Challenges in the Sahel
Implications for peace and development in 'fragile states'

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Cover: A French military convoy en route to Gao, passing by a roadside market in northern Mali.

Photographs: Cover: Jerome Starkey; page 11: Jerome Starkey.

List of Acronyms

ACLED   Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

AQIM   Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb

CMA   Coordination of Movements of the Azawad

CTS   Commission on Technical Security

CVJR   Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation

DDR   disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

IBK   Ibrahim Boubacar Keita

MINUSMA   UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali

MNLA   Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad

MUJAO   Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa

UNODC   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Foreword

Since November 2015, various donor development agencies – the UK's Department for International Development, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank – have declared that fragility, conflict, and violence will remain as strategic priorities in their aid interventions. They have not only set aside resources, but have also commissioned research towards the development of new, and hopefully more applicable and effective approaches to issues and problems that have expanded in difficulty and complexity, posing numerous dilemmas to the international development community.

Christian Aid also intends to understand what it ought to be doing *differently* in tackling violence and building peace. Hence, we are compiling a portfolio that could contribute to the debate on new approaches, examining in greater detail the new forms of conflict and violence that have begun to take shape after the end of the Cold War:

- In Mali, Angola, Honduras and a few other regions, we are examining links between climate change and violent conflict.
- In Central America, we are looking into the impact of crime and gang violence, which today has become deadlier than the civil wars that 'ended' in the 1990s.
- In Bolivia, although not affected by any large-scale violent conflict, we are looking into the violent repercussions of the political empowerment of women in a predominantly macho society.

In this report on the Sahel, Christian Aid continues this examination. The intention of this report is to feed into the policy debates on how to deal with the dilemmas to peace and development posed by 'unusual' actors, including those involved in drug trafficking, in 'fragile and conflict-affected states'. It presents the discussions from an invitation-only roundtable organised in Bamako, Mali, by Christian Aid Sahel in November 2016.

This roundtable addressed a key area often put aside by development NGOs and donor agencies in their diagnostics and strategies on fragile states: the impact of illicit economies on peace building. Shadow or illicit economies – the biggest of which is drug trafficking – have become the basis for the financing of the various armed actors in the conflict. But at the same time, ironically, they also enable – to a certain degree – the survival of poor communities affected by that conflict.

Christian Aid is concerned that the Mali Peace Accord, signed in Algiers in June 2015, is fraying. Tensions and mistrust within and between the rebel coalitions that have signed it and the government are growing. Civil society organisations are excluded from direct participation in the process, such is as in monitoring compliance with the eight-point agenda of the peace accord, which to date, remains largely unimplemented.

Another key concern is the increasing violent confrontations between pastoralist and farming communities across the Sahel, driven by how

their livelihoods have now become seasonally incompatible with each other, apparently due to climate change.

Various NGOs working in Mali and the Sahel, including Christian Aid's sister agencies in ACT Alliance, are eager to know what they can do collectively. Developing interventions in 'fragile states' and supporting resilient livelihoods in insecure and unstable environments, like the Sahel, require understanding vulnerabilities from security, political, environmental and development perspectives. It requires a measure of familiarity with the 'unusual actors' that inhabit the shadowy domains beneath the surface of political life.

The roundtable is intended as a first step to discuss what could be done programmatically by these NGOs, as well as to list advocacies for public policy that they could consider in their influencing work with donor agencies. For example, how to deal with the interlocking drivers of conflict and violence; how to address the unusual actors; how to focus development programmes on the expanding numbers of under- or unemployed youth who become the recruitment ground for crime and terrorism; or discussing what could be more realistic time-frames in addressing these problems.

We hope that this report could trigger more conversations with donor agencies revising their strategies in the Sahel, and contribute to the development of indicators for the UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and good governance.

Christian Aid wishes to express its gratitude to the Open Society Foundations' Global Drug Policy Program for its continuing support and partnership in the search for real alternatives and the development of considered responses to these complex problems.

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'Developing interventions in 'fragile states' and supporting resilient livelihoods in insecure and unstable environments, like the Sahel, require understanding vulnerabilities from security, political, environmental, and development perspectives'

Introduction – tense debates over 'unusual actors'

Christian Aid's country programme in the Sahel organised a closed-door workshop in Mali on 23 November 2016. The workshop aimed to brainstorm on what can be done by development NGOs and donor agencies to respond more systematically to Mali's increasingly complex peace and development challenges.

The workshop was organised around the principle that improving interventions in 'fragile states' and supporting resilient livelihoods in insecure and unstable environments, like the Sahel, require understanding vulnerabilities from different perspectives – security, political, environmental, and developmental. Much of the Sahel, including Mali, has unusual problems, involving unusual actors, and which therefore requires unusual responses.

Held at the Hotel Al-Farouk in Bamako, the workshop drew together 26 participants from ACT Alliance; Norwegian Church Aid; Diakonia; Christian Aid partners from Mopti, including Caritas-Mopti; CAFO, the umbrella organisation of Malian women's associations; and Forum des ONG Internationales au Mali (FONGIM; the 85-member umbrella organisation of international NGOs in Mali). The discussions revolved around the following inputs:

- 'The Fight Against Terrorism, Drug-Trafficking, and Other Forms of Cross-Border Organised Crime' by **Mohamed Kanoute**, Lecturer at the University of Mali in Segou, and Division Chief at Mali's Central Drugs Bureau.

- 'The Sahel – A Corridor of Insecurity and Impunity' – by **Amadou Cheffou Barre**, President of the NGO Garkua (meaning 'shield' in one of the languages in Niger) and former Executive Secretary of Karkara, an NGO devoted to supporting sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable populations in the Sahel, and a Christian Aid partner in Niger.

The workshop opened with a speech delivered by **Attaher Ag Iknane**, the General Secretary of the Ministry of National Reconciliation, and participants came across a key realisation – that conversations with unusual, even controversial, actors are inevitable and necessary if settlements are to be achieved in Mali's peace and development process.

The discussion with Iknane noted how some prominent Malians have been linked, whether rightly or wrongly, with illicit trades – including drugs, arms and human trafficking. Though opinion about them may be divided, it is said that it is precisely because of who they are that these prominent people can be a critical link in unlocking the riddles to the conflict. For example, they are best placed to identify, and in turn are known, even trusted, by key local actors in the various layers of the conflict – hence, they are in a position to initiate dialogues. In other words, if peace building and conflict-sensitive programming for fragile situations are to be non-exclusionary, is there not a need for these 'unusual actors' to be brought on board? As the old proverb states, it is better to have them 'inside the tent than outside'. Such inclusion, though not without risks, is the foundation for lasting political settlements.

'Conversations with unusual, even controversial, actors are inevitable and necessary if settlements are to be achieved in Mali's peace and development process'

Still, the case remains that these actors *are* part of the problem – they have committed, and continue to commit, criminal offences and stoke corruption and impunity. They should be held accountable, not treated lightly, and certainly not given key roles in peace building. Prosecutors should be charging them. NGOs should avoid, not mingle with them. And yet it could not be disputed that they are also part of the solution. They are probably best placed to explain the motivations and complicating factors driving the violence and conflict. Most importantly, they can validate, and are sources of insight, into how the hugely profitable illicit trades are reshaping social and political relationships in the most conflict-affected regions of the country.

Tense debates thus marked the workshop, especially on how 'unusual actors' ought to be regarded – a reflection of the wider difficulties facing Mali's peace and reconciliation process. This post-workshop report elaborates on these difficulties as reflected on by the participants, and links these discussions with other papers and conversations taking place about the Sahel that Christian Aid and its partners regard as necessary for unpacking the peace and development challenges, and in developing the applicable programme and policy responses for stable peace building and poverty eradication in the region.

A 'perfect storm' of crises

The two workshop presenters provided their respective interpretations of how and why the Sahel has become an area of violence, insecurity, and impunity.

In his presentation, Mohamed Kanoute made the central contention that poverty, conflict, corruption, criminality and climate change have now become interlinked – with each driving or reinforcing the other, thus creating what could be regarded as a 'perfect storm' of crises.

Amadou Cheffou Barre started his contribution by explaining how the Sahel has become a corridor of insecurity and impunity. On top of the poverty in the region, the majority of terrorist attacks in Africa in 2015 occurred in the Sahel. There were more than 100 attacks in 2015 in Africa, and at least three-quarters of them took place in the Sahel. Poverty, economic stagnation, and corruption as the principal way of managing the state, he states, are the key drivers of the insecurity.

Mali covers an area of 1.241 million square kilometres, about as big as France, Germany and the UK combined. It is landlocked; the southern 40% is mostly landmass shaped by the Niger River basin, and the northern 60% is largely desert area that comprises the Sahara. Mali has borders of about 7,300 km, roughly twice the distance between San Francisco and New York. It is impossible, Kanoute pointed out, to control these long and porous borders. Yet it is also wrong to assume a total of absence of authority in the borderlands areas. Often portrayed in Western accounts as isolated or 'empty spaces', anthropologists describe how these borderlands and desert areas are criss-crossed by dense trade and social networks, that throughout the ages have sustained life and connected the desert's ancient villages and towns to each other.

The deserts and rural areas of the Sahel are not empty spaces. They have intersecting systems of production, distribution, and consumption, upon which politics evolve over the management and control of resources.[1] They have versatile labour systems that, for example, provide a supply of mostly young men who move products across a vast area, and which are sometimes marked by modern forms of slavery. Within these areas are found competitors for authority who compete or cooperate with each other, broker relationships, provide protection, and establish patronage networks. The 'perfect storm' is best understood when assessed against this context of interdependent relationships.

The Sahel has been home to many communities, mainly pastoralist, since the dawn of time. It is the base from where they develop their livelihoods, engage in trade and transact business. Over the last decade or so, however, Barre stated that the Sahel has also become a corridor for illicit traffic – a 'Highway Number 10' not only for illegal migrants, weapons, drugs and untaxed or stolen goods, but also for transnational armed networks setting up to expand their reach. He noted that the security services of Sahelian countries (see map) are unprepared and ill-equipped to effectively combat organised crime and terrorism.

Below: The countries of the Sahel

Mali has an estimated population of 17.467 million.[2] According to the World Bank, after independence from French colonial rule in 1960, average life expectancy was 28 years. This has increased to 58 today, but is still at the low end of world rankings.[3] It is estimated that about 90% of the population are based in the south, while 10% – mostly nomadic herders – are found in the restive northern regions. More than two-thirds of the population is aged under 25 years, with a median age of 16.2 years, and distributed among a dozen ethnic groups. Kanoute noted that an abundant supply of young men who are unemployed and have no clear future in the regular economy serves as fertile recruitment ground for the criminal and jihadist networks expanding into the region.

Early in 2012, Mali suffered what is perhaps the most serious political and security crisis in its history. It had been regarded for years as one of the more stable low-income democracies in Africa, but the country was rocked by a separatist rebellion in the north, with the rebel Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) declaring a separate state. Jihadist groups, initially allied to MNLA, took control of some towns, villages and highways. This triggered a coup by restive soldiers in Bamako, who blamed the government for the debacles. Within days the democratically elected government was deposed.

As state control crumbled in the north and the central government collapsed in Bamako, a key question that emerged was: why did Mali's population hardly stir to defend their democracy? This appeared completely out of character, because in 1991 thousands of Malians rallied to depose a dictator in a dramatic overthrow that preceded the Arab Springs of northern Africa by two decades. Mali's remarkable democratic mobilisation, now enshrined in its Constitution as the 'Revolution of March 26, 1991', established a republican and secular State committed to a 'pluralist democracy' and subscribing to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The workshop's host, **Yacouba Kone** of Christian Aid, had provided an answer to that question in an earlier paper. Malians did not stir up anew during the 2012 crisis because to many, there was no point taking risks to defend a 'democracy' that has given them so little. Despite the impressive 5.8% annual economic growth recorded between 1995 and 2005, inequality worsened and long-term unemployment became a recurrent problem. Despite multi-party democracy, peaceful transitions of power and hundreds of NGOs undertaking development activities, Mali's democracy took too long, or simply did not work, for the poor majority. Instead, it led to the 'entrenchment of a narrow elite that based its power more on patronage and less on popular support, in a bid to control the central government and the economy – both licit and illicit'.[4]

As a consequence, poor people saw their access to productive assets – such as land and water – being handed over to agro-investors, as exemplified in the transfer of control more than 100,000 hectares of prime irrigated land to Malibya Agriculture, a Libyan company, at the expense of smallholders. Land grabbing and land-based conflicts – sometimes between poor communities displaced as a result of state policy – became rife. Cotton, a traditional provider of employment in a country with such a young population, was abandoned. Mining brought benefits only to its multinational investors.

On top of these, corruption and impunity exacerbated discontent. Relatives and friends of those in power became embroiled in financial scandals, and were not prosecuted. In one instance, donor agencies suspended Mali's access to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, and Tuberculosis and Malaria, after discovering the theft of $4 million from the grants.

'Despite multi-party democracy, peaceful transitions of power and hundreds of NGOs undertaking development activities, Mali's democracy took too long, or simply did not work, for the poor majority'

Below: An extravagant mansion in a *cocainebougou.*

The most conspicuous symbol of corruption was the emergence, particularly in desert towns like Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, of clusters of extravagant mansions owned by upwardly-mobile Malians with satellite phones, riding luxury vehicles, and guarded by bodyguards. Amid the tediousness of moribund local economies and sluggish development, these mansions symbolised the availability of get-rich-quick opportunities to those with the right connections. These clusters of mansions were widely called *cocainebougous* (cocaine towns), showing the popular consensus about where the money came from.

Barre cited estimates that 20% of the population living across the Sahel, or at least 25 million people, are considered extremely poor. With very little prospects for improving their situation via the regular economy, more and more local people become involved in the trafficking of drugs, weapons and other contraband. Some participate part-time in kidnapping activities. Villages become transit points for illegal migrants needing to restock and refuel on their long and dangerous journeys.

The trickle-down effect from these illicit trades could be enormous. Citing the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Barre pointed out that drugs trafficking in the Sahel generates as much as $900 million a year, far outstripping the combined military and security expenditures of the governments of the region.

As if these problems were not enough, Kanoute highlighted that desertification and sharply rising droughts throughout the region compound the crises. These have triggered increasingly violent confrontations between farmers and herders. Denied access to productive land, farmers plant their crops further afield, including in grazing lands, where the crops could be trampled by seasonally migrating herds. As a result, farmers and herders now find that their respective livelihoods – which were previously and historically interdependent with each other – have become seasonally incompatible.

To protect their ways of living and assert their claims to resources, farmers and herders arm themselves, triggering an increase in intimidation, livestock raiding and retaliatory shootings. The traditional coping mechanisms – such as inter-clan dialogues that enable such climate stresses to be managed – appear to have broken down. In May 2016, more than 30 people were killed in a series of clashes between Fulanis (mostly herders and Muslim) and the Bambaras (mostly farmers and Muslim), in the Mopti region. From 16-18 June 2017, around 81 people were killed in three days of clashes between Fulanis and Dogons in Dioungani, also in Mopti, Deadly clashes between armed ethnic militias have become much more frequent.[5]

Kanoute concludes that a potentially lethal mixture of endogenous and exogenous drivers is pushing Mali and the Sahel deeper into conflict and instability.

Actors in the theatre of conflict, corruption and crime

The intervention of French armed forces in January 2013 prevented the advance of separatist and jihadist forces to the south, and allowed Mali to be put back together again. With control regained in key towns, like Timbuktu and Gao, a preliminary agreement towards restoring constitutional order was signed in Ouagadougou in June 2013. Presidential and legislative elections followed immediately thereafter, and veteran politician **Ibrahim Boubacar Keita** (IBK)[6] was elected as president. By September 2013, a cabinet was assembled that was selected for ability rather than political expediency (in IBK's own words). The challenges that lay ahead were huge.

Indeed, by May 2014, Mali was again on the verge of falling back into chaos. In April, the newly appointed Prime Minister **Oumar Tatam Ly**, a respected technocrat and former banker, resigned. IBK immediately appointed a replacement, **Moussa Mara**, but after about a month in post, his visit to Kidal triggered clashes between the Malian Armed Forces and the MNLA, effectively scrapping the Ouagadougou Agreement. This time, the African Union intervened more decisively. A ceasefire was agreed in June 2014, followed by the adoption of a 'Roadmap to Peace' in July 2014. **Modibo Keita,** who was appointed as IBK's chief representative in the negotiations with rebels, was eventually appointed prime minister in January 2015.

By this time, the range of actors in Mali's conflict had begun to form more distinct identities. One set of actors, mostly groups of Touareg separatists that are sometimes locked in their own internal competitions, came to be known as the Coordination of Movements of the Azawad (CMA; Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad). Another set, formed by various armed militias that are regarded as leaning towards the government, are known as the Platform of Mali. These two rebel coalitions became the principal non-state actors in the peace process. However, they remain essentially splintered. Their various component groups have proven to be not only extremely diverse in their structures and ambition, but also have

constantly shifting alliances and changing stakes in the peace process.[7]

Outside these rebel coalitions is an array of jihadist networks that also merge and splinter with each other, and oftentimes rely on similar bases. Excluded from the peace process, the principal jihadist networks are:

- **AQIM** – Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and its offshoots are considered the primary transnational terror threats in North and West Africa.
- **MUJAO** – French acronym for Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, a splinter of mostly black Africans from AQIM, whose leadership is made mostly of northern Arabs.
- **Ansar Eddine** – or Defenders of the Faith, set up as a home-grown jihadist organisation in northern Mali, in contradistinction to foreign jihadist groups.
- **Al Murabitun** – or The Sentinels, the name adopted by the 2013 merger of Gao-based groups from MUJAO and the Signed-in-Blood Battalion.

In addition, Kanoute mentioned that there are armed groups with links to Boko Haram in Nigeria and Salafist groups in Algeria, which are active in Mali or have used the country as a sanctuary to escape pursuit by state authorities from other countries.

Many of these armed groups sustain themselves financially either by providing safe passage and protection to organised criminal networks, or by engaging directly in criminal trades themselves. In Gao, for example, these groups are widely understood to be behind the town's transformation into the gateway to the Sahara for African migrants seeking to reach Europe by whatever means. A report from the BBC has gone as far as saying that the 'migration business' has now become the mainstay of Gao's economy, already known for its *cocainebougou*.[8]

Quite a few groups also specialise in the illegal trading of firearms, most of which were looted from Libyan arsenals as that country disintegrated with the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011. Kalashnikov rifles, and even heavier weapons, could be obtained for a few hundred dollars.

A case study commissioned by Christian Aid and published in 2015 explains that sometimes it is individuals within jihadist networks who are directly engaged in criminal profiteering. An example cited is Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an Algerian Arab whose marriage into both the Berabiche Arab community near Timbuktu and a nomadic Touareg clan in the north enabled him to establish an extensive network for cigarette and drug smuggling. He initially allied himself with AQIM, but was soon expelled by its Shura Council. He then went on to establish the Signed-in-Blood Battalion and linked up with MUJAO, which later transformed into Al-Murabitun. He fought with these jihadist networks while continuing to make money from his smuggling and kidnapping activities.[9]

It is important to emphasise that this array of actors not only have shifting alliances and stakes in the conflict, but also they cannot be adequately portrayed as 'organisations' or coherent groups with fixed memberships or rigid hierarchies. Thus, they are difficult to

identify, and could keep their anonymity most of the time. Hence, it is better to refer to them as 'networks', to emphasise the fluidity of both their identities and associations.

The activities of Mali's many different armed groupings are tracked and monitored by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a university-based, social science research programme funded by the US Department of Defense's Minerva Research Initiative.[10] ACLED tracks the actions of opposition groups, governments, and militias across Africa, specifying the exact location and date of battle events, transfers of military control, headquarter establishment, civilian violence, and rioting.

Table 1 shows a monitoring of armed clashes and other violent events in Mali initiated by these actors, between 3 January 2015 and 4 August 2017.

Table 1: Armed clashes in Mali, 3 January 2015 to 4 August 2017.

Armed actor, as defined by ACLED	Number of incidents and fatalities from 3 January 2015 to 4 August 2017
Al Furqan Battalion	1 (1 killed)
Al Murabitun Battalion	9 (87 killed)
Ansar Eddine	34 (64 killed)
Ansaroul Islam	3 (13 killed)
ANSIPRJ (National Alliance for the Protection of the Fulani Identity and the Restoration of Justice)	3 (3 killed)
AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)	21 (41 killed)
Bambara ethnic militia	4 (21 killed)
CJA (Congress for Justice in Azawad)	1 (0 killed)
CMA (Coordination of Movements of the Azawad)	35 (118 killed)
Dire community militia	1 (0 killed)
Dogon ethnic militia	4 (81 killed)
Dozo militia	2 (24 killed)
FLM (Macina Liberation Movement)	10 (40 killed)
Fulani ethnic militia	5 (18 killed)
GATIA (Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-Defense Group)	33 (150 killed)
GMA (Mourabitounes Group of Azawad)	8 (25 killed)
Government of Mali	2 (0 killed)
HCUA (High Council for the Unity of Azawad)	1 (0 killed)
Ibogholitane ethnic militia	2 (12 killed)
Idnan ethnic militia	2 (0 killed)
Islamic State Sahara	1 (0 killed)
Islamist militia (Mali)	32 (72 killed)
Islamist militia (Niger)	1 (1 killed)
JNIM: Group for Support of Islam and Muslims	41 (105 killed)
Karatou communal militia	2 (3 killed)
Koussouma communal militia	1 (14 killed)
MAA (Arab Movement of Azawad)	1 (3 killed)

Military forces of France	22 (88 killed)
Military forces of Mali	57 (138 killed)
Militia (miners)	3 (6 killed)
Militia (pro-government)	2 (13 killed)
MINUSMA (UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali)	8 (10 killed)
MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)	5 (3 killed)
Movement for Azawad Salvation	1 (0 killed)
Movement for the Liberation of Maasina	1 (0 killed)
MUJAO (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa)	4 (4 killed)
Mutiny of MINUSMA (UN Mission to Mali)	2 (4 killed)
Police forces of Mali	13 (9 killed)
Protesters	43 (4 killed)
Rioters	15 (5 killed)
Tuareg ethnic militia	3 (8 killed)
Unidentified armed group (Mali)	201 (248 killed)
Unidentified communal militia	2 (1 killed)
Vigilante militia	4 (4 killed)
Total	**646 (1,441 killed)**

The total of 646 violent incidents, which resulted in 1,441 fatalities, are distributed across the country, as shown in Table 2. As the data reveals, Gao and Mopti had the most violent incidents over the period, but Mopti had the highest number of fatalities. Most of the killings in Mopti took place from late 2016 to August 2017. The deadliest incident recorded, with 55 fatalities, was a suicide car attack on 18 January 2017 at a military camp in Gao, which housed government and armed groups conducting mixed patrols under the UN-brokered peace deal. The attackers were identified as Al Murabitun, in a tactical alliance with AQIM.

Table 2: Location of armed clashes in Mali, 3 January 2015 to 4 August 2017.

Location	Number of violent incidents recorded	Number of fatalities
Gao	140	338
Mopti	139	411
Kidal	127	248
Timbuktu	114	192
Bamako	61	47
Segou	42	168
Sikasso	10	13
Koulikoro	9	24
Kayes	4	0
Total	**646**	**1,441**

From road map to peace accord: the legal layout

The 'Road Map' to peace was in place by July 2014, and conditions were laid for starting substantive negotiations between the government and rebel coalitions, under the facilitation of Algeria. Proposals to resolve the crises were submitted and debated. In June 2015, the 32-page Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also called the Algiers Process, was signed.[11] It established an eight-point agenda:

- Building respect for national unity and territorial integrity.
- Recognising and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, and valuing the contribution of all Malians, particularly women and youth, in nation building.
- Supporting people in the management of their own affairs, and developing systems of local governance attuned to local needs and aspirations.
- Promoting balanced development in all regions
- Creating dialogue at local level that enables the rejection of violence as a means of political expression, and which leads to the establishment of peaceful means of settling disputes.
- Upholding respect for human rights, human dignity, and fundamental and religious freedoms.
- Tackling corruption and impunity.
- Tackling terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organised crime.

Kanoute emphasised that the inclusion of the last two points in the peace agenda is significant because it recognises corruption and crime as key drivers of Mali's overall vulnerability. He explained that the profits from the illicit trades are used not only to buy protection, but also to buy weapons and other logistics of war that are used by terrorists and criminals in building up their capabilities. But what emerges are not only terror groups who come from outside, but also armed factions from within local populations. Over time, corridors of 'safe passage' for more contraband and illegal goods are secured and maintained, contributing to the spiral of violence and widespread insecurity.

Indeed, as Barre pointed out, in Chapter 11 of the Peace Agreement (The Fight Against Terrorism) the parties reiterate their commitment to combat terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking, through existing regional mechanisms and strategies.

Mali has the required legislative and institutional mechanisms to deal with these problems, said Kanoute (see box). He also listed other laws in place for dealing with the problems:

- Law No 01-078 of 18 July 2001, on the control of drugs and their precursor chemicals.
- Law No 04-050 of 12 November 2004, governing the trade in arms and ammunition in the Republic of Mali.
- Law No 06-066 of 29 December 2006, establishing the uniform law on the fight against money laundering.

In 1995 under its new democratic government, Mali ratified the three UN Drug Control Conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention Against the Illicit Traffic of Narcotic Drugs. In addition, Mali has ratified the 1979 UN Convention Against the Taking of Hostages on 8 February 1990, the 1999 Convention Against the Financing of Terrorism on 28 February 2002; the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime in December 2000, and the UN Convention Against Corruption in December 2003. Ratification means that these international conventions have become national laws of Mali.

- Law No 08-025 of 13 July 2008, on the suppression of terrorism in Mali.
- Law No 10-062 of 30 December 2010, on the financing of terrorism.

Kanoute also elaborated on the political and operational institutions that have been created to deal with the multiple security challenges. These include:

- The National Financial Information Processing Unit, combats money laundering and the financing of terrorism (created 8 June 2004).
- The National Commission for the Fight Against Small Arms, develops the national policy to combat the traffic of small arms and arms of small calibres and, and to supervise the application of international conventions, and other regional and sub-regional agreements on this area (created 11 November 2008).
- The Integrated National Control Programme Against Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime coordinates between UNODC and the various national agencies whose assignments have affinities with UNODC's mandate (created 24 December 2009).
- The Interdepartmental Committee to Combat Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism implements the actions and recommendations of the Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (established in 2012).
- The National Council on the Reform of the Security Sector is tasked to design and implement actions for the reorganisation of security services, and to ensure their adaptation to multiple threats and security challenges (created 14 August 2014 and chaired by the President).
- The Interdepartmental Mission for the Coordination of the Fight Against Drugs is responsible for developing the elements of national drug control policy and to coordinate the activities of departments (created 4 June 2015 under the supervision of the Minister of Security).

The new Cabinet that took over in September 2013 clearly recognised the need to organise the country's response towards the illegal drug trade. On 2 September 2013, the Central Narcotics Bureau within the Ministry of Security was established, with responsibility for operational coordination of the actions of all the agencies involved in the fight against drugs.

At the frontline of law enforcement are specialised brigades. The brigade tackling organised crime and terrorism is tasked to investigate, arrest, and prosecute all offences relating to organised crime and terrorism. It directly reports to the central judicial body that has been set-up to adjudicate with speed on cases involving organised crime. The brigade tackling economic and financial crime has investigative, arrest and prosecution powers, and reports to the judicial pole for economic and financial affairs.

In March 2016, a new task force was created – the Anti-Terrorist Force. It is the 'muscle' for combating terrorism, and is composed of elements from the local police, the gendarmerie and the national guard (the section of the army in charge of the protection of officials).

Plans and programmes have been created by the government to drive the activities of these various agencies and structures. The National Plan to Combat Drug Trafficking, developed in 2012, focuses on three areas – public information and awareness-raising on drugs; prevention of drug use; and control and suppression of illicit trafficking. The national strategy and the National Plan to Combat Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism were developed in 2013, and focus on strengthening the vigilance of taxpayers; capacity building of the monitoring and prosecuting authorities focused on money laundering; and involvement of civil society.

Barre touched on the humanitarian provisions of the Peace Agreement. In Chapter 15, the signatories invited agencies and humanitarian organisations 'to support efforts to ensure rapid return, repatriation, reintegration, and rehabilitation of all displaced persons and refugees'. The parties committed to respect and promote neutrality, impartiality and independence guiding humanitarian action. Most importantly, they explicitly committed to prevent any political or military use of humanitarian aid, to facilitate the access of humanitarian agencies where they are needed, and to ensure the safety of their personnel.

Barre also emphasised the importance of Annex 2 of the Peace Agreement, which provides for interim security measures. The Monitoring Committee of the Agreement will create a Commission on Technical Security (CTS), which is tasked to set up mixed teams of observation and verification; these will serve not only to report on possible violations of the terms of the Agreement, but also stand as an early warning mechanism. The CTS, which is run by consensus, will be composed of six members from Mali's armed forces, three from the CMA; and three from the Platform of Mali. In addition, it will have two members from MINUSMA (the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali) and a member from the mediation teams of international forces.

Within six months from its creation, the CTS shall set up an operational mechanism of coordination, which will create joint patrols among the parties. These joint patrols will secure the process of regrouping, containment and demobilisation of armed combatants. Most importantly, the joint patrols will secure the contested commons and public spaces in the north during the interim period.

The challenges are huge, said Kanoute. There are challenges related to national sovereignty, such as dealing with the presence of foreign armed groups and the fact that Mali's conflict and its drivers have become transnational in nature. Another key area of concern is the strengthening of identities, at the expense of integration and national unity. And of course, there is the presence of the 'unusual actors' of transnational organised crime.

Kanoute concluded his presentation by emphasising that Mali's security challenges cannot be solved by the country's security services alone. Transnational crime, in a context of proliferation of local conflicts and violent extremism, creates multiple security challenges that are transversal and unpredictable. He ended with a plea for civil society to become more involved in dealing with these problems.

Challenges to tackling impunity and corruption

Barre extended the discussion into the impunity and corruption that plagues the region. Defining 'impunity' as the absence of enforceable rules or the lack of accountability, he provided a quote: 'when everyone does what he wants, it results in a society which nobody wants'.

Barre examined a difficult area that the Ministry of National Reconciliation is tasked to address –granting amnesty to those who may have committed crimes and human rights violations. This is a fraught debate in Mali. Originally, the National Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation was set up to investigate the grievances that led to the 2012 security crisis. However, this timeframe was thought to be limited, especially since many believed that the roots of the crisis and violence went back further. The commission was thus discontinued, and the Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation (CVJR) was created in its place. The CVJR was given a wider mandate of investigating all gross human rights violations from independence in 1960 until 2013. The CVJR was placed under the supervision of the Ministry of National Reconciliation.

It is not clear however how the transitional justice processes will work. The 2015 Peace Agreement also provided for the creation of an International Commission of Inquiry in Mali 'to investigate all war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide crimes, sex crimes and other serious violations of international law and human rights'. War crimes and crimes against humanity were reaffirmed as inalienable, and the Peace Agreement required that all parties cooperate with the commission. It stated that there will be 'no amnesty for the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity and violations serious human rights'.

Although lessons may be learned from other countries, such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Mali clearly has its own unique context. Barre pointed out, for example, that creating a new amnesty law will always be subject to pressure from powerful groups. He also warned that given these pressures, the type of amnesty that emerges is likely to provide toleration of certain violations of human rights that have been committed, instead of holding the perpetrators to account. A past that is too painful or too dangerous could jeopardise chances for immediate survival.

Another key area of contention addressed by the Peace Agreement, which had also proven most difficult to enforce, is 'the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, and other forms of transnational organised crime'. The Agreement recognises that terrorism has multiple connections to organised crime and drug trafficking (Chapter 11), and the parties have committed not only to fight it, but also to support the creation of special units to lead this fight. The Agreement also provides for the creation of a commission to fight corruption and financial crime.

In addition, the Agreement calls on the international community to provide financial, technical, and logistical support to implement the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process, security sector reform, and the efforts to fight terrorism and

organised crime. In particular, the Agreement calls on donors to 'contribute promptly and generously to the proposed trust fund' that will be set up to finance sustainable development in the restive northern regions (Article 34). The Agreement provides for the convening of a conference to raise these resources, two months after the development of a specific strategy on sustainable development in the north (Article 37). The government has committed to match resources that would be raised from the conference (Terms of Implementation).

Enforcing these provisions on the 'fight against terrorism and organised crime' is difficult for the simple reason that some local politicians have become involved, or have developed various forms of quid pro quo or symbiotic relationships, with terrorism and organised crime.

In the workshop, views were raised that there may be two peace processes running parallel to each other – a formal and an informal one. The first is the formal Peace Agreement, already discussed in detail above. However, participants speculated that there may also be informal deals being negotiated. This is most especially so, since the formal Peace Agreement focuses only on short-term security, and is silent on federalism or autonomy, a long-time rebel demand that will enable full local control over the local economy – including access to resources (such as land and mineral resources), taxation, and regulation of local, including trans-Sahara trade. Many believe that control of the local economy is the most substantive issue towards the achievement of a genuine political settlement in the country, yet it remains underobserved.

There also remains considerable distrust on whether promises of integration of former rebels in the north into the official security forces and the recruitment of northerners into the public service will be adhered to. But perhaps most difficult to answer are vexing questions on whether certain economic activities – such as those called 'smuggling' and therefore considered criminal by the central government, but which may be seen differently, even considered as a lifeline by locals – could be allowed or tolerated.

The government's attitude to all these is criticised by the movements. They believe that the government is playing both sides, which may jeopardise the whole peace process. For example, corruption in army recruitment through the DDR is common knowledge.[12] Some army officers make money by promising recruitment into the army, the police or the gendarmerie. Unless these deficiencies are addressed, the deadlocks in the process will not be removed.

It would be useful at this point to reiterate the questions raised in Christian Aid's 2015 case study, *The Power of Drug Money in Mali*:[13]

> What can development agencies do about such underlying politics? How can they 'straighten the crooked', so to speak? A first step is to acknowledge the existence of a peculiar form of politics and set of relationships, which drove much of the conflict in northern Mali. Useful questions could then be asked when designing governance interventions. For example, how is the highly lucrative cocaine economy reshaping social and political relationships in the country? What informal or hidden structures

'Many believe that control of the local economy is the most substantive issue towards the achievement of a genuine political settlement in the country, yet it remains underobserved'

and relationships of power need to be examined? Do the usual conflict analyses and conflict-sensitive programming apply as much for situations with a high incidence of organised criminality and corruption? How does one engage with institutions that are probably built on foundations of illegal activity and illicit behaviour? What could be done about criminal markets elsewhere in the world that create the demand for the services of smugglers in the Sahara?

A more difficult question that peace builders ought to be attempting to answer is: Is collusion of some form with organised criminality inevitable in the context of the Sahel? One outcome that Barre alluded to is that there could be no answers to these questions. These questions may be ignored, judgement may be suspended, and the underlying issues conveniently swept under the carpet. These are the challenges to tackling impunity and corruption in the Sahel.

Both Kanoute and Barre warned that the impact of having no resolution to the impunity, corruption, and crimes of the past is huge. They said that donors will be reluctant to support efforts of the state; the implementation and follow-up of development plans will remain difficult and risky. Communities and stakeholders directly exposed to the violence may choose short-term security (ie, collaboration with criminal and armed groups) rather than long-term development. The movements of NGO project teams will be reduced to a bare minimum, and the tolerance for such activities may be put at risk.

Perhaps a question, following Barre's earlier quote, should be asked: what should each one be doing, in order to create a society that everybody wants?

Conclusion: Development and peace building in corridors of impunity and insecurity

Christian Aid's November 2016 workshop did not result in any specific conclusions for addressing the Sahel's complex problems. It was clear that there could be no simple solutions. Every step of the way, there appears to be dilemmas. However, the workshop did unpack, to a certain degree, the peace and development challenges in the Sahel, and it is important that these analytical tools be enumerated, because they can inform the policy and programme interventions that donor agencies and development agencies could consider in the region.

The inter-locking drivers of the crises

As Kanoute noted in his presentation, poverty, conflict, corruption, criminality and climate change have now become interlinked, with each driving or reinforcing the other. It is therefore best to deal with these problems together, rather than piecemeal. Poverty and conflict can no longer be addressed without equally addressing criminality and the impacts of climate change.

A failure to address the interlocking nature of these drivers risks creating blind spots in the analysis. Though it may not be within their remits, development agencies need to be attuned to the problems of criminality, in the same way that security agencies need to consider the role they could play in development. As Kanoute emphasised, the problems are of such magnitude and complexity that they cannot be solved by security agencies alone. Neither can development agencies do it on their own without coordination with other sectors and actors.

For example, the solution to increasing criminality is not always stronger and effective law enforcement. Sometimes, the provision of decent jobs or predictable access to resources like land and water, could be more efficient in reducing the pool of unemployed young people who could otherwise be drawn to crime and terrorism. Equally, supporting livelihood development is not always just about providing seeds, fertilisers, or education to raise healthy livestock. What people also need is protection, so they can sell their harvests or bring their cattle to the market without being extorted at checkpoints by armed men of unknown authority. Such crossovers between the security and development communities are few and far between, and need to be encouraged. The development and security communities ought to be talking more to each other.

Dealing with unusual actors is inevitable

The complexity of the crises in the Sahel has produced a range of 'unusual actors'. They are unusual because they can be criminals who survive because they have become the only source of investment and employment in moribund local economies. They are unusual because they can be bandits and terrorists to the state, but local champions to impoverished and marginalised communities long neglected by the state. Some youth organisations in Gao, for

example, appear to be willing to make trade-offs, citing that the first time gutters were cleaned in the town was when MUJAO took over following the 2012 crisis and imposed its harsh version of Sharia law.

'Unusual actors' are not only those who are armed. They can also be kinship networks, neighbours and friends, or even politicians that local people run to when they are in trouble. Communities in the Sahel have their own support networks. These networks are essentially non-state providers of social protection and could sometimes be more efficient and better targeted than state institutions. Sometimes, development interventions could unnecessarily disrupt these networks. Thus, there may be a need to rethink mantras about social protection, ie, that they should always be completely government-owned and driven.

There is no suggestion that donor agencies working in fragile states, or development NGOs like Christian Aid that are structured by an anti-poverty and human rights agenda, should be tackling the 'bad guys' – eg, human rights violators, criminals, or even terrorists – following the logic of making the peace process 'inclusive enough'. Rather, what appears necessary is to at least at least acknowledge their presence, and that they could appear in a variety of guises. Inevitably, it is state actors that need to engage with these groups. Though unusual actors can make or unmake political settlements and peace processes, being 'inclusive enough' is not without risks – it can backfire and lead to worse outcomes.

More is becoming known about the ways to manage the risks of unusual actors. An acknowledgement that they exist, and are therefore always actively shaping outcomes in the public domain, could lead to a better understanding of the quid pro quos they strike with local communities. For example, there have been cases of unusual actors being the only ones investing in the repair and rehabilitation of water sources in places where state institutions are nowhere to be found and which are too dangerous for development agencies to reach. As part owners of these water systems, unusual actors begin to enjoy local legitimacy. Could the peace process and development programmes, therefore, be more efficient and effective in identifying and addressing such gaps in the provision of public services?

Development agencies need to take account of the role of unusual actors in the messy politics of local villages or the murky relationships between informal and state structures. Acknowledging and carefully considering these roles are essential in designing and implementing development interventions in fragile and conflict-affected areas. In this way, blind spots are addressed, and all options can be laid out, including decisions not to operate in certain places if entanglement cannot be avoided.

However, red lines also need to be drawn. Mali's peace process has excluded terrorist and extremely violent groups for valid and compelling reasons. This decision to exclude 'spoilers' is legitimate and needs to be respected, even as new ways of dealing with this particular set of actors are debated and considered.

Targeting youth in developing livelihood strategies

The two presenters in the workshop made the importance of targeting youth quite clear – Mali and the Sahel have a young population, and they ought to be prioritised in the development of livelihood strategies. If they are not prioritised, they become part of growing pool of unemployed and marginalised, and particularly vulnerable young people that could become a fertile recruitment ground for criminals and terrorists.

Youth development appears to always be at the margins of development strategies and youth programming has attracted very little support from governments, NGOs and donor agencies.

Normally, youth are those in transition from being children to adults. In rural areas of the Sahel, however, that transition typically does not happen or is very short – children are expected to work and become adults quickly as part of a household's survival strategy. Girls, in particular, have a double burden – they are usually married as soon as they reach childbearing age, while expected to do house and other forms of work as well. These mean that they require different sets or packages of development interventions, and that they face additional problems accessing public services or livelihood support because they are subordinate members, not the decision makers of their extended households.

It is also worth pointing out that some youth in the Sahel face fewer issues about unemployment, and more about under-employment or self-employment in informal and illicit economies. There are many stories of Sahelian youth willing to take risks – they will work as mules moving various sorts of contraband across smuggling routes, and come back with stories of adventure and awash with cash. Sadou Diallo, a former mayor of Gao once told journalist Jerome Starkey that he had bought his four pick-up trucks, a Hummer, three Land Cruisers, and two Jeeps from young drug mules who were given these vehicles by drug traffickers as payment.[14]

But there are other groups of youth that have emerged that need particular attention as well, such as the war wounded, ex-combatants, returning mules and orphans.

The need for realistic timeframes

The extent of the problems in the Sahel means that they cannot be addressed or realistically resolved within a few years. Yet most donor agencies and NGOs frame their strategies typically within five-year time frames. Programming within such time scales ought to be discontinued, and donors and development agencies should be considering moving towards longer programme life cycles that can be flexible and adaptive, and improved along the way as more knowledge is gained from tackling the various drivers together, dealing with unusual actors and targeting youth.

In 2011, the World Bank published a background paper for the World Development Report on Conflict, Security, and Development, where estimates were made on how long it would take fragile states to build functional capability. The report separates optimism from wishful thinking. The calculations, made by economics professor Lant

Pritchett using the World Bank's International Country Risk Guide and the World Governance Indicators, found that the time it would take for fragile states to reach solid levels of governance should be measured in decades, not years. For example, Pritchett shows that the fastest 20 countries took on average 27 years to achieve the threshold level in controlling corruption; 18 years to achieve a threshold level of political stability; and 41 years to have an enforceable rule of law.[15]

Having longer timeframes could bring certain benefits in development programming. For example, there would be less rush to formalise the informal economy, or to replace functioning social support networks with less predictable government service delivery. Christian Aid has been working in the Sahel since the 1970s. It is important to take stock of what has been achieved throughout that period.

The workshop concluded that there is neither substitute nor quick-fix alternatives to regular, painstaking development work. The participation of civil society, particularly youth, women, and religious leaders in policy identification, should continue to be promoted. Good governance should remain on the agenda of sustainable development in the Sahel. A better understanding of how illicit trades and other criminal activities shape youth livelihoods should be sought. Inter-state cooperation, especially among Sahelian countries, is necessary.

End notes

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[7] The CMA is comprised of the Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA); the Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (HCUA); the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA), a faction of the Coalition du Peuple de l'Azawad (CPA); and a splinter group of the Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance (CMFPR–II). The Platform is comprised of the Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance (CMFPR–I), the Groupe d'Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA), and splinter groups of the CPA and the MAA. Note that GATIA is a Touareg group, but is part of the Platform. For more details, see Mali Peace Accord: Actors, issues and their representation, Stockholm International Peace Research Insitute, 27 August 2015, www.sipri.org/node/385

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