning mechanisms that facilitate the sharing of information, and cooperation between communities and public security institutions. Civil society can play an important role in this regard by providing information not only to young people but also to other members of the community so

¹³ Lode (note 4), p. 63.

¹⁴ Nyirabikali, G., Diarra, A. and Maïga, M. D., *Causes et Manifestations des Conflits au Mali: Une Perspective de la Société Civile* [Causes and manifestations of conflicts in Mali: a civil society perspective] (CONASCIPAL and SIPRI: Bamako, 2014), p. 90; and Coulibaly, C., 'Decentralisation in Mali: a constrained "responsibility transfer" process', Association pour contribuer à Améliorer la Gouvernance de la Terre, de l'Eau et des Ressources Naturelles (AGTER), Land issues in West Africa: Briefing notes, Dec. 2010, <http://www.agter.org/bdf/en/corpus_chemin/fiche-chemin-103.html>.



they can support each other and contribute to their communities' safety and security. Thus, improved information at the community level can facilitate engagement with decision makers and collaboration on better responses to security threats.

Some training in civic education would be required for citizens involved in the management of early warning mechanisms. Increased awareness would also be useful regarding the illegal possession of firearms. Opportunities exist for civil society to (a) provide information and carry out socialization activities that would enhance citizens' capacities to fulfil their citizenship obligations, and (b) build trust and cooperation within and between communities and security forces. Another opportunity linked to local security is assisting with community building in order to foster social cohesion and solidarity, and to mediate intercommunity disputes that might be exploited by those seeking to infiltrate the community and destabilize the security situation.

Further opportunities for civil society contributions in the area of local security will arise through participation in the demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants into civilian life. This is not just about collecting weapons, but also about ensuring adequate social rehabilitation so that demobilized youth are not recruited back into other irregular armed groups. Successful examples of collaborative initiatives between ex-fighters and community members can be seen in Afghanistan and South Sudan, in which demining activities were conducted by community members together with demobilized combatants.¹⁵ In addition to facilitating the reintegration of ex-armed group members into civilian life, channelling such reintegration through community-based and income-generating activities reinforces security and socio-economic development.

Promoting positive societal values

Malian CSOs can promote solidarity among people and facilitate collaboration and the fair management of common resources. Alongside the political conflict between the government and armed groups, inter- and intra-community conflicts linked to resource scarcity have also been common. The establishment and embedding of attitudes of solidarity and mutual respect could lead to a fairer use of common resources and help to curb or resolve inter- and intra-community conflict. For example, CSO activities could be oriented to increasing community awareness of the inclusive management of common resources such as grazing land and water reserves. These types of knowledge and skills would also be useful for participation in local governance. Moreover, developing and implementing specific training for traditional and religious authorities aimed at increasing their knowledge of the relevant legal frameworks and related processes could assist these authorities to improve the management of their communities, which might also help to reduce communal conflicts.

¹⁵ Piedmont, D., 'From war to peace, from soldiers to peacebuilders: interim stabilisation measures in Afghanistan and South Sudan', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2012), pp. 101–107.

*Promotion of associations, and economic and social development*

Malian CSOs are characterized by a diverse web of organizations of varying memberships, such as women's associations (e.g. the Malian Association of Women Lawyers), youth organizations, associations of traditional leaders, faith-based associations, professional associations (e.g. the National Federation of Artisans of Mali), and so on. In his assessment of Malian civil society, the Malian scholar Abdul Diallo acknowledges that while 'civil society' can be usefully defined in different ways, it can also simply be described as 'a space for citizens' initiatives' located between the family and the state.¹⁶ Given the variety of definitions, a pragmatic understanding of civil society can be gained from its functions and areas of activity, while its importance in organizing and managing social and political interactions within society justifies furthering its development.¹⁷

The strategic importance of Malian civil society in supplementing the state's efforts to meet the needs of citizens dramatically increases its significance in the prevailing context. The state is weak and its services are not available throughout the country. Civil society therefore becomes a crucial partner in filling the gap. In the context of an ongoing peace process, a functional and well-established civil society is very much needed, in that it can mobilize all citizens, provide information and training, facilitate interactions between citizens and the state, and engage in the implementation of certain activities initiated by other actors, including the state and international partners. Despite the political nature of the role inherent in some of civil society's activities—such as debating political priorities, civic education and the promotion of participatory mechanisms—civil society differs from political parties and political associations. A key distinction is that political parties and political associations aim to win political office while CSOs aim to support the common good, in the interests of their members and wider society.

Socio-economic development (or the lack thereof) figures high among the population's grievances against the government and the objectives of the 2015 Peace Agreement. Civil society contributions to the promotion of income-generating associations would be beneficial for the consolidation not only of peace, but also of social and economic progress. Youth and women constitute a large proportion of Mali's economically disadvantaged.¹⁸ Productive and income-generating associations could create employment and increase the economic opportunities for youth and women, especially access to means of production such as arable land, while also offering a space for members to acquire new knowledge and information about their rights.

Although civil society in Mali is already contributing to the ongoing peace process, and while further opportunities have arisen with the conclusion

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¹⁶ Diallo, A., *Où Est Ma Société Civile?* [Where is my civil society?] (Editions de Saint-Amans: Perpignan, 2013).

¹⁷ Edwards (note 9); and Ehrenberg (note 9).

¹⁸ Government of Mali, Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (note 1). See also UNDP, 'Work for human development: briefing note for countries on the 2015 Human Development Report, Mali, [n.d.], <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MLI.pdf>.



of the 2015 Peace Agreement, various challenges limit the effectiveness of these contributions. Section IV elaborates on some of these challenges.

IV. Barriers to effective civil society contributions to Mali's peace process

In an attempt to assess the state of civil society, its contribution to the ongoing peace process and the possible challenges it is encountering, the author conducted a short survey in the form of semi-structured discussions in July and August 2015 with representatives of four Malian CSOs and four international organizations working with civil society in Mali.¹⁹ The four CSOs were: the National Council for Civil Society of Mali (Conseil National de la Société Civile du Mali, CNSC), the National Forum of Civil Society Organizations in Mali (Forum National des Organisations de la Société Civile au Mali, FOSC), the National Coalition of Civil Society for Peace and the Fight against the Proliferation of Light Weapons (Coalition Nationale de la Société Civile pour la Paix et la Lutte contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères, CONASCIPAL) and Complexe Infaplus. The international support or partner organizations were: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Mali, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Mali.

Background of the CSO survey participants

All four CSOs that took part in the survey operate at the national level and have contributed to the ongoing peace process in one way or another. Malian CSOs are arranged under four administrative classifications determined by the territorial level at which an organization operates and by the nature of its membership—that is, whether its members are individuals or organizations.

Level one consists of grassroots associations and organizations formed by individuals at the community level. Level two is comprised of networks of level one organizations, at either the communal or the municipal level. Level three organizations are those that operate at the regional level and level four CSOs are networks that operate at the national level, with a membership made up of CSOs from various locations across the country and working in a diverse range of fields.

The CNSC and the FOSC are national umbrella organizations classified as level four CSOs. Most of the members of the CNSC are also members of the FOSC, and the CNSC is itself a member of the FOSC. Both organizations have made major contributions to the ongoing peace process (see below).

CONASCIPAL and Complexe Infaplus are classified as level four CSOs and undertake advocacy, research and information-related activities. Their seminars bring together different categories of stakeholders in discussions

¹⁹ This Insight Paper builds on the information emerging from the partnership work and fieldwork of SIPRI's Mali Civil Society and Peacebuilding project. It draws on onsite exchanges with members of civil society in meetings and seminar discussions, as well as interviews with civil society actors in Mali specifically conducted for this paper in July and Aug. 2015.



on the country's situation and potential or alternative policy prescriptions to promote and sustain peace, security and development in Mali.

CONASCIPAL was founded in 1999 and is a member of the CNSC and the FOSC. Its mission is to promote and implement initiatives that sustain a durable peace, security and the well-being of Malian society, mainly through training, awareness-raising and mediation.²⁰ Complexe Infaplus was created in December 2014 with a mission to provide peace-related educational activities, develop a peace education programme and foster peaceful values among its membership.²¹

The roles of the CNSC and the FOSC in the peace process

The CNSC was set up at the initiative of the government in 2003 because the government needed an interlocutor to engage with on matters that required civil society involvement. The CNSC was given a formal mandate to mediate between CSOs and the state.

According to its president, Boureima Allaye Touré, the CNSC has contributed to the peace process in a number of ways. Touré claims that the CNSC alerted the government to the threats that were developing in the northern regions of Mali and the climate of discontent within the military well before the 2012 crises.²² After the military coup in March 2012, a coalition of CSOs coordinated by the CNSC and the FOSC issued a proposition on how to deal with the institutional and security crises that had hit the country. Touré asserts that civil society has supplemented the role of the transitional government by providing advice and advocacy, and monitoring the 2013 elections. CSOs also disseminated information to the electorate, which helped the elections to run peacefully. Furthermore, the CNSC is engaged in a number of ongoing activities, most notably the elaboration of an action plan to support the implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement.

The FOSC was created in 2009 at the initiative of the European Union (EU) as a framework for strengthening civil society. It is an informal, rather than legally formalized, network of CSOs that seeks, among other things, to enhance collaboration and consultation among the various umbrella organizations and platforms in order to represent CSOs more effectively, increase dialogue and advance CSOs' opinions on political matters and development policies. The main aims of the FOSC are to revitalize the public sphere and enhance the leadership and professionalism of Malian civil society. The focus of its activities are level three and level four networks of CSOs and umbrella organizations.²³ The (level three) regional civil society coordination bureaux, which would normally have overall responsibility for

²⁰ Maiga, M., Executive Director of CONASCIPAL, and 3 members of CONASCIPAL, Semi-structured meeting and discussions with the author, Bamako, 25 July 2015. See also CONASCIPAL, 'Réalisations' [Achievements], [n.d.], <<http://www.conascipal.org/index.php/FR/quelques-realizations>>.

²¹ Yattara, I., President of Complexe Infaplus, together with a group of members, Semi-structured meeting and discussions with the author, Bamako, 27 July 2015.

²² Touré, B. A., President of the CNSC, Semi-structured meeting and discussions with the author, Bamako, 31 July 2015.

²³ Diabaté, M., President of the FOSC, together with 3 members of the Secretariat, Semi-structured meeting and discussions with the author, Bamako, 29 July 2015. See also 'Le portail de la société civile Malienne' [The portal of Malian civil society], [n.d.], <<http://societecivilemali.org/?Historique>>.



representing and supporting local CSOs, have become autonomous units of the FOSC. This arrangement excludes grassroots organizations and level two CSOs—the local networks of grassroots organizations at the communal and municipal levels—from the FOSC’s activities.

The FOSC’s members use the platform to promote their common interests through dialogue and collaborations between themselves and other development actors. In this regard, the FOSC facilitates the implementation of the Programme for the Support of Civil Society Organizations, 2012–18 (Programme d’Appui aux Organisations de la Société Civile II, PAOSC II), which is funded by the EU. This is a basket fund that aims to strengthen the capacities of CSOs in the areas of political dialogue, advocacy and research in support of their advocacy work.

The FOSC’s activities in support of the peace process included identifying and advocating workable solutions to the Malian crises, and contributions to the preparations for the 2013 presidential and parliamentary elections, the roadmap for peace negotiations and the Algiers negotiations. The FOSC also participated in the Brussels Donor Conference for Mali on 15 May 2013, which was organized under the theme ‘Together for a New Mali’.²⁴ The conference was organized by the European Commission, France and Mali in order to raise funds for the recovery process. That process included implementation of the 2012–13 roadmap for Mali’s transition, which placed specific emphasis on governance reforms, national dialogue to resolve the political crisis and development initiatives to promote economic recovery and the well-being of Mali’s citizens.²⁵

Overlap in the roles of the CNSC and the FOSC

Despite the potential for complementarity between the CNSC and the FOSC, the fact that the FOSC was created at the initiative of the EU as an additional entity to the main existing official national umbrella organization (i.e. the CNSC) has been a source of some confusion and friction. The inability of either organization to clarify for its membership the differences between the two has exacerbated the situation and limited the prospects for complementarity and cooperation. This has also led to a perception within the CSO community that the creation of the FOSC might cause the CNSC to be sidelined by external partners, a concern that is framed as an infringement of local ownership. In a seminar organized by CONASCIPAL and SIPRI on 15 September 2015, in which representatives of both the CNSC and the FOSC participated, an audience

The fact that the FOSC was created at the initiative of the EU as an additional entity to the main existing official national umbrella organization has been a source of some confusion and friction

²⁴ The CNSC, the Forum for the International Non-governmental Organizations in Mali (Forum des Organisations non gouvernementales Internationales au Mali, FONGIM) and the FOSC, ‘Vision and contribution of the national and international civil society for the recovery and sustainable development of Mali: advocacy document of the national and international civil society for the Conference of the Friends of Mali’, Bamako, May 2013, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/mali/docs/operations/6_Civil-Society-Proposition-ENG_Brussels.pdf>.

²⁵ See e.g. Barroso, J. M. D., Hollande, F. and Traore, D., ‘Joint chairs’ conclusions’, International Donors Conference: Together for a New Mali, Brussels, 15 May 2013, <http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/conclusions_-_mali_-_15.05_en.pdf>.



member suggested that they conduct a CSO mapping exercise in order to improve their collaboration and support the interests of their members.²⁶

The confusion surrounding the seemingly overlapping roles of the CNSC and the FOSC is just one of the obstacles facing CSOs in Mali. A number of other challenges for civil society in terms of its potential contribution to peacebuilding emerged during the survey discussions. The main issues are set out below.

Emerging challenges to the functioning of CSOs in Mali

Lack of communication and consultation within and among CSOs

While Touré asserted during the survey discussions that the CNSC consults its membership on the conduct of its work, CSOs remain concerned that most umbrella organizations, including the CNSC and the FOSC, do not consult openly.²⁷ These umbrella organizations have carried out advocacy

campaigns and provided input into national policy, but they have been less successful at liaising with or informing their constituencies at the grassroots level. These weaknesses are attributed to their lack of organizational and financial capacity. It should also be noted that some umbrella organizations, such as the CNSC, the Coordination of Women's

Associations and Non-governmental Organizations in Mali (Coordination des Associations et Organisations non gouvernementales Féminines du Mali, CAFO) and the National Youth Council of Mali (Conseil National de la Jeunesse du Mali, CNJ), were created by or with the influence of the state.²⁸ One negative effect of this has been their lack of proper understanding of their intermediary role. Much of their work focuses on influencing policy and advocacy directed at the state. They are not sufficiently connected with their respective constituency bases to be inclusive, participatory or accountable.

Institutional and organizational challenges

The support and partner organizations that participated in the semi-structured discussions underlined the institutional and organizational challenges facing Malian CSOs. Many CSOs are characterized by institutional and organizational weaknesses, which become obvious in the lack of communication and consultation between members and the absence of administrative routines such as activity plans, budgets and annual reports—including mandatory reports to the government department that regulates the non-governmental sector. Support for improving institutional and

Many CSOs are characterized by institutional and organizational weaknesses

²⁶ CONASCIPAL and SIPRI, Séminaire de présentation de la Vision Stratégique de la Société Civile pour la Paix et l'Unité Nationale au Mali [Seminar for the presentation of the strategic vision for civil society contributions to peace and national unity in Mali], Bamako, 15 Sep. 2015.

²⁷ Altair Asesores, *Mission d'Évaluation à mi-parcours du Programme d'Appui aux Organisations de la Société Civile (PAOSC II): Rapport Final* [Mid-term evaluation of the programme to support civil society organizations in Mali (PAOSC II): final report] (Altair Asesores: Bamako, 26 June 2015).

²⁸ The CAFO was created in 1991. One of its purposes is to act as an intermediary between the state and women's organizations. It also represents women's organizations in different policy-making arenas. The CNJ represents youth organizations in a similar way. Both organizations are classified as level four CSOs.



organizational capacities was considered crucial.²⁹ Participants saw institutional organization as important because it provides material proof of an organization's existence.

Lack of collaboration and complementarity among Malian CSOs

Umbrella organizations engage in activities that are similar to those of their member organizations. This results in competition where there should be complementarity and increased leverage. This is a key challenge recognized by both CSOs and the support and partner organizations. The size of this challenge is demonstrated by the continued growth in the number of CSOs that overlap with existing organizations and the lack of linkages between the different administrative classification levels (i.e. the level one grassroots associations, the level two and three organizations, and the level four national umbrella organizations). A rich diversity of CSOs should be a strength in meeting citizens' needs and making societal progress, but the lack of collaboration and complementarity limits their effectiveness. Malian CSOs recognize the imperative of finding new ways of operating and express an expectation that external partners might help them to bring about the change needed to improve complementarity within the sector.

Another issue that came out of the survey discussions was that civil society networks often focus on short-term issues at the expense of the long-term and more challenging issues that prevail at the grassroots level, such as the need to create income-generating activities and the provision of basic services. This can also be linked to dependence on external funding, which is often provided for issue-specific activities that are delineated in advance by the funding partner.

Lack of voluntarism and civic engagement among CSO members

The first generation of CSOs that emerged with the wave of democratization in the 1990s was comprised of students and workers who had a basic income (e.g. a salary or student financial support) to cover their subsistence needs.³⁰ The second generation of CSOs, which has emerged after 2000 is predominantly comprised of people with no steady income because of the high levels of unemployment. According to the UN Statistics Division, the unemployment rate in Mali has remained around 8 per cent since 2005, while the population has increased on average by 3 per cent per year.³¹ Moreover, this trend is coupled with an increase in the number of young workers entering the labour market. The formal employment sector, which includes the government and large companies, is at best only expected to account for 10 per cent of the new jobs required.³²

Engaging in civil society activities can therefore be seen as an alternative to formal employment, but such engagement is not necessarily motivated by a

²⁹ Officials at ECOWAS, MINUSMA Civil Society Section, NDI Mali and UNDP Mali, Interviews with author, Bamako, July–Aug. 2015.

³⁰ Semi-structured meetings and discussions between civil society actors and the author, Bamako, July–Aug. 2015.

³¹ United Nations Statistics Division, Country profile: Mali, accessed 20 Dec. 2015, <<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=mali>>.

³² Bart, M., 'Youth unemployment in Mali: a magnet for criminals and terrorists', The Broker, 23 Apr. 2015, <<http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Blogs/Sahel-Watch-a-living-analysis-of-the-conflict-in-Mali/Youth-unemployment-in-Mali-a-magnet-for-criminals-and-terrorists>>.



conviction to serve the collective interest. In addition, citizens must dedicate the majority of their time to making a living, which means that they have less time for volunteering for civil society activities. This dynamic could also explain the predominant focus on short-term issues and the lack of attention paid to wider societal issues that require long-term engagement.

Local ownership challenge

CSOs are willing to collaborate and understand the need for external support in terms of knowledge, skills and resources, but there was some criticism about how this support is provided. The criticism most often voiced is that external international partners have their own predefined areas and types of activities that they are prepared to support, but these activities do

not necessarily correspond with the needs of local actors and beneficiaries. One example cited is the EU's support programme for CSOs in Mali (i.e. PAOSC II), which focuses on strengthening the capacities of CSOs to contribute to development policies and strategies. While this objective is relevant to the policies of the government and its external

partners, it does not contribute to citizens' and CSOs' immediate capacity needs in terms of attending to the priorities of the wider population. This situation creates conflict between CSOs and local populations, because the needs of the people are not attended to despite the availability of funding.

The June 2015 evaluation of PAOSC II indicated that the programme would have been more relevant if the identification and definition of target groups and activities had taken the local context in which CSOs operate into consideration, especially at the regional level.³³ CSOs argue that potential partners should build their activities on local needs, instead of 'prescribing treatment without asking patients about their illnesses'.³⁴ Although a certain degree of local ownership exists, especially in terms of implementing activities, given the dependence of the civil society sector on external funding and the low level of thematic expertise and organizational capacity, challenges remain when it comes to making decisions and prioritizing activities.

A change in the workings of civil society is needed in order to revitalize interactions with and among grassroots actors

V. Policy implications for civil society initiatives in support of the peacebuilding agenda in Mali

There is considerable potential for civil society to contribute to peacebuilding in Mali, particularly because of the long-standing cultural predisposition for inclusive dialogue. Among the preconditions for achieving this endeavour are that civil society is itself equipped with the right capacities, and reflects in its own practice the lessons that it seeks to promote. The challenges identified above can be overcome and civil society can make an effective contribution to peacebuilding, provided that it responds adequately.

The lack of communication and linkages between the different levels of civil society, particularly with the grassroots level, constitutes a serious shortcoming of civil society's core function: to connect the state and society.

³³ Altair Asesores, PAOSC II (note 27), p. 6.

³⁴ FOSC representatives, meeting and discussions with the author (note 23).



This also limits civil society's potential to enhance citizens' capacities and skills for participation in civic life, as well as its impact on the promotion of other values of relevance to peacebuilding, such as mutual respect, inclusive dialogue, collaboration and solidarity among citizens. Inclusive dialogue at the grassroots level can only occur if actors at that level are sufficiently mobilized. This is difficult if the bulk of civil society work is being carried out in the capital. Thus, the same criticism levelled at previous governments, of confining development initiatives to Bamako, remains true today and evident within the civil society sector. A change in the workings of civil society is needed in order to revitalize interactions with and among grassroots actors. This can be achieved through an increase in and support for activities initiated at the grassroots level.

PAOSC II, the EU's support programme to civil society in Mali, presents a variety of options to provide support that can be used to address these challenges and promote the revitalization of interactions within civil society.³⁵ The FOSC participates in the planning, implementation and monitoring of activities conducted within PAOSC II. Malian CSOs should therefore use the FOSC's position to refocus PAOSC II-related activities in a way that also supports the activities of grassroots organizations and strengthens collaboration and networking with them.

However, the June 2015 evaluation report indicates that although PAOSC II responds to the needs expressed by CSOs regarding their own capacities for policy dialogue and consultation, it does not take account of the variety of and differences among CSOs when it comes to the elaboration of intervention strategies.³⁶ Thus, the lion's share of interventions has been devoted to regional and national umbrella organizations, excluding grassroots organizations and not taking local needs and policies into consideration. National umbrella organizations have a responsibility to rectify this situation and ensure that all categories of CSOs benefit from the support available.

Owing to the low level of local ownership, national umbrella organizations might have limited influence on the strategic planning of PAOSC II activities. As a result, and in order to deliver balanced and inclusive support to CSOs, external partners should seek to reinforce support at the grassroots level. Given the dependent relationship, especially in terms of financial support, increased attention from external partners to the grassroots level would attract the attention of national umbrella organizations and enhance interlinkages and the level of interaction. Such a move would thus increase mobilization in the civil society sector and enhance its potential to contribute to peacebuilding.

³⁵ Altair Asesores, PAOSC II (note 27).

³⁶ Altair Asesores, PAOSC II (note 27), p. 13.



Abbreviations

AMUPI	Association Malienne pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam (Malian Association for Unity and the Progress of Islam)
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CAFO	Coordination des Associations et Organisations non gouvernementales Féminines du Mali (Coordination of Women's Associations and Non-governmental Organizations in Mali)
CMA	Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (Coordination of Azawad Movements)
CNJ	Conseil National de la Jeunesse du Mali (National Youth Council of Mali)
CNSC	Conseil National de la Société Civile du Mali (National Council for Civil Society of Mali)
CONASCIPAL	Coalition Nationale de la Société Civile pour la Paix et la Lutte contre la Prolifération des Armes Légères (National Coalition of Civil Society for Peace and the Fight against the Proliferation of Light Weapons)
CSO	Civil society organization
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FIAA	Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad (Arab Islamic Front of Azawad)
FOSC	Forum National des Organisations de la Société Civile au Mali (National Forum of Civil Society Organizations in Mali)
GATIA	Groupe d'Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defence Group)
HCUA	Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (High Council for the Unity of Azawad)
MFUA	Mouvements et Fronts Unis de l'Azawad (United Movements and Fronts of Azawad)
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNLA	Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)
MPA	Mouvement du Peuple de l'Azawad (People's Movement of Azawad)
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa)
NDI	National Democratic Institute, Mali
PAOSC	Programme d'Appui aux Organisations de la Société Civile (Programme for the Support of Civil Society Organizations)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACEBUILDING IN MALI

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