

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

– SELF-PORTRAIT ON THE OBSTACLES TO PEACE IN MALI –

The Malian Institute of Research for Peace (IMRAP), in collaboration with Interpeace, and thanks to the financial support of the European Union (EU) and the Kingdom of Denmark, initiated a peacebuilding programme entitled: *An Agenda for Peace and Social Cohesion in Mali*. The programme is premised on the understanding that for peace to be sustainable in Mali, there must be an active involvement of the population and all stakeholders of the Malian society. The methodology used for the programme was carefully chosen to ensure its effective contribution to the identification of key questions on peacebuilding and to the strengthening of collective participation as a fundamental aspect of a democratic process and the management of public affairs. This methodology termed, Participatory Action Research, offers a framework for collective research in which Malians are involved in the identification of the main obstacles to sustainable peace and the plausible solutions that can be attributed given their understanding of the situation. Through consultations and participatory research, IMRAP facilitated discussions and has created safe spaces for dialogue where Malian stakeholders can raise the challenges to peace faced by the country and propose reflection on solutions for peace. This is a long-term process as the restoration of trust among concerned stakeholders, which is necessary for constructive dialogue and debate, requires time.

The identification of the participants in the consultation process was done in accordance with a set of established criteria which took into account among others, ethnic, religious, socio-professional, regional, generational and gender dimensions. Emphasis was put on collecting rough information of the focus groups to preserve the authenticity of the information as it represents the points of view of the entire Malian society. In order to allow for open discussion, the facilitation was transparent and was done without a pre-established agenda so that IMRAP would not influence the direction of the discussions, (with the exception of the initial question: « what are the obstacles to peace? »). The role of the facilitation team was to bring out the opinions expressed, reformulate them and reintroduce them into the debate. This technique assigns the lead role to the participants themselves, and ensures the emergence of a consensus among the group or, on the other hand, brings out contradictory positions.

The process of dialogue and research on the obstacles to peace in Mali was carried out between November 2013 and March 2015 in all the eight regions of Mali, in the District of Bamako and refugee camps in Mauritania and Niger. More than 4,700 persons were consulted. A three-phase approach was followed: (i) consultations at the district level through 123 focus groups and more than 70 individual and collective/group meetings; (ii) regional restitutions aimed at validating and deepening the preliminary analysis of Malians emerging from the initial consultations; (iii) national restitution (National Conference) aimed at validating the *Self-Portrait of Mali* and to prioritize the entry points for the research of solutions to the key obstacles.

The empirical data collected from the population was complemented and enriched by the analyses of Malian resource persons who have proven expertise in the various thematic areas dealt with, on the one hand, and by desk research to further clarify and enrich the understanding of the issues at stake, on the other hand.

Finally, the audio-visual tool was used to complement the research. Video ensures the authenticity and genuineness of the points expressed during the discussions. In a country as vast as Mali, the use of video also proved to be a key tool for promoting debate and dialogue. Showing the focus groups videos of debates from other parts of the country, triggered debate and created mutual understanding between social groups which, as a result of geographic, cultural, ethnic, generational and, indeed, psychological distances, would normally not feature in the dialogue. At the end of this phase of the participatory research, one can observe the emergence of a common understanding by Malians of the problems which affect them. In the end, it is four key factors which were identified as obstacles to peace. These are: (i) the management of the socio-political diversity and the crisis of societal values, (ii) the regulation of competition for natural resources and economic opportunities, (iii) the governance of access to public services and (iv) the engineering of the management/resolution of conflicts and rebellions in the country.

A brief presentation of each of these factors provides a general overview of the challenges to the consolidation of peace.

1. CHALLENGES LINKED TO THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIO-POLITICAL DIVERSITY AND THE CRISIS OF SOCIETAL VALUES

Due to its rich history and peculiar geography, Mali is incredibly diverse from a socio-political, cultural and religious perspective. It is a mosaic of peoples, races, social organizations and varied cultural practices that cohabit within its borders. Today, however, and from the point of view of Malians, the political economy, which is sustained by this blend of peoples and their respective cultures, is a risk factor for socio-political cohesion. Indeed, socio-political instrumentalisation of the differences between the populations (skin colour, religious persuasions, political choices, etc.) are said to come with serious risks. In this regard, consultations conducted as part of the research have highlighted among Malians the feeling that their social, ethnic, religious or political differences are instrumentalized for individual gains (struggle for State power, personal enrichment, social recognition, etc.) or collective (interested proselytism, etc.) purposes. By way of illustration, in the area of religion, an increase in the number of sects in Islam borne by the self-enhancement strategies of religious leaders is noticed. As explained by the Malians consulted, the latter, on the basis of interpretations misguided by holy writings, are working to build a political, economic and social capital by, among others, playing on the struggles for positioning among the major international sects on Malian soil.

« What made the grandeur of these communities is the unity of action, complementarity between ethnic groups, peaceful cohabitation, and interdependence between the components of society. Putting people back-to-back on the pretext that we want democracy, allowing anyone to come and say what he wants anywhere and anyhow would not work. »

- Participant, Timbuktu focus group

For many Malians, this type of drift is made possible particularly through the failure and contradictions of the educational system, considered as the purveyor of unemployed people who have hardly had proper education. To them, the Malian educational system which is supposed to replace the defective traditional socialization frameworks (failure of parental and family authority as well as the traditional community educational structures) is struggling to breed a type of Malian with ethical values and morals which are close to those which served as the melting pot of ancestral Malian. These values which particularly epitomize the respect of and submission to the authority of elders, as well as the constant quest for reconciliation and compromise, appear to be gradually fading away today in the country. Thus, with the diktat of modernity borne by new information and communication technology (ICT) and the image that it conveys of themselves to them, many Malians are questioning the nature and process of the production/internalization of values. This weakening of consensus on societal values is gradually widening an intergenerational gap which is manifested by the recrimination of elders against the behavioural patterns adopted by the new generation which they consider as contrary to the ancestral values. However, without renouncing to them, the youth are expressing their desire for emancipation. Malians are, therefore, questioning themselves about the means of cementing their society and consensually defining the type of citizen Mali wants to raise as well as the type of society in which they want to live today, that is to say, assisting in the emergence of a new Malian citizen. Yet, in the absence of structured platforms and a true culture of dialogue which can aid the discussion of these issues, this process often generates serious social tensions which are particularly worsened by the widening of the inter-generational gap and the breeding of certain identity divisions.

2. CHALLENGES RELATING TO THE REGULATION OF THE COMPETITION AROUND RESOURCES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Regardless of the regions and their respective socio-economic structures, lots of tensions are noticeable concerning access to natural resources and economic opportunities. They mostly lead to friction in inter and intra-community relations and the erosion of trust in institutions. During the consultations, numerous perceived failures in ensuring access by different categories of people to local economic opportunities were criticized (natives against non-natives/aliens, the elite against ordinary citizens, elderly social figures against young social personalities, women against men, etc.). The participants agree that the availability of economic opportunities is highly affected on the one hand by some unforeseen circumstances such as climate change and the geographical environments well as changes in the socio-political context and the dynamics of the worsening living conditions of the people, on the other hand.

« I find it difficult to understand how, within a short period of time, the traditional institutions that have always ensured a fair and equitable distribution of resources and conveniently ensured conflict management can now become ineffective and powerless. »

- Participant, Kita Focus Group, in the Kayes region

complex ownership strategies of these limited opportunities come to light; in all these, state representatives and other authorities responsible for addressing the issue of access to such opportunities are often considered as interested parties. Their involvement in local contexts is characterized by different application of standards and even sometimes by a clear opposition between standards and practices (issue of local agreements), structure and by an ever increasing and inequitable competition. Additionally, in the regions and even in the capital, some categories of people, generally the natives and/or the vulnerable like the youth and women consider

themselves as having been marginalized from enjoying the local and/or national resources and opportunities. This situation engenders deep feelings of injustice which cause friction among neighbours and relationships leading to the erosion of trust in the institutions.

3. CHALLENGES RELATING TO GOVERNANCE OF ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

The consultations showed that structural imbalances and deficiencies in the provision of quality accessible public service and across the entire Malian territory in terms of justice, education, health and security cause deep feelings of inequality. These feelings are interpreted by the population as unequal treatment between the regions of the North and the South, between regions in the countryside and the capital Bamako, between the urban centres and rural areas, etc. Indeed, each of these areas considers that priority has been given to the others in development financing by the State and the technical and financial partners, in infrastructural development, and generally, in the consolidation of the presence of the State.

At the centre of the debates, the constant element, irrespective of the region – were the contradictions, the inability to successfully complete the decentralization process and the inconsistency of practices of some stakeholders. This is reflected mainly in the inadequate transfer of skills and resources and even in the conflict of competencies among the different levels and types of authorities. The latter are

« It is like corruption, everyone is denouncing it, and everyone has seen that it is hurting the country, it is impeding development and the growth of the country. But those who engage in minor corrupt practices and those who do it on a large scale attribute the practice to the others. To them, what they are doing is not corruption; it is an arrangement, it is a service being rendered to a friend or even a relation. But it is not corruption, it is not reprehensible. [...] While they themselves are at the centre, it is an entire scheme; it is a system that has been developed around structures. »

- Former Minister and first female Governor

mainly linked with the creation of new places of power and co-existence of an appointed authority and elected power under conditions of legitimacy and legality often called into question. The people have often underscored the low visibility and the irregularities associated with the modalities for the partitioning of the territory and the deficiency in internalizing the decentralization process by the stakeholders. Furthermore, there is the feeling of bankruptcy on the part of the authorities, including structural weakness of the state, which is particularly obvious but not limited to the Northern regions and Kayes.

Correlatively, the main risk factor perceived for socio-political cohesion in Mali resides in the fact that these structural imbalances and deficiencies are re-interpreted by the population from the perspective of regional favoritism promoted by the public authorities or technical and financial partners. The consequence of this perspective is to consolidate in the minds of the people a polarizing North/South debate and mixed feelings of inequality between rural, urban and provincial communities and people in the capital city, between Malians in the top echelons and those at the bottom. Fundamentally, this bi-polar classification between Malians is gradually being internalized, on the one hand, from the standpoint of privileges and from the point of view of the marginalized in the society, on the other hand; that is those who are in the majority; that is between individuals and communities, and between regions, centres and the undeveloped fringes of the country.

4. CHALLENGES RELATING TO THE MECHANISM FOR LOCAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT/RESOLUTION AND ARMED REBELLIONS

According to many Malians consulted, this uninterrupted cycle of rebellions and even local conflicts which have affected social peace at least for the past five decades is driven by the deficiencies in the approach used by the public authorities for their management/resolution. Indeed, whether it is through the use of legitimate violence by the law enforcement

authorities or through negotiation, the methods used in resolving the tensions and conflicts seem to bear inherent seeds of the continued existence of elements. Thus, when the State decides to resort to the use of legitimate violence,

« How can we establish peace with war? »

- Lieutenant in the Malian Army

in each of the camps, the population who are victims of violence – brutal repression, extortions, human rights violations, etc. – have described how the cycle of resentment and vengeance leading to an environment of constant insecurity is nurtured among the population partly by the militias- some of whom are mobilized by the State – and by the serious crisis of confidence between the population and the law enforcement agencies – with the Malian Armed Forces being the first to blame. On the contrary, where the State chooses the path of negotiation, the population consulted in such matters has criticized the processes as not being adequately inclusive or they are spearheaded by stakeholders considered as illegitimate.

In any case, the perceived deficiencies in the conflict resolution mechanisms generate among the population a deep feeling of rejection which sometimes leads to ethnic polarization, which is reinforced by the dynamics of militarization arising as a response to the security vacuum. In other cases, there are feelings of inequality among communities which induce a deep mistrust of the State, thus creating the foundation for the radicalization processes of certain groups. This situation then contributes a dangerous climate of permanent crisis between the population or certain fringes of the population and the State.

"We should not plait the hair on lice"

- Participant, focus groupe of Mberra camp, Mauritania

"We want to say the truth because honestly we are fed up with this problem. There is no peace, there is no war; we have nowhere to turn to. It must be said that the rebellion was poorly managed, that is the truth"

- Participant, focus group of Arab Elders, Ber

Based on the overall consensus on the obstacles to peace established around this self-portrait, the National Conference, while recognizing that the obstacles identified are complex and inter-related and constitute the basis for divergent opinions, decided that there no turnkey solutions. An observation which led the Conference to recognize that more new, participatory, inclusive and change-oriented mechanisms are necessary in order to arrive at solutions that will not only be operational but also lead to consensus-building and sustainability. It is within this perspective that a mandate has been given by the representatives of Mali to IMRAP and Interpeace to launch a participatory process with a view to finding solutions on the priorities identified for peace (see *the thematic sheets in the Annex*), in close collaboration with a steering committee mandated to support IMRAP to identify, analyze and provide support for efforts leading to solutions likely to bring about real change. The challenges considered as priorities by the National Conference include (i) *erosion of societal values*, (ii) *limitations of access to employment for the youth*, (iii) *deficiencies in governance in the area of public affairs* and (iv) *chronic insecurity* particularly caused by the crisis of trust among the population and their security system as well as the phenomena of establishing militias.

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