

# Towards Local Ownership of International Interventions in Mali

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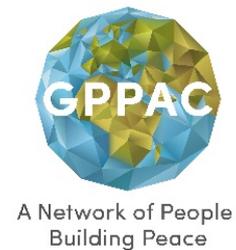
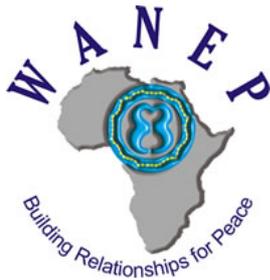
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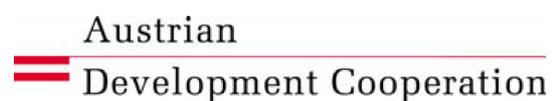
A Network of People  
Building Peace

# Colophon

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# 1. Introduction

The human security lens highlights how people experience insecurity at a personal and community level. However, such day-to-day realities are often directly influenced by political developments at the national, regional and international levels. This is especially evident in the case of Mali, where not only have transnational factors played a role in the evolution of violent extremism, but where development and governance structures have been shaped by the heavy presence of bilateral and multilateral partners.<sup>1</sup> With the crisis that began in 2012, the role and influence of these partners have taken on new dimensions, notably with the introduction of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the renewed commitments of the international community to the 2015 National Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.

The international statebuilding and peacebuilding support is frequently framed around the objective of "strengthening the social contract" between the Malian state and the citizens. For internationals to contribute meaningfully to such an endogenous process, it is necessary to continuously consider the dynamics of local ownership. This entails raising questions such as: Whose analysis and priorities guide the interventions carried out by the international actors? Which stakeholders are involved in the implementation? How are these actors and actions monitored and evaluated, and to whom are they accountable? And is there an exit strategy for international partners?

This chapter will examine some of the dynamics surrounding the international interventions, with particular (if not exclusive) attention to MINUSMA, from the point of view of local ownership. If understood as an inclusive approach, this lens can serve to reorient a state-centered paradigm towards human security. To help articulate and measure the progress of local ownership through the participation of civil society, we refer to three dimensions of local ownership, presented below.

## The 3 dimensions of 'local ownership'<sup>2</sup>

- **Wide:** involving a diversity of groups (including gender, age, ethnicity-based diversity) in the analysis, implementation, and evaluation of interventions;
- **...systematic:** there are formal and ongoing mechanisms for multi-stakeholder consultation, participation, and collaboration;
- **...and deep:** local actors have the capacity and space to collectively contribute to the process in an informed and strategic manner.

For Malian civil society as well as policymakers, a better understanding of the challenges as well as the opportunities of UN peace operations can help shape more constructive partnerships. For MINUSMA and other international partners, including International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), critically assessing their approach and interventions through the three dimensions of local ownership can contribute to a more sustainable impact of their investments.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017) note that "Mali's heavy dependency on foreign assistance has created a complex and multifaceted governance dynamic in the country" in 'Assessing the EU's conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions in Mali', WOSCAP 2017 (p.27)

<sup>2</sup> Following the model of Lisa Schirch in: 'Local Ownership in Security Case Studies of Peacebuilding Approaches', Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC and Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2015 [www.humansecuritycoordination.org](http://www.humansecuritycoordination.org)

## 2. The strong presence of ‘internationals’ in Mali

The international interventions underway in Mali cover the full range of sectors. In addition to peacekeeping operations through MINUSMA’s military arm, a wide range of civilian statebuilding and peacebuilding initiatives are carried out by MINUSMA, other intergovernmental and bilateral assistance agencies, as well as INGOs. Statebuilding support covers governance reform, decentralization, Security Sector Reform (SSR), rule of law and strengthening of state institutions. Peacebuilding support includes the mediation process, the implementation of the peace agreement, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). Basic services and humanitarian assistance is particularly needed in affected regions in the North. Justice initiatives promote human and women’s rights and transitional justice. Development programs support job creation, food security, environment, health and education projects. Last but not least, a vast number of academics, researchers and think tanks intersect all these sectors.

MINUSMA is involved in virtually all of these sectors, and as such is a relevant case study for international intervention. With international actors involved in exercising each of the State's responsibilities, questions about local ownership have been inevitable.<sup>3</sup> WANEP's human security consultations highlighted a number of fears and criticisms that are directly or indirectly related to this issue. These included concerns about the perpetuation of aid dependency; the absence of exit strategies; the perceived incoherence of international interventions; and the sense that priorities and activities did not always reflect Malian priorities.<sup>4</sup> For instance, a civil society reflection observed that, *“It is clear that MINUSMA implements a lot of projects and field activities in some regions, but it’s not clear what the role of the local authorities play. The government should be informed of activities and investments of both civil society and international actors. There’s a need for a multi-stakeholder platform to follow the strategy in its totality.”*<sup>5</sup>

Whilst civil society acknowledge some gains made<sup>6</sup>, albeit slow, in the implementation of the peace process, civil society reports and WANEP consultations reflect that local communities see little progress from all these efforts. On the contrary, the fact that the security situation has worsened and spread to central Mali in recent times<sup>7</sup>, despite so many investments and partners, has not gone unnoticed. As one representative of a regional organization noted, *“there have been more and more missions and partners in Mali since the crisis, investments in the millions, but all of this has not made Mali any less fragile”*<sup>8</sup>. There are many reasons for the current situation, and there is no doubt about the amount of genuine professional effort invested in the MINUSMA mission; yet these perceptions highlight structural as well as operational challenges that stand in its way.

For MINUSMA, the need for local ownership was discussed from the beginning of the mandate, among others in the reports of the UN Secretary General. A 2013 report noted that *“The polarisation and trauma that characterise Mali today require external*

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<sup>3</sup> The theory of sovereignty covers the field of competences which the State cannot delegate without distorting its fundamental missions – from « L’État et les monopoles régaliens : défense, diplomatie, justice, police, fiscalité » in Cycle de conférences du Conseil d’État 2013-2015: *Où va l’État ?*, p.2, Conseil d’État 9 July 2014,

<sup>4</sup> Rencontre du Groupe de Réflexion International, Bamako 31 mars – 1 avril 2015, convened by WANEP, GPPAC and HSC

<sup>5</sup> Rapport Délégation Malienne à New York, 7-10 Novembre 2016, GPPAC

<sup>6</sup> Déclaration de la Délégation de la Société Civile Malienne à New-York, 11 November 2016

<sup>7</sup> See Reports of the UN Secretary General on the Situation in Mali 2016;

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/open-letter-un-security-council-peacekeeping-mali>

<sup>8</sup> Meeting with ECOWAS representatives, The Hague February 2016

*actors to be sensitive, patient and supportive. International partners must recognise that there are no quick fixes and that external interventions can exacerbate divisions. It is essential to promote and support national ownership and to abide by the imperative of "do no harm". The organised political and social groupings of Mali require support of various kinds from the United Nations and other external actors but they also insist on national ownership.*"<sup>9</sup> However, operationalizing these principles is complicated.

### 3. MINUSMA: a mission of its time

A complex mission with civilian, police and military components, MINUSMA has a broad mandate<sup>10</sup>. Seen in the global context, MINUSMA is an example of the changing role of peacekeeping missions moving towards broader 'peace operations', deployed even before a peace agreement is signed. In Mali, the peace agreement was signed two years after the deployment of MINUSMA, whose mandate includes the mission of "stabilizing" the country. Similar stabilization missions have been seen in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo/DRC (MONUSCO). While the exact meaning of "stabilization" is still a subject of debate<sup>11</sup>, it generally includes a so-called "robust" mandate allowing for the use of force in a context where peace has not yet been achieved. Furthermore, the "integrated approach" implies that the different components (notably the civilian and military branches) of the mission are to work more coherently towards the same objective. This approach is seen as necessary in the face of transnational and hybrid threats such as terrorism, organized crime, food, sanitary and climate-related security.<sup>12</sup>

The emergence of this new generation of peace operations is not without controversy. The integrated approach coupled with a robust mandate is seen by some as risky for civilian branches of the mission, and the engagement of UN troops in armed combat in an active conflict context can arguably be seen as a break from the basic principles of peacekeeping operations (Consent of Parties, Impartiality, and Non-Use of Force except in Case of Self-Defense or Defense of Warrant)<sup>13</sup>. The UN may be perceived as a party to the conflict, and the mission ends up spending valuable resources on self-defense. This is a fundamental problem, as the people of Mali consider the protection and safety of civilians the most important part of MINUSMA's mandate<sup>14</sup>. With MINUSMA a target of armed groups, there is a "constant tension" between self-protection and

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<sup>9</sup> Par. 43 (Role of external actors), p.8, Report of the UN Secretary General on the Situation in Mali, 26 March 2013

<sup>10</sup> Security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; assisting the reestablishment of State authority, rebuilding the security sector, humanitarian assistance and the promotion and protection of human rights: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/about-minusma>

<sup>11</sup> Boutellis, A., (2015). Can the UN Stabilize Mali? Towards a UN Stabilization Doctrine?. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development. 4(1), p.Art. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Aning and Abdallah: 'Confronting Hybrid Threats in Africa: Improving Multi-dimensional Responses', p22 in: De Coning, Gelot and John Karlsrud (Eds.): The Future of African Peace Operations, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> According to Karlsrud (2015), "The UN is being given tasks it has not been designed for and in the long term this will have grave consequences, undermining the general acceptance of UN peacekeeping operations as a tool to help states emerging from conflict" - in: [The UN at war: examining the consequences of peace-enforcement mandates for the UN peacekeeping operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali](#), Third World Quarterly Vol. 36, Iss. 1, 2015

<sup>14</sup> *Malimètre* 2015, p 60; Rencontre du Groupe de Réflexion International, Bamako 31/3 – 1/4 2015, WANEP, GPPAC, HSC

protection of the Malian population<sup>15</sup>. With only 14 per cent of the total budget of \$ 923,305,800<sup>16</sup> to accomplish the task of protecting civilians, MINUSMA is struggling to allocate the necessary budget for the implementation of the remaining tasks of its mandate<sup>17</sup>.

**MINUSMA Personnel currently deployed in Mali (January 2017):**

10 651 military personnel  
1 262 police  
1 180 civilians (542 national - 648 international, including 125 United Nations Volunteers)

- Source: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/effectifs>

On the more positive side, recent political and policy developments within the UN also offer important opportunities for a reorientation of international interventions towards human security and local ownership. Three reports published in 2015 on the UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts - the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the on the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture (AGE report), the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO Report) and the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security - continue to fuel the debate on the UN's approach to peace and security. Their conclusions, as well as a number of recent resolutions and policies, stress the need to place people at the center of the efforts of the international community in order to work for peace and security. As a multi-dimensional mission, MINUSMA is at the forefront of efforts to translate these commitments into practice.

## 4. Roles and political dynamics surrounding the mandate

In planning and implementing their interventions, international actors are faced with a complex political landscape on the ground marked by national, regional and local power dynamics, deep-seated historical polarization as well as constantly shifting trends and allegiances. At the same time, another less talked-about factor is how international dynamics and interests also shape the interventions. The political backdrop of donor countries' home constituencies, and the interplay of interests in the intergovernmental forums dictate the terms and conditions for MINUSMA's mandate and affect its implementation.<sup>18</sup>

For instance, MINUSMA has seen the most involvement of Western forces among

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<sup>15</sup> 'To save peacekeeping from Trump's Budget Ax, Will the UN embrace fighting terrorism?' Foreign Policy 29 March 2017; According to Anthony Banbury, 86% of the MINUSMA budget was allocated to these self-defense actions: Banbury: [I love the UN but its failing](#), New York Times 18 March 2016

<sup>16</sup> [Approved resources for peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016](#) - Note by the Secretary-General, United Nations 26 June 2015

<sup>17</sup> Para. 17, page 5, Rapport du Secrétaire Générale sur la situation au Mali, 28 Mars 2016 S/2016/281

<sup>18</sup> According to the ICG, the diverging interests between regional and Western powers is "sucking oxygen" from the implementation" of the peace agreement: [Open Letter to the UN Security Council on Peacekeeping in Mali](#), International Crisis Group, 24 April 2017

active UN peace missions, following concerns about terrorism and migration. The formulation of a "robust" mission mandate reflects these priorities, influenced in particular by France in the process of drafting the UN Security Council resolutions on Mali.<sup>19</sup> In response to the complex and "asymmetric" threats of non-state armed actors in Mali, a specific contribution by the Dutch, Swedish and Norwegian troops was the establishment of the All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU), the first established UN intelligence body in peacekeeping operations in the field. This operation is said to be directly influenced by the NATO counter-insurgency experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup>

However, such investments have been questioned by some local and regional actors in Mali. For instance, a regional intergovernmental representative expressed concern that these "temporary" teams were not serving a sustainable national infrastructure, distracting resources and attention from the development of regional capacities under the long-term ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), including the conflict early warning and early response system. A civil society reflection noted that *"the prevention aspect is not covered by MINUSMA, so latent conflicts are not considered until they become a national problem"*.<sup>21</sup>

The coherence of multidimensional interventions is also in question. There are tensions between the processes of statebuilding, peacebuilding and peacekeeping.<sup>22</sup> Statebuilding is based on a partnership with the host government, and within this context the 'robust' type of peacekeeping in Mali therefore positions international forces as a conflict party. This is by many seen as compromising the credibility and impartiality required for broad and inclusive peacebuilding efforts. Critics highlight the contradictions caused by the dual role of MINUSMA and other international partners as both referee and trainer, mediating in the peace process on the one hand, and on the other sustaining an inter-dependent partnership with the government. These contradictions fuel mistrust about the motivations of the international community in Mali.

The question of how various international actors are positioned and perceived locally should be central to planning the division of roles amongst internationals. Furthermore, a recent statement by the International Crisis Group points to the multiple armed forces operating in the north, with planned G5 and AU forces potentially adding to what could become a veritable "security traffic jam". It adds that troop increases in themselves would not be game changers, and highlights the need for MINUSMA to decentralize and strengthen its political and civil affairs components and giving the mission a greater role in local reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> While many Malians, in particular those representing the elite, routinely call for a robust peacekeeping mandate to keep violent extremists at bay, it is relevant to take into account both perceptions and impact in affected local communities.

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<sup>19</sup> John Karlsrud (2015) highlights the influence the resolution 'penholders' UK, USA and France, in pushing for a robust mission, guided by their seconded staff in the UN Secretariat, and with DPKO led by Hervé Ladsous, a French career diplomat: 'The UN at war: examining the consequences of peace-enforcement mandates for the UN peacekeeping operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali', Third World Quarterly Vol. 36, Iss. 1, 2015

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Rapport Délégation Malienne à New York, 7-10 Novembre 2016, GPPAC

<sup>22</sup> Interviews Bamako, February 2016; see also: Nicolle Ball, Megan Price, Erwin van Ween: 'The tricky business of using greater force in UN peace operations', CRU Clingendael Institute 2015

<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group 2017

## 5. The extension of the Authority of the State

Since the UN is based on the governance of member states, and the main interlocutor for peace operations is the host government, it is not surprising that MINUSMA has been criticized for a predominantly state-centric approach to its Extension of State Authority mandate<sup>24</sup>. As already noted, this part of the mandate implies a certain allegiance to the government as a local partner or counterpart. For those who see the government as part of the structural causes of the conflict (for example through problems of bad governance and corruption), strengthening the authority of the state through militarized and statebuilding efforts could then be understood as anchoring and perpetuating the root causes, as seen (according to critics) in Burundi and South Sudan.

A state-centric approach is also problematic in view of the fact that governance and social cohesion in Mali are largely based on local, traditional, diverse religious and family structures. These informal structures operate in parallel with (or in some places in the absence of) more formal state structures, and must be taken into account as part of a "hybrid" vision of statebuilding that does not correspond with dominant Western governance and administration models. Hence, the ability to strengthen the state authority through conventional training and mentoring based on these models is limited.<sup>25</sup> While it is equally important not to romanticize traditional structures (as these can also perpetuate existing inequalities<sup>26</sup>), the Malian hybrid social reality requires a broad reform agenda and a highly contextualized approach that goes beyond state institutions.

These types of challenges have been increasingly recognized in UN circles, notably with the HIPPO report concluding that peace operations should be guided by "the primacy of politics", since "*in a context of fragmentation, it is possible that an attempt to rebuild or extend central authority may contribute to the worsening of conflict instead of peace*"<sup>27</sup>. This awareness has been well captured in policies and guidelines issued by the UN's Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO) headquarters. Extension of State Authority mandates are increasingly discussed in tandem with confidence building between the State and society, in other words as part of strengthening the social contract<sup>28</sup>. The UN Civil Affairs Handbook, published in 2012, proposes an inclusive framework for engagement by peace missions in relation to the Extension of State Authority mandate, recognizing issues of diversity, gender and culture, as well as local ownership and the principle of Do No Harm.

In order to move from a state-centered approach to a focus on human security, the implementation of such guidelines requires not only theoretical knowledge, but also contextualization based on a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of governance in Mali, whether formal or traditional. However, the need for capacity building of the internationals in this regard, in order to make a meaningful contribution in the Malian context, is largely underestimated.<sup>29</sup> Rather than limited and ad-hoc briefings, preparation and training of international mission personnel and forces could benefit from

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<sup>24</sup> D. Mechoulam: Redefining State Authority in Mali, Global Observatory 28 June, 2016

<sup>25</sup> For example, Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017) note that EUTM training staff "could have done more to use local expertise and adapt the training to the Malian context"

<sup>26</sup> Bagayoko, Hutchful & Luckham (2016): "Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority", *Conflict, Security & Development*, 16:1, 1-32.

<sup>27</sup> Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO Report), p. 16, United Nations, June 2015

<sup>28</sup> Rapport du Secrétaire général sur la situation au Mali, 26 mars 2013 (S/2013/189)

<sup>29</sup> Séverine Autesserre: *Peaceland*, 2014 documents how contextual knowledge is systematically less valued than 'technical' knowledge of expats.

more systematic inclusion of dialogues and training by Malian universities, national UN offices such as the UNDP, and local civil society sharing Malians' knowledge and capacities with international partners.

## 6. Community engagement and civil society

It is widely recognized, at least at the policy level, that peace operations can only be effective and achieve sustainable results if they engage and connect with local communities<sup>30</sup>. To date, an inherent problem in peacekeeping missions is the fact that the peacekeepers live and function separately and isolated from the local communities they are supposed to protect. This gap between the daily life of peacekeepers and the local population has consequences for their effectiveness and the results of peace interventions.<sup>31</sup> To better understand and respond to these challenges, the Civil Affairs arm of the DPKO headquarters has developed resources and tools for community involvement in the contexts where peacekeeping missions operate. In 2013, the "Guidelines on Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in United Nations Peacekeeping" were published.<sup>32</sup> The proposed actions include, for example, enhancing the collaboration with national staff engaged as liaison officers, gender advisors and community liaison assistants with local communities and their representatives, as well as conducting regular surveys.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are frequently the entry point for community engagement. To many international actors, civil society engagement is also a strategy to mitigate some of the risks inherent to statebuilding highlighted in the previous sections. CSOs can contribute to strengthening state-society relations, and play an important role in civilian oversight. However, civil society is also a reflection of the social, political and power dynamics of Malian society at large. Faced with the observed fragmentation of Malian civil society, international actors struggle with how to identify "legitimate representatives" to work with. This is a challenge that is characteristic of conflict-affected contexts generally, identified by UN peacekeeping missions globally:

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<sup>30</sup> See HIPPO Report

<sup>31</sup> S. Autesserre (2014)

<sup>32</sup> Donati, Druet, Fearnley, Harvey & Oliver: 'Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in Multi-Dimensional UN Peacekeeping', UN DPKO Civil Affairs Team, 2013

Challenges faced by UN Peacekeeping Operations in engaging effectively with civil society in conflict-affected contexts <sup>33</sup>	
<p>Strategic challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Short-term nature of peacekeeping mandates,</li> <li>· State-centric nature of peacekeeping,</li> <li>· Lack of understanding of the mandate,</li> <li>· Lack of a strategy for systematic engagement,</li> <li>· Identifying the right set of civil society partners,</li> <li>· Ensuring inclusive representation of civil society in meetings,</li> <li>· Overcoming suspicions among civil society actors of national registration rules,</li> <li>· Impact of civil society engagement on mission decision-making and prioritisation,</li> <li>· Managing tensions between the host government and civil society.</li> </ul>	<p>Operational challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Access to civil society actors at the local levels,</li> <li>· Mapping civil society,</li> <li>· Capacity and coordination of civil society,</li> <li>· Presence of an enabling environment,</li> <li>· Timing and sequencing,</li> <li>· Expectations management,</li> <li>· Lack of financial and programmatic resources,</li> <li>· Need for better stakeholder and geographical mapping mechanisms.</li> </ul>

One of the challenges is the perceived gap between formal, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which by some critics are considered politicized, part of the elite and focused on Bamako, and the more informal, local civil society groupings across the country which are often more affected by deep-seated conflict dynamics and polarization.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, it is precisely the diversity of Malian civil society that makes engagement at the various levels necessary. While CSOs representing various local communities are involved in advancing the peace process by articulating their human security priorities and perspectives, national NGOs “*who speak the same language as the politicians*”<sup>35</sup> are equally needed to address and challenge the political arena on structural governance issues. The many forums, platforms and networks of civil society in Mali demonstrate its potential to organize and mobilize around different themes, although their collective advocacy capacity would benefit from support towards more strategic and systematic approaches.<sup>36</sup>

In MINUSMA, the Civil Affairs division has the mandate to “*build capacities of civil society to access and engage more effectively in the peace process and the mechanisms for peacebuilding and national reconciliation*” (UNSC resolution 2227/2016). The most visible community and civil society engagement efforts of MINUSMA are the communication and dissemination activities such as social media and the Mikado radio station, its awareness and capacity building workshops with different stakeholder groups and local Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). However, when reflecting on these engagements,

<sup>33</sup> Hate, Moore & Druet: 'Understanding & Enhancing Engagement with Civil Society, (p.82,88) UN DPKO, 2016

<sup>34</sup> Ismaïla Samba Traoré avec Traoré Hanane Kéïta et Mariam Koné : 'Culture Politique, Citoyenneté et Crises au Mali quels Processus et Acteurs pour le Changement'; Mouvement Malivaleurs & International Alert 2014

<sup>35</sup> Atelier d'échange sur les grandes lignes de la Stratégie de Sécurité Humaine au Mali et de son cadre de suivi-évaluation, 3 Juin 2016, Bamako – WANEP-Mali, GPPAC, HSC

<sup>36</sup> 'Apprendre par la conception d'un projet au Mali', GPPAC, WANEP-Mali, HIGJ 2016 ; Rapport Délégation Malienne a New York, Décembre 2016, GPPAC

civil society representatives express a lack of depth and strategy:

*“Often the internationals consult the local CSOs only to collect their ideas or to approach them as ‘implementers’ of their own ideas, which keeps the CSOs in a position of dependence. We hear the UN representatives talk of “their projects” but where do their ideas come from? Without meaningful community engagement there can be no ownership of these activities. The CSOs should be included from the beginning of the projects. This problem also exists with international NGOs, who tend to take the lead in managing funds. This contributes to limiting the capacity development of the local CSOs. The system and the cooperation mechanisms keep the local CSOs in a situation of fragility”<sup>37</sup>*

Nevertheless, some important good practice has been seen in Mali with regards to engaging civil society alongside state actors in the management and monitoring of funds and projects, for example the UN Peacebuilding Fund or the UN Women coordination around the implementation of the national action plan of Women, Peace and Security. Where these commendable efforts sometimes fall short is ensuring transparency in how the civil society representatives were chosen, as this causes tensions and (rightly or wrongly) complaints amongst CSOs about their legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> Internationals therefore need to not only pay attention to process and communication, but also ensuring selected civil society representatives have sufficient support and capacity to report back to their peers.

It was only recently that DPKO recognized the need for mission guidelines to ensure systematic and contextual engagement with civil society in relation to the mission mandate. Acknowledging the impact of the conflict on civil society, the DPKO report 'Understanding & Enhancing Engagement with Civil Society'<sup>39</sup> proposes that missions should invest more in understanding the ecosystem and the political context of CSOs, to then identify how and whom to engage among local civil society actors.<sup>40</sup> In addition to stakeholder mapping and risk assessment, the report also advises that peace missions play a proactive role in facilitating dialogue between civil society and state actors, and provides a 'toolkit' for strategic engagement with civil society in relation to the mandate.

This toolkit presents an opportunity for more strategic relations between MINUSMA and civil society, whilst ensuring context and conflict sensitivity. The security threats particularly in the north of Mali make this all the more important, as not only are peacekeepers directly targeted by armed groups, but one of the key causes for armed groups attacks on civilians is said to be reprisals for suspected collusion with “foreign” forces.<sup>41</sup> Risk assessments, both by MINUSMA staff and by national CSOs, to ensure civil society and community representatives are not affected or at risk due to engagement with the mission are crucial. Finally, focusing on the quality of engagement with civil society means building mutual relationships and collaboration. As pointed out by Malian civil society representatives, it is not enough to simply inform or include CSOs in the implementation of the mandate, they need to be involved from the analysis, to shaping the interventions through to their evaluation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Rapport Délégation Malienne a New York, Décembre 2016, GPPAC

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. See also Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017) p.32

<sup>39</sup> Hate, Moore & Druet (2016)

<sup>40</sup> Aditi N. Hate, Lisa Moore, Dirk Druet: 'Understanding & Improving Engagement with Civil Society in Multi-Dimensional UN Peacekeeping: From Policy to Practice', Final Draft May 2016, UN DPKO and Field Support, (2016)

<sup>41</sup> Natasja Rupesinghe: Strengthening Community Engagement in United Nations Peace Operations, ACCORD Conflict Trends, 19 October 2016

<sup>42</sup> Rapport Délégation Malienne a New York, Décembre 2016, GPPAC; Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017)

## 7. The coordination conundrum

A widespread complaint in Mali is that the operational space is crowded by the large number of different international actors involved, each with their own agenda and approach.<sup>43</sup> Although the Malian authorities actively encourage donor investment, the proliferation of agreements, strategies and partners may not only divert the government's attention away from domestic commitments, but also leads to competition between the different agencies and donors for exerting the most influence and achieving results.<sup>44</sup> The Malian government also complains that international partners, although they have mobilized funds for Mali, spend this budget on bilateral projects or with civil society, without reporting to the government.<sup>45</sup> A recent research report notes that *"Though Mali's ownership is considered key to the success of support, the political and bureaucratic requirements of the international actors, as well the complexities of the support architecture, actually make it very challenging for the Malian State to exert leadership and control in the whole process"*.<sup>46</sup>

Another challenge is the coordination within and between the missions of the international community. Currently, 24 countries are contributing to MINUSMA, bringing different cultures, languages and operational practices. On the military side, in addition to coordination issues with other forces (e.g. Opération Barkhane by the French), there are tensions notably between African and European forces in particular.<sup>47</sup> On the civilian side, the mission's peacebuilding efforts must seek better coherence among UN member states' diplomacy efforts<sup>48</sup> as well as aligning the strategies of the Civil Affairs' focus on local dialogue and community engagement with, on the other hand, the Political Affairs' high-level national mediation. On top of this, a challenge for this integrated mission is to operationalize a degree of civil-military cooperation. Ultimately, however, interagency and donor coordination challenges, which are both technical and political, must not overshadow the priority of engaging and feeding into national processes and structures.

The coordination conundrum is a structural and political problem of the set-up of international missions and international aid more broadly; no amount of databases, meetings and documents is likely to fix it. As a matter of fact, there is a long history of coordination mechanisms in Mali, for example the 'Plateforme Harmonisation de l'Aide' (since 1997) between the government and donors is considered "very closely knit" at the strategic level<sup>49</sup>. However, the criticism is rather that these are often experienced as externally initiated and non-transparent for the local CSOs that are not part of the internationals' information and communication loop. Some forums have been established by actors who will not have a long-term presence, or have been set up to serve a specific and ad hoc intervention, creating new structures in competition with those already established.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Interviews Bamako, February 2016; see also Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017)

<sup>44</sup> Helly, Thérèse-Bénoni, Galeazzi, Maïga and Ouédraogo (2015): 'Sahel strategies: why coordination is imperative', ECDPM and ISS, 2015; see also Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017)

<sup>45</sup> Interviews Bamako, February 2016

<sup>46</sup> Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017)

<sup>47</sup> Albrecht, Cold-Ravnkilde & Rikke Haugegaard : African Peacekeepers in Mali, DIIS Report 2017:02

<sup>48</sup> The ICG (2017) notes "Though MINUSMA's diplomacy around the peace process is active and valuable, without greater international coherence it yields little concrete impact on the ground."

<sup>49</sup> Djiré, Sow, Gakou & Camara (2017) p.14; see also [www.maliapd.org](http://www.maliapd.org)

<sup>50</sup> G. Nyirabikali: 'Opportunities and Challenges for Civil Society contributions to Peacebuilding in Mali', SIPRI 2016

Even so, examples held up as good practice can be found in this regard. For instance, the security 'Plateforme d'Echange et d'Action' set up by EUCAP-Sahel which brings together Malian security forces with CSOs working on security and international partners, notably MINUSMA. This platform - which is currently chaired by a civil society participant - has served as entry point for collaboration, for example on integrated training. According to its civil society participants it has also contributed to synergies amongst the participating CSOs. Such smaller-scale, thematic platforms that are regular enough to not only connect institutions, but also build personal relationships and trust over time, can contribute to alleviating some of the coordination challenges at different levels.

Ultimately, overly institutionalized coordination may not always be feasible or even desirable, since this could well contribute to systematically excluding certain actors, and may not allow for the flexibility necessary for a changing context. However, it is crucial to critically assess to what extent existing coordination mechanisms benefit and feed into permanent Malian capacities, structures and long-term processes. Furthermore, thematic and content-oriented platforms can have more added value if connected to the strategic and state-led mechanisms such as the Plateforme Harmonisation de l'Aide. Civil society oversight and involvement in such coordination mechanisms, as argued for in the experience of the New Deal process<sup>51</sup>, can promote broader and more people-centred accountability.

## 8. An exit strategy for MINUSMA?

A central concern identified during this project is the lack of a clear exit strategy for MINUSMA and the duration of MINUSMA's engagement in Mali.<sup>52</sup> Some CSO participants feared that MINUSMA would extend over time, as did its sister mission, MONUSCO in the DRC. The mechanisms and results of transferring technical expertise and political ownership to Malians and regional actors is eagerly awaited. The expectations of the population on this issue since the establishment of MINUSMA in 2013 increasingly reflect this concern.<sup>53</sup>

The need to elaborate an exit strategy as soon as a UN mission is deployed in a host country has been discussed several times in the UN Security Council.<sup>54</sup> This has also been recommended by civil society in the case of Mali.<sup>55</sup> The UN SG has outlined three reasons for a peacekeeping mission to leave the host country: if the mission succeeds, if the mission fails and in case of partial success.<sup>56</sup> It is relevant to consider these different scenarios for Mali: what would be a success or a partial success in Mali, and for whom? What would be a failure? It is relevant to consider the experience of other UN missions, such as the challenges faced by MONUSCO in the DR Congo, as well as the positive

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<sup>51</sup> [www.pbsbdialogue.org](http://www.pbsbdialogue.org) and <http://www.cspps.org/>

<sup>52</sup> Rencontre du Groupe de Réflexion International, Bamako 31 mars - 1 avril 2015, convened by WANEP, GPPAC and HSC

<sup>53</sup> Mali-Mètre [www.fes-mali.org/index.php/mali-metre](http://www.fes-mali.org/index.php/mali-metre)

<sup>54</sup> Le Conseil de Sécurité s'engage à améliorer la transition et stratégies de sortie des opérations de maintien de la paix de l'ONU, Conseil de Sécurité, 6270e réunion, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2010/sc9860.doc.htm>

<sup>55</sup> A. Boutellis: "Mali's Peacekeeping mission: Full-fledged Behemoth, or have lessons been learned?", Global Observatory 12 Mars 2013

<sup>56</sup> UN Secretary General, "No Exit Without Strategy: Security Council Decision-Making and the Closure or Transition of UN Peacekeeping Operations", UN DOC S/2001/394, 10 April 2001

lessons learned from the downsizing and the withdrawal of the UNAMSIL mission in Sierra Leone through the establishment of a UN Peacebuilding Office.<sup>57</sup>

As peace in Mali continues to be fragile, or non-existent for parts of the country, a MINUSMA withdrawal may not be likely in the immediate term. Nevertheless, the popular demand discussed above has demonstrated the need for a clearer articulation of progress and success for the mission. MINUSMA, as other UN missions, is accountable to the Security Council, the UN Secretary General and, at least in principle, to the host government. Its progress reports focus on activities, outputs and changes in the context. Capturing the results of mission interventions at a more strategic level of outcomes and overall impact remains elusive. A process of reflection on the conditions and scenarios that should inform a MINUSMA continuation or withdrawal, as well as its actual impact over time, is important not only for the contributing countries and the UN itself, but can bring greater clarity for the Malian constituencies.

Finally, let's not forget that - as with the articulation of the mandate - the negotiations on exit conditions are enmeshed in international relations between states, influencing the final result. This intergovernmental arena should therefore be more directly guided by the expectations and lived experiences of the diverse Malian population groups, before defining the parameters of MINUSMA's mandate and exit strategy. A monitoring and evaluation system based on mutual reflection and the use of the various contributions of civil society could also contribute to a more people-centred accountability of UN operations, and can help facilitate the exit of international actors.

## 9. Conclusion and recommendations

MINUSMA is a mission of its time, exemplifying the global debate on robust, multidimensional UN missions, as well as an eagerly observed testing ground for the UN good practices laid out in 2015 reports. With such a heavy presence of the international community in Mali, expectations of the population are inevitable. As long as the acute problems affecting the population remain, the visibility and awareness campaigns about the mandate are not likely to stem these expectations. Some of the challenges highlighted in this chapter are systemic and political, and will not find a technical or operational solution. That is why it is essential that the ownership and oversight over the international interventions in Mali is articulated and addressed up-front. A full awareness of the political and practical implications of international and multidimensional interventions is necessary to inform advocacy, negotiations as well as partnerships. This also calls for analytical capacities as well as a safe space for collective reflection and learning between international and national stakeholders. The international partners themselves should not be left out of the analyses, as their actions cannot be dissociated from their own national interests and from the political dynamics of state-centric international relations.

As discussed in this chapter, there are both policies and guidelines for supporting a locally defined agenda as part of UN missions and beyond. However, more systematic attention to how they are implemented, monitored and evaluated from a Malian point of view would offer more tangible opportunities to improve MINUSMA's sustainability. If local CSOs are better aware of existing engagement efforts and the tools and guidelines

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<sup>57</sup> 'Renewal of UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', What's in Blue, 29 March 2016

available to the mission, they can participate in enhancing MINUSMA's contributions from a human security perspective.

Concluding, the recommendations in this chapter encourage both international and Malian actors to consider how their interventions and results relate to the three dimensions of local ownership – *wide, systematic and deep*. Progress on what this might look like in the Malian context can be further explored by using the monitoring and evaluation framework<sup>58</sup> developed for this strategy, illustrated in the Figure below\*.

### *Local ownership is wide...*

Consider how international interventions can be more systematically and deliberately inclusive of national stakeholders in a conflict-sensitive manner:

- For MINUSMA, invest in developing mission-wide operational guidance and capacity for engaging local civil society strategically following the DPKO toolkit for conflict sensitive and mission-specific engagement<sup>59</sup>, taking into account dynamics within civil society.
- For INGOs and donors, support inclusiveness and collective action at the civil society level by strengthening capacities in networking, horizontal accountability (eg via communication and feedback loops), gender-sensitive and participatory advocacy strategies.
- Ensure that interventions and coordination mechanisms build on existing initiatives and structures, which prioritize national stakeholders and relate to agencies that have a permanent presence in Mali (such as national offices or permanent missions); Critically assess actions and information loops that are disconnected from the actors and mechanisms that will remain once MINUSMA has withdrawn (such as national and regional infrastructure).
- Improve information sharing between international and national actors on stakeholder mapping, conflict analysis and evaluations, for a more effective and shared overview amongst civil society, state actors, academia, international agencies and missions with a permanent or long-term presence in Mali.

### *... systematic..*

The international community and INGOs can increase the impact of their contributions by engaging more systematically with their Malian partners at the analytical level:

- Not only inform and consult local communities, but support long-term community security processes that can contribute to a national infrastructure for peace.
- Integrate mutual capacity building between internationals and national stakeholders in mission preparation, ensuring contextual knowledge carries the same weight as technical.
- Improve the coordination on international advocacy between local and international NGOs and the academic community, including reflection with explicit attention to the role and influence of international actors in Mali.
- Monitor and address aid dependency in both bilateral and non-governmental sectors.

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<sup>58</sup> Based on the Monitoring & Evaluation framework *Ensemble pour la Sécurité Humaine au Mali – Cadre de Suivi-évaluation*

<sup>59</sup> 'Understanding & Enhancing Engagement with Civil Society' by Hate, Moore & Druet – UN DPKO, 2016

*...and deep.*

Local ownership is possible when international interventions are accountable to the Malian population and where a diverse civil society has the political space and the information necessary to participate in continuous oversight:

- For the international community and Malian policymakers, improve the overview, transparency and information sharing of established international and national coordination mechanism.
- Support transparent multi-stakeholder platforms that facilitate regular and thematic information exchange, enabling relationship, trust building and, eventually, joint action.
- Develop a locally owned monitoring & evaluation system to capture the results and impact of MINUSMA to inform national debate as well as Secretary General reports and UN Security Council debates regarding the mission's progress and exit strategy.

#### **Levels of Local Ownership\***

