



**Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits  
et missions de paix**

**UNMET HOPES TO GOVERN MALI'S  
PERSISTENT CRISIS**

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**A Stabilizing Mali Project Report  
AUGUST 2017**

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## List of Abbreviations

ATT	Amadou Toumani Touré (President of Mali 2002–2012)
BVG	Office of the Auditor General
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSA	Accord Follow-up Committee
CNDDR	National Commission of Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration
CNRSS	National Commission for Security Sector Reform
CVJR	National Commission for Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation
CEN	Conférence d'Entente Nationale
CMA	Coordination of Movements of Azawad
DDR	Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
GoM	Government of Mali
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (President of Mali 2013–present)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
RPM	Rassemblement pour le Mali (President IBK's party)
WDI	World Development Indicators

# Foreword

The following report is an analysis of the political and security situation in Mali following the outbreak of the crisis in 2012. In light of the international actors' concern with restoring State authority, Professor Sears's study details the contours, in mid-2017, of how the Government of Mali struggles to credibly fulfill its commitments.

In the coming months, the Centre FrancoPaix will publish complementary reports and analyses that will cover different elements and dimensions of the situation in Mali. A final report will be available in the spring of 2018. The following is therefore part of a collective research effort.

Indeed, in September 2016, the Centre FrancoPaix launched a major research project on the Malian conflict and its international engagements. Entitled "Stabilizing Mali: the challenges of conflict resolution", the project aims to produce a rigorous scientific analysis of Malian conflict dynamics. Through multidisciplinary and multidimensional analyses of the situation and opportunities for action, through a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and with a team of eight expert researchers, the initiative seeks to establish the connections and relationships between multiple variables, notably the links between conflict dynamics and those of international intervention. As such, the Mali Project will develop an enhanced and detailed understanding of the conflict and opportunities for peace.

The complexity of the situation in Mali is undeniable. The difficulties of the peace process are obvious. The limits of mediation and international interventions are important and, some will say, counterproductive. We do not pretend to know or to have discovered the solution to the Malian conflict, but we are confident that our approach and our team can identify and analyse the crucial links between various dimensions of the conflict, and thus shed new light on it.

Good reading.

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Photo : Sears © 2009





## UNMET HOPES TO GOVERN MALI'S PERSISTENT CRISIS

This report details the contours, in mid-2017, of how the Government of Mali (GoM) struggles to credibly fulfill its commitments. In light of the international actors' central preoccupation with restoring the authority of the Malian State, a contextualized understanding is crucial of the bureaucratic, political, and perceptual challenges that the State faces, not merely to stabilize itself, but to face the transformations that will be necessary to sustain stability. Further, these transformations and the barriers to them are crucial for appropriate, effective cooperation among international and national actors in pursuit of durable peace in Mali and the sub-region.

This report proceeds as follows. A brief methods discussion is followed by the context of the past five years, together with issues raised by the current status of the Accord implementation process, in particular how the issue of inclusivity is managed, and reflected in public discourse. Government credibility and State effectiveness are then discussed with reference to corruption, impunity, and bureaucratic resistance to reform. Next, donors' roles in these dynamics preface discussion of the stability aims of international and Malian actors, in light of the political economy of crisis. Then, divisions within the political class and civil society offer context for the recently proposed (and postponed) constitutional revision referendum. In conclusion, two nexuses are juxtaposed. Security against direct violence and political-economic development to address structural violence intersect the multiple interests and agendas of international, national, and sub-national constituencies. Questions for further research are appended.

### Methods

This report draws on academic scholarship, news media, and reports by government, international organizations, and research institutes. Analysis of this material is informed and augmented by open-ended interviews, elite interviews with interlocutors chosen through purposive and cascade sampling from prior contacts, that allowed for analysis of interlocutors views, positions within institutions and organizations, as well from their own insights (and documentary material). Government and non-governmental actors (Malian and non-Malian) were interviewed in April and May 2017 in Bamako and in September 2016 in Montreal. European Union staff and non-governmental EU partners were interviewed in April 2016 in Brussels. Analysis of the contemporary realities is further informed by insights from interviews conducted in June–August 2009 in Bamako and Gao. Relationships cultivated in these research trips add to those dating from doctoral dissertation field research in March–December 2002 and a Canadian Crossroads International volunteer placement in September 1994–March 1995. The interpretations here of the complexity of the current situation, its many categories of actors, and significant intangibles, are thus built on over 20 years of personal and professional relationships with Malians from six of Mali's regions. Basic Bamanan language, learned and relearned over multiple visits and opportunities to dialogue with



diaspora Malians, remains a part of the research tool-kit in evidence here: enabling access and building rapport.

## **From acute crisis 2012 to peace process restart 2017**

The Government of Mali under Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) faces disappointments of unmet hopes produced by unfulfilled expectations of its management of the multidimensional crises since 2012. Unfulfilled election commitments in 2013, and the handling of the drafting, signing, and lackluster implementation of the 2015 “Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers Process” (“hereafter Accord”), have eroded confidence in the current government. Ambivalence or lack of political will, to lead implementation and address multiform crises, is further exacerbated by the bureaucratic difficulties of translating even genuine commitments into concrete actions to address State bureaucracy and political economy factors that had engendered vulnerability to the crises

With their historical roots, contemporary manifestations, and complex contingencies, factors are converging to seriously hamper the transnational efforts to restore the authority, capacity, and legitimacy of the Malian State. The profound disappointment with the IBK administration, even among long-time Rassemblement pour le Mali (RPM) party supporters, is hard to overstate. “The crisis IBK put aside as impossible to manage –its complexity– and refused to see its realities and face them” (Interview, 1 May 2017, Bamako. RPM militant and former candidate in Ménaka. Gao region). Entrenched resistance to administrative reform, and persistent and endemic corruption, undermines cooperation among the many Malian actors in the peace and stabilization processes, as well as with Mali’s technical and financial partner–donors.

Seen in institutional and historical perspective, 2012 “demonstrated the structural weaknesses of the state and unveiled finally for the international community the real condition of the country” (Baudais 2015, 512). Notwithstanding the weaknesses revealed, however, the transitional Roadmap (January 2013) and presidential and legislative elections in 2013 restored constitutional and ostensible political normalcy sufficient to resume international development and military–security cooperation. Cautious optimism about possibilities for peace, which produced the 2015 Accord, are at high risk of succumbing to pessimism in mid-2017.

## **Justified concerns about Accord implementation**

Observers’ and analysts’ concerns about the Accord implementation are well-founded, given the many obstacles to progress, some noted since the process began. Indeed, “rather than trying to change a deeply flawed political system,” the Accord “seeks only to strengthen the institutions within it” (International Crisis Group ICG 2015, 1). Particularly concerning are the lessons offered by the slow pace and contestation of the Accord’s implementation (Boutellis and Zahar 2017). Persistent ‘lack of political will,’ and ‘bad faith,’ or ‘mistrust’ among the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), Plateforme, and GoM remain palpable challenges. Relatively timely successes in pursuit of restoring the State’s authority in the north of the country, as stipulated by the Accord, include : the Conférence d’Entente Nationale (CEN), ongoing meetings of the Accord Follow-up Committee (CSA), installation of interim authorities (contested and delayed), Constitutional reform

(attempted, hotly contested, now postponed), drafting a Peace Charter (another contested point of progress), and the late June 2017 process ‘restart’ which aims at near-future completion of urgent tasks.

Contrary to enthusiasm about the implementation process, for example, the CSA has been deemed “mere theatre” by some involved and close to participants. Little progress to show after a year of meetings raised serious questions about suitability and relevant expertise of those present (Interview, 20 April 2017, Bamako, donor embassy political councillor; Interview, 1 May 2017, Bamako, Senior CMA member and former International NGO director). Making mutual accusations, the signatory parties each have dodged responsibility for their own part in the stagnation of the process. Indeed, as Zahabi Ould Sidi Mohamed (President, Commission nationale de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion; CNDDR) underscored in February 2017, “The CSA has had 13 meetings without being able to parse certain questions of inclusivity” (cited in Coulibaly 2017, 5). Without rejecting the importance of seeking inclusivity, a senior administrator from Timbuktu nevertheless objected, “all those who are crying out have no representivity. These people want part of the cake and are ready to risk the whole process to get it” (Senior administrator from Timbuktu cited in Coulibaly 2017, 4). Critiques of the CEN reflected broader critiques of the Accord and process, and named as ‘check-box’ progress the same features that are cited by enthusiasts. The GoM “should be leading and guiding the process,” but instead, “because of the laxity of the Administration,” Accord implementation is “not even 10% done” (Interview, 2 May 2017, Bamako, Political party leader). Progress made to date, however, answers only in part the criticisms and concerns that persist about the commitment, agendas, and interests of different GoM actors in the process.<sup>1</sup>

## **Inclusivity and Representation: who speaks for whom?**

Even if representatives of the CMA, GoM, and Plateforme agree on certain points of progress in the implementation of the Accord, at issue is the very representativity of such representatives. Indeed, this thorny problem is signaled by actors from different viewpoints –GoM, CMA, donors (Interview, 1 May 2017, Bamako, Senior CMA member and former International NGO director; Interview, 2 May 2017, Bamako, Political party leader; Interview, 20 April 2017, Bamako, donor embassy political councillor).<sup>2</sup> Delicate political arrangements between CSA members and their constituencies are further disrupted by cease-fire violations, which also punctuate worsening relations among signatory stakeholders (Sandor 2017; United Nations 2017). Furthermore, the non-state signatories are not alone in facing criticism of their credibility in the Accord implementation processes. The GoM struggles to lead implementation credibly; even commitments made in good faith are difficult to concretize (Interview, 26 April 2017, Bamako, Senior staff, Cabinet of the Leader of the Opposition; Cisse 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Among non-signatory groups and even GAS (*groupes armés signataires*; armed signatory groups), resistance to timely implementation can reflect profit-driven leverage of the process, but also ‘spoiler’ interests in having the current peace process fail, whether to pursue avenues toward another agreement, or to benefit from the ‘instrumentalization of disorder.’ C.f. Chabal and Daloz.1999; Sandor 2017.

<sup>2</sup>A weak participatory approach augured ill for Accord implementation. Indeed, « tout a été discuté ailleurs, jusqu’au point que certains ne se sont pas sentis concernés par l’Accord. » Femme politique malienne et ancienne ministre, 11 février 2016, Bamako (cited in Sy et al 2016).

## **(Non)Credibility and (In)Effectiveness of the State**

Notwithstanding the current GoM electoral mandate, in northern communities, “as much as at any time in Mali’s post-independence history the administration is perceived as a foreign body [...] The greatest corruption is in loss of justice in the north” (Interview 1 May 2017, Bamako. Senior CMA member, former International NGO director). A genuine base of State legitimacy among non-urban northern and other outlying populations has been of little interest to the southern-oriented political class. Even as multiparty elections and accompanying administrative decentralization offered opportunities to build social contract relations between the central State and populations throughout Mali, many post-dictatorship political transformations are still outstanding since the 1990s (Bergamachi 2014; Charbonneau and Sears 2014; Sperber 2017). Reprised in 2012, “[f]undamental in the crisis that Mali experienced at the beginning of the 1990s was the profound questioning of the state,” (Baudais 2015, 204; C.f. Bøås and Torheim 2013). Indeed, the *modus vivendi* of the pre-2012 period –the ostensibly ‘pre-conflict’ period– was characterized by centralized and centralizing administration coupled with personalized, patronage politics and profound mistrust among the actors now charged with enacting the Accord. More generalized mistrust is between populations in general and the administration, on a range of basic services, and the responsible and responsive presence of the defense and security forces (Interview 28 April 2017, Bamako, Malian Researcher and Analyst).

Thus, the post-2013 ostensibly workable political status quo is unevenly legitimate, particularly where the administration of justice is concerned. “Without provisions of justice, there can be no peace: otherwise it [the peace process] is attempting to heal a puss-filled wound with a bandage” (Interview 11 May 2017, Bamako. Senior Administrator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Thus, despite the wide resonance of fighting impunity, accessible and impartial justice is an issue as complex as it is central. The frustrations with judicial reform among donors and international NGOs stem from inconsistent political will to end impunity, particularly in the armed forces and at high bureaucratic levels, coupled with associated problems of non-independence, lack of means, and insufficient expertise (Interview 18 April 2017, Bamako, donor (non-Malian) senior development cooperation staff; Avocats sans frontières Canada 2017; MINUSMA 2017).

Even as human rights violations since 2015 characterize “an unprecedented level of insecurity” (Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme/Association malienne des droits de l’Homme 2017), complaints filed also await adjudication for cases of sexual assault of Malian women during the 2012-2013 crisis, committed by state and non-state actors. The gendered impacts of contemporary and historical conflicts raise many issues of fundamental justice. Impunity for war time sexual violence threatens, as alleged persecutors are integrated into army and police forces in communities with their former victims (Interview 11 May 2017. Senior administrator and military officer, Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission –CVJR; Interview 9 May 2017, Bamako. Senior staff Mali Chapter, regional women’s peace network; Interview 5 May 2017, former Senior staff, Association des Juristes Maliens).

## Bureaucratic resistance to reform

The IBK administration has not credibly broken with this past to lead the reforms needed for durable stability and socio-economic development fit for reconciliation and peace (Interview 30 April 2017, Bamako, former RPM candidate in Menaka). While some populations are served by few or no State functions, others face a poorly adapted and even predatory State.<sup>3</sup> Patterns of managing conflicts through patron–client relations among national and regional government elites incorporate opposition actors into consensus politics and government (Interview 26 April 2017, Bamako, Bureau du Vérificateur Général (BVG) Staff; Interview 24 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Malian institutional development analyst; Sandor 2017).<sup>4</sup>

Implementing top-level commitments in any large bureaucracy is challenging. Mali's bureaucratic shortcomings present especially stubborn problems of divergent perspectives and commitments within the GoM. For example, notwithstanding the declared “cornerstone,”<sup>5</sup> importance of Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) in the peace process, it is “a lower priority for the Ministry of Defence,” and faces suspicion among those who see DDR as another iteration of “self-serving for rebel groups to benefit from more resources” (Interview 25 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Administrator, CNDDR).<sup>6</sup>

Suspicious within the GoM about Accord elements are also reflected in current and rooted attitudes towards administrative decentralization, a key policy program initiative in tandem with democratic pluralism in the mid-1990s, and somewhat emblematic of the State's uneven capacity. “The agents of central authority hated decentralization as a sharing of powers, which they saw as a reduction of their powers and privileges to which they had become accustomed and felt entitled” (Interview 3 May 2017, Bamako, Senior administrator, Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and State Reform). Indeed, frictions exist between institutions, whether between regions and the capital, or among numerous directorates, commissions, offices, and ministries. Frequently overlapping institutional responsibilities, and redundant work on similar issues, exacerbates poor articulation among the proliferating offices. Moreover, some recently established Ministries are without properly equipped offices to exercise their roles, and are shown as evidence of political patronage appointments, rather than functional administrative units (Interview 3 May 2017, Bamako, Senior administrator, Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale, de la Décentralisation et de la Réforme de l'État; Interview 26 April, Bamako, Senior official, national workers' union). With roots back to the 1990s, the 2015 Accord inherits implementation failures of earlier peace Accords (Tamssaret 1991, Timbuktu 1996, Algiers 2006), as well as legacies of partial and resisted

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Absent’ State authority does not automatically equate to a chaotic vacuum without norms and practices that order social and economic relations. Indeed, communities' survival has historically depended on resilient non-state authorities (Sears 2013; Coulibaly 2016).

<sup>4</sup> The “excessive dominance of the executive branch” has permitted “the growing socio-cultural cleavage between urban elites and the rest of the population” (van de Walle 2012, 3).

<sup>5</sup> Zahabi Ould Sidi Mohamed, President, Commission National de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion (cited in Coulibaly 2017,5).

<sup>6</sup> Also at issue is the possible terrorist infiltration of DDR (Charbonneau 2017a).

decentralization processes (Interview 28 April 2017, Bamako, Former Minister and author and analyst; Sy, et al 2016; ICG 2015).

Thus, the peace process confronts multiple institutional contradictions, and elite political class actors' attempts to manage far-reaching dysfunctions in the aid-dependent political economy of the patronage State (Interview, 2 May 2017, Bamako, Political party leader; Baudais 2015, 196). Bureaucratic resistance, mistrust, and silencing effects play a “significant role in limiting the ability of planning for and responding to crises,” and faces a “certain – not to say animosity – but perhaps suspicion in light of current advantages and prerogatives that could be reduced or eliminated” (Interview 25 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Administrator, National Commission for Security Sector Reform – CNRSS). This comprehensible, if all-too-human, resistance to change is endemic to institutions' culture and administrators' behaviour, and not fully addressed by changes in ‘texts’ (policies, framework documents, procedure manuals) or organizational structures. Moreover, reforms have consistently “gone against the grain of the previous administrations” operating within centralist and centralizing legacies of French-modeled republicanism (Interview 28 April 2017, Bamako, former Minister and author).

The case of the Bureau du Vérificateur Général (BVG) continues to be instructive, if not altogether encouraging, with few recommendations for prosecution or reform being pursued. Fighting corruption continues to be high on official agendas, despite the disconnect between strong rhetoric and little corresponding concrete progress. Although the BVG continues to investigate and report, the government suffers massive financial losses, and there is only little and sporadic application of existing legislation and prosecution mechanisms. Lack of political will hampers follow-up, the public perception of selective impunity is not unfounded, and rumours circulate that reports as yet unreleased by the IBK's office name actors close to the President (Interview 26 April 2017, Bamako, BVG Staff; Bureau du Vérificateur Général 2015; Sylla 2017). With this backdrop, the public contempt for government corruption is widespread, and denounced by critics from within and outside the GoM. As pre-2018 election campaign machinery is set in motion, critics ask why BVG recent reports have not been made public by the president's office, recalling IBK's September 2013 investiture speech commitment to eliminating corruption (Ba 2013). Significant government turnover since 2013 signals a lack of strategic vision at the GoM's highest levels. Among the most instructive changes were the short-lived terms of Prime Ministers Oumar Tatam Ly (5 September 2013 to 5 April 2014) followed by Moussa Mara (5 April 2014 – 9 January 2015). Ly's resignation letter names “dysfunctions and shortcoming in the Government's operations, that greatly reduce its capacity to meet the challenges it faces” (Diarrah 2014).

Perpetuating weak institutional development, the 2003–2013 decade offered “few significant changes in the functioning of the Malian administration, in light of the activities undertaken, financing allocated, and efforts made” (Viguiet et Contis 2015, 64, my translation). Given the multidimensional crisis, Mali's need for better governance is deeper than reform. More than restoring State authority, is the need, as the CEN stressed, to “Refonder l'Etat sur des bases plus égalitaires” (Dia 2017). Refounding the State must include greater attention to structural and behavioral, institutional-cultural and political-economic dimensions of Mali's challenges. While both local and national-level governance practices are characterized by impunity, also noteworthy is that discretionary authority, unencumbered by professional ethics, fails to link accountability to legitimacy, which in turn can allow and entrench poor management and corruption. Thus the cycle of weak accountability and lack of pressure from populations for said accountability rests on weak

mutual trust and low expectations between populations and administrators (Interview 24 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Malian institutional development analyst).

The resonance of refounding the State on more egalitarian bases goes beyond particular groups' interests and concerns. The desire to correct the basis of State–society relations, framed in terms of greater regional autonomy by the CMA in 2015 (Ag Acherif 2015), nevertheless speaks to the broader and deeper need for a reconstructed social contract throughout Mali. Profound and lasting change confronts « une certaine difficulté chez ces agents étatiques de se départir de leur ancienne perception hiérarchique du pouvoir » (Coulibaly 2016, 40).

## **Mali–donor relations: restoring, reforming, or refounding the State?**

Institutional dysfunction co-occurs with significant donor involvement. In 2013, foreign aid was equivalent to 11 per cent of Mali's Gross National Income (GNI), and 80 per cent of central government expenditures. Per person official development assistance (ODA) nearly tripled 2000–2014 (World Bank 2016; World Bank 2017). Although not simplistically dictated or overruled by international actors, GoM options are conditioned and constrained by donor priorities and interests, which bring negotiations with external actors agendas into every sphere of government priority-setting and implementation (Interview 25 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Administrator, CNRSS). Thus, worth monitoring is the relationship between the stabilization agenda (which is central to Mali–donor cooperation), and the divisions apparent within the GoM bureaucracy and broader Malian political class. Donor investment in short-term stability risks tacitly endorsing “a Potemkin's village” republic (Caplan 2013): that is, a façade able to withstand superficial inspection, but erected on bases as yet insufficient for a sovereign, democratic polity (Sperber 2017; Charbonneau and Sears 2014). Also, the guidance and discipline of donors is a contentious point regularly reported in media, and ripe for exploitation by opposition politicians and civil society actors. Indeed, even when desirous to formulate policies responsive to citizens' aspirations, GoM actors operate within conditions of very high aid dependence, which can hamper accountability and investment in public institutions (Moss et al. 2006).

Donors' financial and technical support procedures can tie up, circumvent, or replace scarce government capacity and undermine sustainable capacity-building. This produces incentives and pressures for administrators to abdicate effective leadership and leverage financing opportunities so to maintain their influence with their respective client groups, while preserving the outward forms of cooperation partnerships (Interview 3 May 2017, Bamako, Senior administrator, Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale, de la Décentralisation et de la Reforme de l'Etat; Interview 11 May 2017, Bamako, Senior Administrator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Donors have fostered proliferating structures and new initiatives, in part with a view to capacity-building, but also to ‘work around’ blockages in the Malian administration “by supporting or creating structures better equipped with qualified human resources, and technical and financial means” (Baudais 2015, 293). After funding ends, the ad hoc structures have few lasting impacts on State capacities or administrator ownership. GoM—donor relations of cooperation thus reproduce “ownership without leadership” (Interview, 18 April 2017, Bamako, donor (Malian) senior development cooperation staff).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A Bamanan proverb characterizes taking and neglecting responsibility in cooperation: “If you say, ‘Come help me kill this lion’, you had better have its ears; if you only have its tail, no one will help you.”

Administrative structures and institutional cultures afford even relatively senior staff insufficient responsibility to be effective. “CEO-itis,” rigidly top–down management, discourages dissent, and stifles frankness and innovation. Inculcating responsibility in decision-makers (“*responsabiliser les responsables*”) faces significant obstacles in the existing context of institutional structures, cultures, and behaviours. Minimal decision-making power thwarts taking responsibility, and combines with lacks in oversight or monitoring, and few if any consequences for poor performance or non-action. The tension between the relational and the professional juxtaposes individualism and selfishness (for personal as well as broader commonplace family and client network obligations), versus a more encompassing social solidarity that is manifest in a commitment to the public good (Interview 21 April 2017, Bamako, Malian opposition party activist and researcher; Interview 24 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Malian institutional development analyst; Interview 29 April 2017, Bamako, Sikasso Teacher).

Profound dissatisfaction with the 2013–2018 IBK administration goes beyond distrust of a particular government. Increasingly symbolic of the deeply suspect authority of the State in certain regions, and among certain populations, it is emblematic of the full gamut of failures: from weak capacity to provide a minimum of justice and public safety to capacities misused in discriminatory or predatory ways. Notwithstanding the many justified reproaches against the State, and despite the fiercely, sometimes violently, contested processes of negotiating different views and aims for authority, legitimate governance institutions more representative of and responsive to the needs and aspirations of local populations are nevertheless necessary.

The 2015 Accord identifies (though with few details) much that could be relevant to restoring *and refounding* State authority. Even with “scant mention of issues like the access to basic social services, jobs or justice,” the Accord does speak in broad terms to socio-economic development concerns “at the heart of popular demands,” naming in particular “la nécessité pour l’Etat de refonder sa vision du développement local” (ICG 2015, 1; Accord 2015, Part IV, Chapitre 12, Art. 31). For example, addressing the political economies of survival through illicit trade and the worst forms of trafficking requires a vision for a political economy of reconciliation, to translate the short-term reduction of direct violence into the durable transformation of structural violence (Interview, 20 April 2017, Bamako, donor embassy political councillor; Interview 26 April 2017, Bamako, Senior official, national union; Accord 2015, Chapitre V; Galtung 1969).

## **Political economy of crisis, stabilization, and reconciliation**

The Malian political economy must navigate between neoliberal policy preferences advocated by donors and the socialist and social democratic political history of an ostensible provider–state.

In Mali, poverty is the norm, not the exception. Thus, notwithstanding some encouraging macroeconomic indicators, per capita Gross National Product growth remains low 2.0–2.5 per cent; over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Malians live on less than \$3 USD per day, and nearly 50 per cent on less than \$2 USD per day (IMF 2017; Roseberry and Leuprecht 2017). Most opportunities for employment and investment are concentrated around Bamako. Economic dynamism is frustrated by weak public financial management, and by the negative impacts of insecurity on producers, consumers, investors, and donors (Konate 2017). Mali’s Sahara and Sahel zones are highly vulnerable to climate shocks.

Poor rains, droughts, and floods increasingly impact the largest share of national income: agriculture. After five years of crises, conflict, food insecurity, and declines in basic services, humanitarian agencies struggle to help an estimated 3.7 million relief-dependent Malians— about one in five. An “extremely complex humanitarian emergency” rests on multiple food crises since 2003 that had already “significantly weakened the livelihoods of the poorest families” (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations ECHO 2017). As insecurity persists or increases at the community level, mutual self-help systems also suffer, exposing more of the most vulnerable Malians –women and children, especially in rural areas– to greater risks, disproportional privations and burdens. (Interview 5 May 2017, Bamako, Former senior staff, Association des Juristes Maliens; Interview 9 May 2017, Bamako; Senior staff Mali Chapter, regional women’s peace network; Bencherif et Ag Rousmane 2017).

In addition, well-trained Malians may find job opportunities with the international donor sectors more attractive than government work which is perceived to be poorly paid, corrupt, and demoralizing (Interview, 22 April 2017, Bamako, Senior Malian staff international NGO; Interview, 3 May 2017, Bamako, Retired government hydrological engineer, opposition party member). Indeed, addressing Mali’s political economy of crisis, stabilization, and reconciliation, according to former US Ambassador to Mali (2008—2011), needs realistic expectations based on adequate assessment “of the extraordinarily difficult conditions in which the country must operate” (Milovanovic 2017).

## Constitutional reform and socio-political divisions

The GoM’s proposed Constitutional reform (March–July 2017) met with massive opposition: the *Don’t touch my Constitution* campaign. Peaceful protest on such a large scale in a declared state of emergency is significant, and the indefinite postponement of the referendum is an encouraging sign of the GoM’s responsiveness. Perceived by many as intended to plebiscite IBK’s management of the crisis, the gambit leaves open the question of the GoM’s grasp of Malian public opinion. Trust in institutions and administrators is low in opinion surveys, with only 29 per cent satisfied with GoM actions (Roger 2017; Guindo et al 2016).

A recent open letter to IBK is an instructive criticism of the President’s failings, of which the misguided attempt to reform the constitution is deemed emblematic. Historian, author, and former First Lady, Adame Bâ Konaré admonished IBK to rise to the occasion, to expand the scope of dialogue, and to facilitate retreat from a muscular, even bellicose stance among peace process stakeholders – “dégonfler les biceps” (Konaré 2017). Certainly, it is wise to exhort calm and harmony in the face of spreading violence, conflict, and stubborn crises. However, in making this appeal, Konaré reinforces the Bamanan/Mandé-centric narrative of Mali’s greatness under Sundiata Keita (fl. 1230 CR), central to the political nationalism in Mali promoted by educated and urban professionals for 25 years. Indeed, a southern-oriented and selective articulation of ‘unity’ and ‘cohesion’ goes against precisely the salient ethno-linguistic diversity and inequality that underlies the ongoing conflicts and crisis (Charbonneau and Sears. 2014; Sears 2013).

Non-government agencies and leaders in Mali’s ‘statist’ civil society, remain closely tied to service providers and recruiting bases for access to State resources and positions (Interview 26 April 2017, Bamako, Senior staff opposition political party, Women’s wing). Indeed, a key question is, notwithstanding the self-promotion implicit in observations from younger politicians, “Without



targeted support of those future leaders showing promise, there can only be accidental breakthroughs. [Donors' political] neutrality is mediocre and inoperative. The current, established political class is known" (Interview, 2 May 2017, Bamako, Political party leader). Can Malians, together with Mali's donor-partners, identify and aid those actors who can credibly claim and plan to address 'bad governance' (corruption, impunity, etc.), and foster more responsive and representative political power at national, regional, and local levels? Who are the most promising among the next generation of political leaders? A "new generation of activists" emerging since 2012–2013 may indeed be relatively "unconnected to existing political structures" (Whitehouse 2017, 28). In advocating non-violence, promoting tolerance, and doing politics differently (Poudiougou 2017), so-called 'new civil society' nevertheless inherits 20-year legacies of how "civil society decided to play hooky and not get serious on activism or proactive constructive criticism" (Interview with 'Fanta' cited in Whitehouse 2017, 30). Change agents also confront an embedded status quo, with possibly growing popular nostalgia for past regimes and leaders (Tamboura 2017). Interlocutors sometimes express disappointment through nostalgia for certain former administrators deemed competent, but who were fired, forced out, or frustrated in their work.

Calls by civil society actors, for more searching and comprehensive peace-seeking processes than are currently at the forefront of Accord implementation, are gaining traction. Among the most significant challenges to the larger State–society and GoM–donor relations that encompass the administration, is possible dialogue with self-proclaimed jihadists. The suggestion of dialogue re-energizes questions of representivity within and beyond the current Accord processes (Macé 2017; Keita 2017). Non-state actors in social regulation and welfare provision respond to conflict-prone social divisions, which remain at risk of being instrumentalized through ethnic othering as a prelude to possible violence (Interview 11 May 2017, Bamako, Senior administrator and military officer, CVJR; Interview 5 May 2017 Senior Staff, CVJR Bamako Section).

Against threats of more widespread crisis of socio-political order, community-level or grassroots conflict management mechanisms are not as effective as they may have been ten years ago, nor are evidently as robust as they were in the mid-to-late 1990s. The relatively long-lived Peace of Timbuktu (1996) was built on traditional leaders empowered and enabled by support from their communities and judiciously engaged international actors. Just as the Accord process suffers from degrading trust, so too do other conflict contexts (Interview 18 April 2017, Bamako, Non-Malian International NGO country Director, and fluent Fulfulde-speaker; Poulton et Ag Youssouf 1998; Sears 2010).<sup>8</sup>

With the historical precedents, and as during the acute crisis and since, many community leaders are today involved in organizing basic public services. Related to disconnections between governors and the governed, however, is a potentially significant shift from the overall socio-political situation prior to 2012. Collaboration with armed non-state actors suggests deep crises along social cleavages among different groups, as well as between different groups and the state. These forming and shifting axes of social (dis)trust deserve much closer scrutiny. This scrutiny is particularly crucial in light of Mali's historical practices of social integration, discipline, and conflict management, but also the resilient consensus politics paradigm, despite its acknowledged shortcomings (Interview 24 April 2017, Bamako, Senior analyst, MINUSMA; Macé 2017). A key

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<sup>8</sup> When doubly disserved by state and traditional authorities to facilitate access to opportunities or resources through patronage networks (whether 'local' or 'extraverted') young Malians (men especially) have less and less to lose.

question arising is the degree to which community leaders do or do not enjoy grassroots and unofficial (non-State, customary) support and/or affirmation through official or State administrative structures, particularly as seen and endorsed by youth. Social and political trust trajectories need analysis in historical perspective.

Restoring reformed pre-2012 governance will be insufficient to reduce conflict-prone divisions. Social cleavages remain (e.g. over resource access and management of farmland, water, pasture, and artisanal gold mining sites), and are becoming unprecedentedly militarized, significantly increasing risks of violence. Moreover, the state's uneven capacity to maintain social order through force and consent-building hampers control of criminal violence outside of core areas and regions. Conflict synergies among root causes combine and reinforce the more proximate and contingent conflict factors (Interview 2 May 2017, Bamako, middle-class Peulh from Bandiagara Circle, Mopti region; Agmour 2017; Sangaré 2016; IMRAP 2017; Bagayoko et al 2017). Indeed, in some outlying areas, the situation is worse since the 2013 presidential elections (Hagberg et al 2017, 36).

While violence displaces over 45,000 thousand Malians internally and 140,000 into neighboring countries, there is a certain *sang-froid* in electoral campaign preparations while incidents of violence in Bamako, Mopti, and Kidal regions punctuate the daily news. The unfolding of political, economic, and social 'business as usual' in the south speaks of a perhaps cavalier confidence, or wait-and-see attitude (ECHO 2017; RFI 2017a, 2017c; Jeune Afrique 2017). Late-in-mandate announcements, especially infrastructure projects, are building political capital, and intended to impress the (literate/political class) electorate and donors leading into the 2018 Presidential elections. Conversely, lackluster Accord progress reinforces assessments that the IBK government has not credibly pursued its 2013-2018 mandate (Maiga 2017).<sup>9</sup> Given the divisions within the Malian political class, the 2018 Presidential elections harbour potential difficulties for the peace process in both the short-to-medium and longer terms. Indeed, perceptions perhaps more common in the south are that north-focused agendas dominate the Accord process at the expense of the pursuit of transformations relevant across all of Mali's zones, and robustly representative engagement with all of Mali's populations with a stake in the future of peace (Interview 2 May 2017, Bamako, political party Leader; Interview, 1 May 2017, Bamako, Senior CMA member and former International NGO director; Kone 2017). If significant anti-status quo tendencies, sentiments, and movements are not reflected adequately in the poll results in 2018, current mobilizations suggest real possibilities of more generalized social disruption, whether (or not) it precedes or follows Malians mobilizing to vote. Claims about the distribution and availability of national identity number (NINA) cards as improved proof against electoral fraud are viewed with circumspection if not suspicion. As in 2013 and 2016, the accessibility and security of voting in some zones remains questionable in 2017 and into 2018 (Interview 21 April 2017, Bamako, Malian opposition party member, and researcher).

Such voting will occur within a political party system that remains poorly institutionalized, fragmented, and highly personalized, with personalistic parties lacking political platforms. Exacerbated by Amadou Toumani Touré's two terms as an independent, political coalitions and consensus have been increasingly criticized as entrenching governance unresponsive to popular discontent with institutional deficits and representatives' poor performance (Bleck and Wan de Walle 2011). Anticipating 2018 elections as the next phase of returning political normalcy mistakenly

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<sup>9</sup> The GoM domestic policy program declared by Prime Minister Maiga has the peace process foremost, but as only one among, many priorities.

relies on enthusiasm and possibly exaggerated expectations, for restoring the State's authority to manage the ongoing crisis. A spectrum of policies, practices and approaches, within the transnational GoM—donor cooperation dynamics, must seek timely restoration of State authority and its durable refounding.

## Governance nexuses for development and security

In the immediate aftermath of 2012–2013, donors were more fully, if belatedly, alerted to the State's façade of effectiveness and legitimacy, in which they had played a role perpetuating (Bergamachi 2014). With modest enthusiasm for the 2015 Accord process, notwithstanding its shortcomings, large donors (World Bank, France, EU) are renewing or augmenting their partnership commitments. Mali's profound and entrenched governance problems have yet to impact donors' actions and approaches significantly.<sup>10</sup> While preoccupied with security, donors risk returning to complacency on governance once again (Boutellis and Zahar 2017; RFI 2017b; Brown 2016), and risk reproducing and preserving a narrative of justified confidence in Mali as a model cooperation partner.<sup>11</sup>

As a significant document from the Accord implementation process to date, the CEN report indicates problems amenable to short-to-medium institutional reforms: those related to stabilization, as well as transformations that Mali's political economy has needed for at least 25 years. Significant institutional changes cannot, however, be durably addressed as technical problems in isolation from their *political* dynamics, in which elite actors hope to rescue and salvage, if not reset and renew, a version of the aid-dependent political economy of the patronage State, to their benefit and that of their networks.

In light of the legacies of 2002–2012, and stagnant or deepening crisis in 2013–2018, international cooperation involves an increasingly challenging constellation of tasks to navigate and assess. At the intersection of multiple donor–partner relations is a nexus of responses. Responses to direct violence include lethal force and security capacity-building; responses to structural violence include institution-building and reform, as well as sustainable and equitable socio-economic development.

As constitutional reform debates and renewed CMA and Plateforme fighting (Ag Mohamed 2017) re-activate questions of what Malian state is to be restored, Mali is increasingly a focal point of international and regional crisis management interventions (Charbonneau 2017b). The presence of MINUSMA, Barkhane, EUTM, and G5 Sahel force together with national security and defence forces leaves national sovereignty a salient and unresolved issue among political class actors and among Malians more generally (Mara 2017; AFP 2017; Sommet Extraordinaire du G5 Sahel avec la

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. EU Member States' concerns for Mali's stability in the sub-region, within Europe's 'broader neighbourhood,' are narrowing rather than broadening the vision for intervention and cooperation suited to fostering regional peace (Interview, 19 April 2016, Brussels, Senior staff, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office; Interview, 21 April 2016, Brussels, European External Action Service (EEAS) staff; Interview, 19 April 2016, Brussels, European Commission, Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), Senior staff; c.f. Charbonneau and Sears 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières is concerned also about the future of humanitarian relief work in Mali, facing the decline of politically neutral spaces and actors (Marín 2017).

France 2017; Charbonneau 2017a, 2017b). Precisely because stability-seeking operates in relatively short-term logics, Mali–donor cooperation regains ambivalence towards overdue governance reforms. Just as international observers were enthusiastic about Mali’s ostensibly model democratization, so too might modest Accord success be applauded, and thus obscure critical appreciation of the changes needed but little achieved since the early 1990s. Opposition parties and candidates may persuade voters that they bear a promising future rather than the burdens and compromises that have plagued Malian politics for at least twenty years. Nevertheless, change agents must contend with, even as they may try to leverage, the depth of disappointment in IBK’s administration of persistent crisis.

Whatever stability may be built through Accord implementation will remain fragile in the short- and medium-term. The State cannot be sustainably ‘stabilized’ by the current arrangements. Notwithstanding the recent restart of the peace process, the conflict lingers in a phase of degrading trust amongst signatory parties. Troubled connections between the leaders and the bases of CMA and Plateforme, exacerbated by GoM’s lackluster efforts, reflect larger lacunae in governance transformation. The Accord process reprises 25 years of incomplete, discarded, or piecemeal reforms, but now in much less favorable conditions. In what areas of policy and practice does the GoM most embody ownership and leadership of agendas and strategic priorities that are pursued through cooperation?

Efforts to manage political challenges across Mali must shift economic and social policies, and not solely military and security approaches, from the margins toward the centre of policies and practices. Consistent public goods provision remains crucial to strengthen the State’s legitimacy, not only in northern regions, but across conflict-prone social cleavages throughout the country. Sustainable development, towards a political economy of reconciliation, needs better anti-corruption measures, as well as the highest short-to-medium term priority on fighting impunity. However, unrealistic expectations can feed discontent and threaten even modest gains. Openly admitting problems – endemic bureaucratic corruption and the possible expansion of criminal activities involving officials or their clients – has yet to qualify or adjust donors’ enthusiasm for partnerships with the Malian State. More openly and critically acknowledging the problems of poor governance, and by acting concretely with courage to reflect these in their technical assistance and aid flows, influential donors could contribute in a positive way in effective partnership with the dynamic forces in the country that desire foundational change.

## For further research

This is one of several preliminary reports of the Centre FrancoPaix's Mali Project. The preliminary reports will be combined, revised, updated, and augmented with more research and analysis into a single final report which will be available in Spring 2018. The following questions are suggestions for debate and for future research, but they also guide our collective research efforts:

*Who speaks for whom to whom?*

- What credible claims do leaders have for their leadership? In a polity where election results are suspect, and the support bases for un-elected authorities are contested, observers should question not assume the mechanisms of representation.

*Who are rising and returning leaders?*

- Who are credible political leaders, whether in a rising generation or among those least compromised from having been part of past governments and regimes?

*How can we do cooperation differently?*

- More than ten years after the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (c.f. Accra Agenda 2008, Busan Partnership 2011), what areas of international—national articulated policy and practice most embody the principles, especially ownership, and the related strategic priorities?

*What sustains State stabilization?*

- What actions to restore State authority also entail reforms that are consistent with visions of refounding the State and (re)establishing social contract relations? Not mutually exclusive, these dimensions of durable stabilization need their interrelationships and sequences to be considered.

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# About the Centre FrancoPaix

Following the 15th Francophonie Summit and the Resolution on crisis situations, crisis resolution and peacebuilding in the French-speaking world, the Raoul-Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies set up the Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix (in conflict resolution and peace missions) in order to support the strategic objectives of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) in conflict prevention and management.

Inaugurated in January 2016 with the financial support of the OIF, the mission of the Centre FrancoPaix includes:

- The promotion of scientific research and university training in French in the field of peace and conflict studies, in particular conflict resolution, conflict management and peace missions;
- The promotion of scientific research and university training about conflict resolution and conflict management in French-speaking countries, particularly in Africa;
- The production and diffusion of scientific research that focuses on conflict resolution and peace operations, particularly through knowledge production activities with policymakers and practitioners in the field;
- Enabling intellectual exchanges and the flow of knowledge by promoting mobility, innovation and collaboration between institutions, university researchers and students from the “Global North” and the “Global South”.

The Centre FrancoPaix in Conflict Resolution and Peace missions aims to promote scientific research, academic training and the development of conflict resolution research in the Francophonie. The CFP is funded in part by the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

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