National Dialogue in Mali

Lessons from the 1991 National Conference for the
Nascent Conference of National Understanding

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Case Study
Report

Abstract

The question of dialogue has been at the heart of inter-Malian debates for many years. The deep crisis that was revealed by the events of 21 March 2012 has undermined the social fabric and peaceful co-existence, and has weakened the state and its institutions. National Dialogue has thus reappeared as an absolute necessity in order to allow for all the children of the nation to come together again and collectively set forth the new social contract which must bind Malian women and men.

Despite the prevailing socio-political and security context, one needs to remember that Mali's history is full of lessons on the practice of National Dialogue. Modern Mali stems from an old civilization, and the history of the nation offers much experience in social dialogue mechanisms (such as the Mandé Charter, inter-community gatherings, the National Conference of 1991, regional and local consultations). This rich social capital has contributed until today to the peaceful co-existence between culturally diverse populations.

To end the current crisis, the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, issuing from the Algiers peace process and signed on 15 May 2015 in Bamako, proposes the opening of a series of dialogue spaces and initiatives. It notably provides for the conduct of a Conference of National Understanding. Based on a thorough review of the dialogue experience gained during the National Conference of 1991, this study allows us to provide perspectives for a renewal of National Dialogue in post-crisis Mali.

About the Publication

This publication was produced in the framework of a two-year project (March 2015 – April 2017) to develop a Handbook on National Dialogues funded by the German Federal Foreign Office in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the Handbook is to offer a practice-oriented guide for comprehensively designing and implementing National Dialogues. It rests on participatory methods including 1) strategic dialogue and exchange between local stakeholders, international development and peacebuilding practitioners, and policymakers, 2) a comprehensive mapping exercise of National Dialogues across the world, and 3) in-depth case studies on National Dialogues produced by local researchers. The project is implemented by the Berghof Foundation, in cooperation with swisspeace. This publication is one of seven case studies; others include Guatemala, Lebanon, Libya, Nepal, Sudan, and Tunisia. The case studies provide recommendations for on-going processes in the specific country and inform the Handbook's findings. The overall aim of the project is to improve National Dialogues and enhance the capacities and contributions of conflict parties, local stakeholders and external actors towards their successful implementation. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Veronique Dudouet for supervising and editing the case study, as well as to Karin Göldner-Ebenthal for supporting the editorial process.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

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AEEM	*Association des Élèves et Étudiants du Mali* (Association of Malian Pupils and Students)
AfDB	African Development Bank
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ARGA-Mali	Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa
AU	African Union
CAT	*Cellule d'Appui Technique* (Technical Support Centre)
CERDES	*Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche pour la Démocratie et le Développement Economique et Social* (Research Centre for the Study of Democracy and Socio-Economic Development)
CMDT	*Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement du Textile* (Malian Textile Development Company)
CNC	*Comité National de Coordination* (National Coordinating Committee)
CSA	*Comité de Suivi de l'Accord* (Monitoring Committee of the Agreement)
CTSP	*Comité de Transition pour le Salut du Peuple* (Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FIAA	*Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad* (Arab Islamic Front of Azawad)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MINUSMA	*Mission Multidimensionnelle des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali* (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission)
MNR	Ministry of National Reconciliation
MPA	*Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad* (Popular Movement of Azawad)
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
TJRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission
UDPM	*Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien* (Malian People's Democratic Union)
UNTM	*Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali* (National Workers' Union of Mali)
WB	World Bank

1 Introduction

1.1 **Context of the study**

In the 1990s, nearly all the French-speaking, sub-Saharan states in Africa underwent a process of transition towards a system of multiparty democracy. Analyses show that within the framework of transitional processes, the phase of constitutional change is decisive for the success of democratisation as well as for the enrichment of the theory of constitutional law. Transitions in Africa in the 1990s are no exception to this rule (Besse, 2009).

During that period, Africa witnessed an implosion of stability marked by political unrest, coups, civil war, as well as border and racial conflicts, all of which made states vulnerable and insecure (Bellinda et al., 2012). In the majority of African societies, the desire for peace has led to the development of techniques to avoid or at least reduce conflicts by channelling violence through specific socio-political structures, along with oral and unwritten agreements of a judicial or magico-religious nature (Bah, 1999).

Having identified a profound longing for peace in traditional Malian societies, there is an important epistemological problem to be faced: Can there be a link between past and present? To what extent can traditional procedures work in the present context, where the political and institutional levels are marked by the incursion of modern elements? The analysis of National Dialogues in Mali examines both Malian traditions in their quest for peace as well as contemporary (described as 'modern') mechanisms for conflict resolution.

National conferences appear to have been an innovative and distinctive mechanism to which a number of countries have had recourse. The 'institutional' expression was first coined by Benin's President Mathieu Kérékou (Eboussi Boulaga, 1993). The National Conference in Benin enjoyed a certain measure of success and became a model for many French-speaking, sub-Saharan states. The experiment was repeated in Gabon, the Congo, Niger, Mali, Togo, Zaire and Chad[1]. It is therefore a specifically African mechanism (Besse, 2009).

According to some authors, national conferences have a mixed nature (Raynal, 1994). In the first place, they represent a ritual of transgression, allowing for the symbolic expulsion of conflicts, and thus proffer a public forum for the spoken word, which has led some observers to compare it, rightly or wrongly, with the celebrated African tradition of the 'palaver' tree (Banegas, 2003). Furthermore, they also seek to be an institutional structure that generates new powers intending to initiate democratic values. It was indeed to carry out the latter mission that nearly all of the national conferences brought about a veritable civil coup by declaring themselves supreme. They opted for a transition based on a break-away from the former regime, not on progressive reform. This rupture was legalised with the setting-up of new institutions by way of a new constitution, adopted through what is usually termed the 'original

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[1] Benin: 19 to 28 February 1990, Congo: 25 February to 10 June 1991, Gabon: 27 March to 19 April 1990, Niger: 29 July to 3 November 1991, Mali: 29 July to 12 August 1991, Togo: 10 July to 28 August 1991, Zaire: 7 August 1991 to 6 December 1992, and Chad: 15 January to 7 April 1993.

constituting power'. The holder of this power was mostly the National Conference itself, based on its own declaration of sovereignty. It thus coincided with the establishment of a new legal order involving crucial social transformation.

Certain analysts (Banegas, 2003) have rebelled against the idealistic notion of a 'Benin model' and the common depiction of peaceful and consensual National Dialogue processes, while bringing to light the context of conflict and extreme tension in which they took place, and insisting on the unpredictable and reversible nature of African transition processes. National Conferences come with democratisation and occur in contexts of political, social and institutional crisis. Thus, instead of guaranteeing the stability and prosperity of African countries, the advent of democracy was fuelling conflicts in numerous countries of sub-Saharan Africa (Feikoumo, 2012).

Mali's National Conference had a number of original characteristics, as stressed by President Amadou Toumani Touré: "*The Malian National Conference begins where others end. The Transitional Committee convenes and organises a National Conference, chaired by the president of the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People (CTSP), the Head of State*" (Amadou Toumani Touré, 8 June 1992).

This committee had fourteen days to establish a constitution, an electoral code and a charter of political parties, and to set out the state of the nation. Many delegates from rural areas and Malians living abroad were also invited to take part in the National Conference. On 8 June 1992, the inauguration of the elected president Alpha Oumar Konaré marked the end of the democratic transition in Mali. It began faced with a very disturbing social and political revolution, dealt with an uprising in northern Mali, and negotiated and signed a National Reconciliation Pact.

Contextualising the Malian National Conference allows us to discern the challenges, intricacies and complexity of its promoters' task. Today, Mali is facing a renewed crisis that began in 2012 with an armed rebellion and a military coup, both of which seriously undermined peace and co-existence, and weakened the state and its institutions. Unease can be sensed almost everywhere, and it is crucial to enable the sons and daughters of the nation to come together in consultation. The Peace and Reconciliation Agreement issuing from the Algiers process and signed on 15 May and 20 June 2015 in Bamako provides the main framework to resolve the on-going crisis. One of its provisions calls for the holding of a National Reconciliation Conference to enable an in-depth debate between the components of the Malian nation on the conflict's underlying causes. Such a debate will have to handle, amongst others, the Azawad (northern Mali) issue. In this context, the conference must lead to the development of a Charter for Peace, Unity and National Reconciliation. Consequently, the National Reconciliation Conference must be approached as an inclusive process building on the various perspectives of all regional, socio-occupational, institutional and political horizons, at all levels of the country starting from the smallest villages and fractions, in order to foster the emergence of a shared vision both of the crisis that is blocking progress in our country as well as of prospective exist strategies.

From this perspective, there is a need to capitalise on past experience so as to rebuild the post-crisis National Dialogue in Mali. With this in mind, the study's main objective is geared to producing an analysis of the National Dialogue process introduced by the National Conference in 1991. This study also enables us to spell out concrete proposals for the renewal of the post-crisis National Dialogue in Mali within the framework of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This study has been undertaken in the context of the preparation of a National Dialogue Handbook. It seeks to:

- Collate the lessons learned from recent or incipient experiences of National Dialogue, pointing out the requirements of and opportunities for effective support,
- Reflect on these best practices or lessons learned in order to tackle the most pressing problems occurring during National Dialogues,
- Provide recommendations to professionals, politicians, donors and actors involved in the Malian conflict in order to prepare, organise, support and apply National Dialogue processes efficiently and effectively on the basis of insights from the field.

1.3 Methodology and structure of the study

From a methodological point of view, we have opted for an interactive and qualitative approach. In terms of the data-collection process, we have reviewed the existing academic literature relating to the subject of National Dialogue in Africa and Mali. In addition, we have analysed documents resulting from various Malian dialogue processes, notably those relating to the National Conference in 1991. The research team was made up of a supervisor, two associated researchers and four research assistants.

In order to prepare our field research, we organised a methodological workshop in Bamako. This enabled the team members to forge a common understanding of the terms of reference, validate the research sites, identify the actors to meet, define a provisional work timetable, and develop interview guides. We carried out 14 interviews in Bamako, and 10 in the Mopti region. In addition, we organised two discussion panels in Bamako and Mopti, in the form of thematic briefings followed by discussions and recommendations. They brought together academics and researchers, representatives of public and semi-public institutions, eminent persons participating in the 1991 National Conference, custodians of Malian traditions and cultural values, representatives of political parties, members of civil society, and representatives of international organisations. The panels in Bamako and Mopti consisted of 31 and 30 participants respectively.

We have borrowed from Banegas (1995, 13) the premise according to which, in order to understand national conferences:

> "*it is also necessary to analyse how the dual occurrence of political protests and reforms were relayed by one body, one institutional procedure: the National Conference. It is effectively a perfect time and place to observe the methods of expressing grievances, the mobilising potential of pro-democracy activists, but also the mechanisms of resource conversion and representation-construction of the mobilised groups. It also exposes the strategies of instrumentalisation of the mobilisations and struggles (...) influencing the outcome of the crisis.*"

The constraints faced in this work were twofold. In terms of time management, it has been somewhat difficult for us to arrange for the various actors to be available for the scheduled interviews within the tight deadlines allocated for this study. With regards to the selection of research sites, we found it

important to account for a variety of actors and cultures. Given our limited financial resources, we were obliged to limit the number of sites by including just one regional capital (Mopti) outside of Bamako.

Finally, in terms of thematic limitations, further research should be undertaken on the possibilities of compromise between modernity and tradition, given the interest elicited by the discussions on this topic during the fieldwork. It must also be added that our observations have focussed primarily on the National Conference, even if some elements of analysis have at times been brought to bear on other dialogue mechanisms within the country's diverse communities (such as the village headman's hall, inter-community meetings, regional forums for peace, etc.).

The present report is structured in five main sections, as follows: The history of dialogue in Mali (first section), the National Conference of 1991 and its inauguration (second section), issues and perspectives of the National Dialogue today (third section), the role of international partners in the negotiation process (fourth section), and finally, lessons, guidelines and recommendations for the National Dialogue (fifth section).

2 Mali: Land of dialogue

Mali is a country with an old civilisation, whose history abounds with experience in mechanisms for social dialogue and understanding, the co-management of lands, and the regulation, anticipation and prevention of crises linked to the cohabitation of diverse ethnic, cultural and socio-professional groups. Its social capital and cultural heritage have enabled the maintenance of social relations and the prevention and management of conflicts therein. This has contributed to assuring the sustainable cohabitation of various populations with their diverse customs, and has also fostered the integration of different communities on the basis of complementarities translated as societal values. One of the most illustrious examples of large-scale dialogue dates back to the *Kourou kan Foukan* conference organised by Soundiata Keita in 1236. This conference is considered a crucial milestone because it gave birth to the Mandé Charter as a basic norm regulating life in the city. Parts of this charter are still in use in a few Malian communities today. Effectively, many practices in Mali illustrate the use of community dialogue (more locally circumscribed than the term 'National Dialogue' as understood in this study) as an instrument of prevention, management and governance.

Among the *Dogon* people of Mali, it has been established that "*the common interest necessitates peace and that the rain clouds are blown away from the places where disorder holds sway.*" In cases of conflict, *Dogon* wisdom is thus eager to have both parties share responsibility, the overriding consideration being the maintenance of internal peace, following mutual forgiveness (Dieterlen et Fortes, 1965). In this context, 'palaver' or the *Toguna*[2] is not intended to establish the conflicting parties' respective wrongs and to pronounce sentences leading to exclusion or rejection. It may be seen rather as a lengthy therapy with the aim of breaking the vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence so as to re-establish peace and harmony.

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[2] "In *Dogon* country, the *Toguna* ('palaver tree' in Malinké country) is a traditional institution enabling mediation with the utmost respect across customary and religious norms. The *Toguna* is built in the form of a shelter at the height of the seated protagonists and allows them to enter into discussions without agitation" (Dakouo et al., 2009, 13).

Another element of this heritage, the '*sinanguya*', known as '*cousinage*' (cousinship) and widespread throughout the Sahel, is an approach to managing relationships between various ethnic, socio-professional and age groups. It concerns a kind of non-aggression pact based on friendly banter and is intended to forestall or attenuate possible antagonism in community life.

The consensual establishment of a tolerant form of Islam in the Empire of Ghana, the Mandé Charter and the co-existence of several religious and customary legitimacies within empires and kingdoms are all examples of tolerance, respect for diversity, and concord between religious beliefs, ethnic groups and socio-professional bodies. These governance mechanisms had the capacity to assure institutional stability, a higher social cohesion, an agreement on the collective exploitation of natural resources, as well as the anticipation and prevention of impeding crises (Konaté, 2014).

History shows us that Mali, despite its warlike traditions, also remains a land of dialogue characterised by its specific history and geography (Sanoko, statement to the Bamako panel, February, 2016). The country has long been envied for its wealth in gold and agricultural land. If little seems to have remained of the past in terms of effects on the population's daily life in contemporary Mali, the country is nevertheless the product of a centuries-old tradition. Effectively, nomadic or semi-nomadic herdsmen (the *Peuls*, *Touareg* and *Maures*) have inhabited the same space as black farmers (the *Soninké*, *Malinkés* and *Bambara*), with more or less native ruling dynasties assuming the necessary authority to appease the tensions dividing them. These various groups are sometimes surprised to discover themselves so close to each other, in spite the diversity of their features and the multiplicity of their origins. This alone has allowed the development of a rich and unique tradition of dealing with conflict.

It should be noted that historians' analyses are still heavily loaded with references to the Mandé Empire. During the Bamako panel, one participant commented: "*Mali is a great country, but it is very diverse … Historians often speak as though the whole of Mali is the Mandé. The relationship of a Senoufo, of a Malinké with the village headman is different to that of a Peul with his village leader, since he respects his religious chief more. In the history of this area, it is important to understand what the reference points are*" (K.S., Bamako discussion panel of 17 February 2016).

Other analysts think there is often a *"paradisiacal perception regarding certain aspects of our culture"* (B.B., Bamako discussion panel of 17 February 2016). Yet as another panel participant noted: "*Our history is also marked by violence. There is a culture of violence, of the total domination of whoever is in power. 'Môgô ni fanga tè flan gné'* (no one dares compete with the powers that be)".

In contemporary Mali, the prime example of political dialogue referenced remains the National Conference of 1991, which took place after the fall of President Moussa Traoré. However, investigations reveal that Mali has experimented with a whole range of diverse dialogues throughout its history, which can be classified as follows:

- ☰ **Inter-communal dialogue** is a dialogue practised by various community groups with the aim to prevent or resolve conflicts linked to social issues, the exploitation of natural resources, etc. Inter-communal meetings deal most frequently with sectorial or ethnic issues that are generally confined to specific geo-cultural areas. This kind of dialogue has enabled the renewal of lines of kinship and co-existence that had been broken by armed inter-communal clashes in northern Mali during the 1990s. Today, inter-community dialogue is also applied by NGOs and civil-society actors in the context of peacebuilding processes and social cohesion in Mali.

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- **Social dialogue** refers to cultural forms of mediation and reconciliation used to regulate social relationships. One usually refers to social dialogue as the body of intervention by chiefdoms – men of castes (social mediators) mandated to promote the resolution of a dispute between two different communities or within a given community.

- **Political dialogue** is organised and facilitated by those in power with the aim to find solutions to a problem of a political or institutional order. For example, in 2001, the Malian government introduced a new institutional mechanism for territorial administration in order to reduce tensions born out of the 1997 electoral crisis that had led a third of the political parties to place themselves outside the institutions by refusing to recognise the results of the parliamentary and presidential elections.

- **Communal dialogue** widespread after the 2012 crisis, it refers to discussion forums set up to reinforce social cohesion within the framework of local governance. Such forums also aimed to bolster the legitimacy of local state representatives that had been tarnished in the crisis by placing them at the heart of the process, and facilitated the co-existence of different local legitimacies.

- **Inter-religious dialogue** is organised by religious leaders in order to devise joint actions or to come to a common opinion on issues of national concern.

- **Constitutional dialogue** refers to the consigning of elementary constitutional jurisdiction as the basis of citizens' involvement in the consolidation of democracy (Wing, 2013, 59).

- **Regional dialogue** is part of the regional, often sectorial, consultations that take place within Mali's regional administrations.

- **National Dialogue** comprises meetings with a national dimension, such as the National Forum (*États Généraux*) on decentralisation in 2013. In this paper, the term mainly refers to the Malian National Conference of 1991.

While Mali has seen numerous experiments in dialogue, the current socio-political and institutional situation prompts us to interrogate the link between the experiences of the past and the present context. In point of fact, the current crisis in Mali has been exacerbated by the fragility of the politico-institutional system and bad governance. The mismanagement of local governance has amplified the conflicts surrounding natural resources and provoked inter- and intra-community tensions. Generalised violence and serious violations of human rights have traumatised the population, thus affecting daily community and inter-ethnic interactions (BAD, 2015). However, various attempts to bring Malians together around the same table have failed to find a way out of this impasse. Without a doubt, the involvement of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Ouagadougou (2013) and Algiers (2015) peace processes have helped bring about constitutional normalisation and the signing of a Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, but recent conflicts have seriously affected people's trust in dialogue processes.

One of the main challenges in the current Malian context is evidently the establishment of a dialogue not only at the national level, but also at an inter-community level. The existence of dialogue remains obligatory for the construction of democratic societies, notably in those emerging from crises that need to reconcile and remobilise communities and to build a new societal model. In literature on dialogue, a number of authors are rediscovering socio-historic approaches to conflict management. For instance, Ndiaye Aïdara et al. (2015, 4) mention that one cannot grasp mechanisms for the management and settlement of conflicts without thorough knowledge of the environment, territory and customs of the given populations.

Given the aforementioned context, dialogue plays a crucial role in the current process of reconciliation. Taking up the words of Sandrine Lefranc (2007, 9), this might be described as a question of "*social engineering that must allow conflicting groups to overcome their mutually stigmatising representations by becoming more and more interwoven*". "Innovative" approaches with regard to the prevention and management of conflict in the context of dialogue and reconciliation processes can nevertheless raise questions of sustained pacification and reconstruction – what John Crowley (2000, 4) defined as "*any politico-institutional process establishing or re-establishing peace within a community that has been torn apart (eventually, of course, by redefining its borders, if not by suppressing it as a community).*"

3 The National Conference of 1991: Context, issues and implementation

Researchers have sought to analyse past national conference processes in Africa by drawing a sort of balance sheet of their achievements. One example is the analysis by Simplice Feikoumo:

> "*Beyond the heated debates, the remorse, the tears, the political squabbles and value judgements, National Conferences have had the crucial benefit of effecting a clear political choice in favour of pluralist democracy, multiparty politics, regular, free and open elections, the exercise of trade-union rights, respect for human rights as well as the guarantee of fundamental freedoms as a model for the social organisation and governance of a country. They also represent an opportunity to de-legitimise any seizures of power by force under any guise, and to (…) establish both the rule of law and the resolution of political conflicts exclusively through dialogue and non-violence as sacred norms of the Republic. The African countries appear reborn, confident and relatively united. The advantage of these conferences is therefore the achievement of socio-political change without resorting to violence, which often leads to chaos.*" (2012, 58)

3.1 The National Conference of Mali: A contextual construction of National Dialogue

The National Conference held in Mali in 1991 should be analysed within the institutional environment of the time, characterised by certain key events. Indeed, the fall of the first Malian Republic after a coup d'état on 19 November 1968 was followed by a decade of military rule (1968-1978). In 1974, a constitution was established by referendum that legalised the single-party rule of the Malian People's Democratic Union (UDPM) under a military-civilian regime led by President Moussa Traoré. The Second Republic, established by the 1974 constitution, was in turn overturned by a popular uprising of the democratic movement in March 1991.

In the years 1990-1991, the situation was marked by rebel movements in the north of the country, and the mobilisation of political, trade-union or professional organisations against the one-party system in place. In the same vein, it must be understood that the democratisation process on the continent initiated by the Franco-African La Baule Summit (1990), the social crises linked to the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme, the destruction of the country's economic and social foundations

under cover of the liberalisation of public life in Mali, a disastrous famine, as well as governance challenges combined with popular frustration with ever-increasing social inequalities and human rights violations, were a veritable breeding ground for revolution.

In opposition to the UDPM, illicit political parties made a stand against the politico-military bureaucracy in order to demand democratisation and a multiparty system in Mali, along with civil-society actors who formed a Committee for the Coordination of Democratic Associations and Organisations, bringing together the trades unions, including the National Workers' Union of Mali (UNTM), the Association of Malian Students (AEEM), and professional bodies. The press – including *Les Échos*, *la Roue*, *Cauris* and *Aurore* – became involved, reporting purposefully.

From January 1991 onwards, the situation worsened with the outbreak of violence, government crackdowns, deaths and considerable material damage. The coordination committee, installed in the Labour Exchange, courageously forced the Moussa Traoré regime into dialogue – albeit without a successful outcome. Street violence continued, reaching a peak on Friday 22 March 1991 (Black Friday), with the destruction of factories, banks, the Tax Office and the Treasury, lootings and the opening of Bamako prison and freeing of prisoners. In face of such chaos and violence, a section of the army broke away from the regime and re-grouped in the National Council for Reconciliation, taking power on the night of 25-26 March 1991. The Coordination Committee and the National Council for Reconciliation met and founded the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People (TCSP), made up of 10 military and 15 civilians, and put in place a transitional government presided over by a Prime Minister.

Following the overthrow of the Second Republic, the CTSP and the transitional government found themselves confronted with three challenges:

- ≡ Preservation of national unity in the face of latent or open attacks and rebellions,
- ≡ Sorely needed reconciliation between Malians profoundly affected by the ravages of more than 23 years of dictatorship and plundering of public assets,
- ≡ Need for stability in the institutional and security areas, in view of restoring the economy that had been poisoned by the regime's nepotism, corruption and mismanagement.

To lay the foundation for a new multiparty democracy, a changeover was organised with the participation of all socio-economic and political stakeholders. Indeed, the pro-democracy groups represented in the Coordination Committee were able to stimulate a real momentum for change to which an entire population could adhere. This was a period dedicated exclusively to setting the state back on its feet and laying the foundations for the Third Republic, which aspired to be a multiparty, democratic society based on respect for human rights. The end of the post-revolution crisis also coincided with a series of negotiations with the *Tuareg* armed insurgency in Northern Mali (1990-1991) which started with the Tamanrasset agreement signed by the UDPM regime before the events of March 1991 and concluded on 11 April 1992 with the signing of the National Pact. This major step made by the transitional government would allow the new Republic to pacify the country.

The first acts performed by the Transitional Committee were the drafting of the Basic Act enunciating the plan for a new constitution for the period of transition, and the establishment of a transitional government. The government, headed by Soumana Sako, consisted of 21 members, five of whom were from the military. Another major step taken during the transition was the organisation of a National Conference held from 29 July to 12 August 1991.

Whereas the organisation of a National Conference was originally conceived by the democratic opposition as a mode of transition after the overthrow of the UDPM regime, its focus shifted under the Transitional Committee. The priority was no longer to challenge the regime in power, but rather to lay the groundwork for a new republic with the former leaders of the democratic opposition at the helm of state power (CERDES, 1998, 45).

In his speech on the state of the nation in 1991, Prime Minister Soumana Sako noted that "*the National Conference represents in the first instance a sign of respect for the will of the martyrs who fell on the field of honour in the course of heroic struggles led by our people in the cause of freedom and democracy. The National Conference is also the hope of all Malians, particularly those who, as a consequence of the former regime's injustices, have lived through periods of anguish and misery and have lost all confidence in the future.*"

The National Conference was conceived as a sovereign assembly representing the nation and convened by the CTSP in accordance with Basic Act No.1 of 31 March 1991, with the aim to assess the state of the nation, draw up a constitution, and adopt an electoral code along with a charter of political parties. In accordance with Article 29 of the same Basic Act No.1, decisions made at the National Conference were to be binding. The specificity of the Malian National Conference lies in the fact that it facilitated the radical restructuring of state institutions, the creation of a new republic and, above all, the resolution of an identity-based conflict, as the country was confronted with an armed rebellion in the north led by a significant minority of the *Tuareg* population. Indeed, in Mali, the broad objective of the National Conference was to lay the foundations for new Malian institutions by the assessment and adoption of a constitution that was put to the people by referendum on 25 February 1992.

3.2 Participants to the National Conference

The majority of speakers interviewed for this study expressed the view that the Malian National Conference, held from 29 July to 12 August 1991 in Bamako and following several months of preparation, represented the most open – or most democratic – national forum for dialogue in the history of Mali since its independence, due to the number and nature of its participants as well as their role and legitimacy. One should first highlight the participatory approach employed for the organisation of the National Conference. By including all categories of actors representing Malian society, the aim was to arrive at a collective discussion with freedom of expression on all major issues of national concern.

> "*The National Conference of 1991 [was] brought about without any doubt by the popular uprising, aimed to change the country's image by making a fresh start. In fact, faced with the ruling regime's opposition to the political and democratic opening up of the administration of power, conflict could not be prevented. The main issue was thus to discuss what form this socio-political change should take. For this to happen, the leaders of the coup, the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People, could not decide the country's future in a restricted format. It was necessary to encourage the opening of dialogue, to call upon the representatives of the various social strata, that is to say all socio-professional categories, to have their say on the country's future. At the time, enthusiasm and commitment were such that there was no difficulty in making the various social sectors in the country embrace the conference. Everyone already felt concerned by the prevalent situation at that time. For this purpose, a participatory approach to the National Conference's organisation was brought to the fore.*" (Malian politician, former minister and former member of the democratic movement, 11 February 2016, Bamako)

It emerges from the collected interviews that the National Conference effectively brought together all perspectives within the Malian nation, with the exception of representatives of the deposed power. The professions best represented were education (261), administration (224), fishermen (165), the judiciary (99), business (89) and healthcare (60), along with the primary sector, peasants and farmers.

The organisation of the National Conference was carried out under the authority of the CTSP. Under Decree No. 91-19 / PM-RN dated 28 April 1991, a commission for preliminary consultations was created, chaired by Amadou Mody Diall, minister delegate to the prime minister. This commission was made up of six ministers, representatives of the unions, companies, farming, the religious sector, women, young people and *Tuareg* organisations, as well as eleven individuals, mainly senior civil servants. Its mandate was to advise the prime minister on all measures relating to the selection of participants for, and organisation and management of the conference's work.

Louis Massicotte (2009, 11) carried out a thorough analysis of the nature of participation at the National Conference. He comments: "*One week before the opening of the Conference, the CTSP decided about the participation criteria. Participants had to be Malians aged at least 18, fully enjoying their civic rights, never having been condemned for a serious offence, and not having stood prominently against the democratic process.*" It should indeed be noted that all political groups and movements represented in the Conference were in favour of the democratic process. For one former participant, "*the National Conference was of a revolutionary nature. [It] was all-inclusive because everyone had been invited from all walks of life so that their points of view could be heard. Religious leaders, opinion makers, unions, political parties, peasants and farmers were thus all at the meeting*" (former minister and former member of the 1991 National Conference, 11 February 2016, Bamako).

Table 1: National Conference Participants

Participant Profiles	Number
CTSP and Cabinet	28
Members of government	21
Ambassadors, governors	8
Armed forces and security	15
Invited eminent Malians living abroad	20
Professionals	42
Preparatory committee experts	63
Malians living abroad	77
Delegates from regional coordination committees	118
Delegates from political circles	135
Delegates from communes	19
Delegates from cooperatives	11
Delegates from political parties	125
Delegates from associations	467
Interpreters	10
Press	126
Organisation committee	132
Total	1,518

Source: Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, 20 August 1991, 208

The delegates who participated in the National Conference were representative of a diversity of political, institutional and socio-professional spheres. For example, the organisers extended an invitation to associations representing the Malian diaspora as well as to several eminent Malians living outside the country, including academics. The record-writers of the Acts of the National Conference did not specify the levels of representativeness of the various participants, but rather focused on the historic nature of the event as such. It is noted in this regard: "*For the first time since Mali gained national sovereignty in 1960, its sons found themselves to be in a political forum of an exceptionally wide scope, under a banner other than that of a single party. In this respect, the conference provided a schooling in democracy for the 1,800 participants, who learned to listen with patience, politeness and tolerance to all those who possessed different sensitivities to their own*" (Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, 20 August 1991, 8).

Moreover, a Mandate Verification Committee was set up within the framework of the National Conference and chaired by Doctor Mamadou Sarr, while Halidou Touré was appointed as rapporteur. This committee comprised a total of 55 members and was mandated to verify the official list of participants, as well as the individual records filled out by delegates. The Mandate Verification Committee's report shows that among the registered participants, 1,034 were men as opposed to 52 women. Such a disparity is revelatory of the low priority given to gender in the holding of the National Conference. Although the National Conference officially registered 1,518 participants, more than 1,800 name-tags had been distributed by the end of the meeting.

Table 2: Participants by Age Group

No.	Age Groups	Number
1.	Under 20 yrs.	4
2.	20 – 30 yrs.	122
3.	31 – 40 yrs.	338
4.	41 – 50 yrs.	319
5.	51 – 60 yrs.	162
6.	61 – 70 yrs.	78
7.	Over 70 yrs.	7
8.	Unspecified	56

Source: Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, 20 August 1991, 39

According to the above table, the most represented age groups were the 31-40 year-olds and the 41-50 year-olds, while the average age of all participants was 48. It is also of note that civil society in Mali was called upon to play a key role within the National Conference by virtue of its active participation in the 1991 revolution. As Céline Thiriot remarks:

"*Mali's case, a transition qualified as being exemplary in its day by analysts, contains some interesting points for our consideration with regard to the role of civil society during the democratic transition and consolidation. In Mali, civil society has come to exercise a great deal of pressure on the leadership, going so far as to oust it from power. Above all, it has been very broadly involved, in its various components, in the management of the transition. This experience has not been neutral and went on to influence the ways in which civil society took part in the post-transition regime during the peace consolidation process*" (2002, 278).

Finally, the National Conference's inclusive nature was bolstered by the great freedom of expression enjoyed by its participants, thanks to the absence of censorship or self-censorship. In accordance with Article 5 of the rules of procedure: "*The participants in the National Conference cannot be harassed or subject to legal proceedings during and pursuant to the National Conference for opinions they may have voiced.*" On the other hand, representatives of the various sensitivities acted as true spokespersons because it was possible for their mandators to verify what they had brought as a message, the debates being broadcast on the radio.

3.3 Implementation of the National Conference

The implementation of the National Conference was governed by internal regulations developed under the authority of the CTSP and adopted by all delegates in a plenary on the second day of the National Conference. To this effect, the participants were invited to comply with these regulations to ensure the proper running of the meeting. The articles below give us some more details.

Article 1: The National Conference is a sovereign assembly convened, in accordance with the Basic Act of 31 March 1991, by the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People (CTSP) with a view to discussing the state of the nation, elaborating a draft Constitution and adopting an Electoral Code and Charter of Political Parties.

Article 19: Before the start of the proceedings, the interim bureau must verify mandates by delegation, by name or through an attendance monitoring system. The voluntary withdrawal of a delegation from the National Conference can in no way be allowed to interfere with the smooth execution of this work.

Article 27: The decisions of the National Conference are made by a simple majority of participants in attendance.

Article 34: The internal regulations of the National Conference come into force as soon as they are adopted. Any situation unforeseen by the present Internal Regulations will be resolved by the conference.

Source: Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, 20 August 1991, 31

In his opening address to the National Conference on 29 July 1991, Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, who was then head of the CTSP and also chairman of the National Conference, stated: "*the choice for us is very clear: We have to make this National Conference a place of dialogue and collaboration in order to reinforce reconciliation and national unity as well as social harmony and security, so that democracy might triumph and be further strengthened*" (Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, Bamako, 20 August 1991).

The constituting bodies of the National Conference were: the Plenary Assembly, the Presidium, the committees and the secretariat.

≡ **The Plenary Assembly:**

It was composed of all participants attending the National Conference, who had the right to voice an opinion on the subjects under discussion.

≡ **The Presidium**:

According to Article 6 of the Internal Regulations, "*[t]he Presidium steers the work of the National Conference.*" To this effect, the Presidium was in charge of overseeing the application of the Internal Regulations, maintaining order and discipline, directing the discussions, announcing the opening and closing of sittings, and calling a vote on the questions under discussion. The Presidium also elected from among its members a Rapporteur-General, who acted as the spokesperson of the National Conference, and was in charge of drawing up a general report on the National Conference. The Presidium was chaired by Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, chairman of the CTSP. He was joined by nine vice-presidents. The vice-presidency of the National Conference was allocated to a woman, Ms. Ly Madani Tall.

Members	Names
President	Amadou Toumani Touré
1st Vice-President	Ly Madani Tall
2nd Vice-President	Victor Sy
3rd Vice-President	Monsignor Julien M. Sidibé
4th Vice-President	Sall Binta Ba
5th Vice-President	Younous Ag Youba
6th Vice-President	Noupouno Diarra
7th Vice-President	MBamou Diarra
8th Vice-President	Modibo Diakité
9th Vice-President	Boïssé Traoré

Source: Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, 20 August 1991, 204

An analysis of the origin of the ten members of the Presidium shows a broadly balanced representation of political, institutional and civil-society actors, closely aligned with the anti-government movement in support of the advent of democracy. Muslim and Catholic Christian religious bodies were represented, as well as political groups like the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) and the National Congress for Democratic Initiative (CNID), along with the judiciary. However, no member of the former regime was present within the Presidium or any other bodies set to steer the National Conference process.

≡ **The working committees:**

Four **working committees** were set up by the National Conference: the Constitutional Committee, the Electoral Code Committee, the Charter of Political Parties Committee, and the State of the Nation Committee. Each committee was run by a bureau comprising a president, a vice-president, a rapporteur and a secretary. Their mandate was defined by the National Conference's Internal Regulations; however, the number of committee members was not pre-defined.

Constitutional Committee	
President	Cyr Mathieu Samaké
Vice-President	Commandant Siaka Sangaré
Rapporteur	Mamadou Cherif Haïdara
Secretary	Sory Ibrahima Diarra

Source: Actes de la Conférence Nationale du Mali, 20 August 1991, 204

Electoral Code Committee	
President	Aboubakar Gassam
Vice-President	Amadou Cissé
Rapporteur	Pascal Baba Coulibaly
Secretary	Abdrahamane Dicko

Charter of Political Parties Committee	
President	Younouss Hamèye Dicko
Vice-President	Bintou Sanankoua
Rapporteur	Mamadou Koutia Diawara
Secretary	Ibrahima Ly

State of the Nation Committee	
President	Oumar Baba Diarra
Vice-President	Cherif Cissé
Rapporteur	Cheick Samaké
Secretary	Yaya Karambe

The composition of the various committees reveals a careful balance, or compromise, between the main political, social and military forces in power. Effectively, nearly all committee members came from the transitional authority dominated by the military personnel who had perpetrated the coup of 26 March 1991. The Malian legal expert Baba Berthé adds that "*the holding of the National Conference served to unite the nation's vital forces – military representatives, civil society, youth and women community groups, and even members of the armed insurrection*" (Baba Berthé, legal expert, former minister, 16 February 2016, Bamako).

With regards to the role of the armed insurrection in the National Conference, Modibo Keita (2012, 16) points out that Cheick Ag Bayes of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MPA) and Hamed Sidi Ahmed of the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad (FIAA) participated in both the CTSP and the National Conference as representatives of the insurrection. The author also notes that "*the National Conference of 1991 was the first time that the question of the insurrection was raised officially at the forefront of the national stage*" (Keita, 2002, 16).

In a context of post-crisis political and institutional fragility, the dissemination of information and awareness-raising at the national and local level on the legislative process represented a major challenge. Conference archives do not provide any explicit information on the communication strategy, but the interviews carried out reveal that both official and private channels of communication were used to sensitise the rest of the nation about the process. The use of the following channels is noted in this regard: national television and radio, the newspaper 'l'ESSOR' (official State daily), privately owned newspapers (*Echos*, *Nouvel Horizon*, *La Roue*, *l'Abeille*), and international press (*Radio France Internationale* from France, *l'Humanité* from France, *El Pais* from Spain, *Jeune Afrique* and *le Cafard Libéré* from Dakar).

As noted in a CERDES study (1998, 48), both in committee and plenary sessions the speakers demonstrated considerable insight and embodied the pluralistic and dynamic character of Malian society, which has never been one of consensus. Notwithstanding the challenges linked to 'the material organisation of the work', delegates were assiduous during the committee and plenary sittings. In spite of the sometimes heated nature of the debates, the Malian National Conference was able to proceed within the set timeline – two weeks. The quality of the reports drawn up and adopted is testimony to the speakers' spirit of maturity and responsibility.

With regards to the key themes addressed during the National Conference, the debates were marked by a strong desire for democratic opening, notably in terms of freedom of forming and running political parties, as well as a search for lasting solutions to the armed insurrection through a reform of decentralisation, and a desire to include women and young people in the post-crisis transition and the country's institutional architecture.

In the face of the socio-political and economic context of the period, the National Conference of 1991 tackled a variety of problems, including:

- the structuration and establishment of a state based on the rule of law,
- the establishment of a participatory and representative democracy,
- the establishment of a full multiparty system,
- the creation and establishment of sustainable institutions (until the 2012 coup),
- the establishment of a decentralisation policy,
- the introduction of local democracy, and
- the need to establish forums for intercommunity dialogue.

3.4 Challenges obstructing the National Conference

The 1991 National Conference did not only receive praise. One of those interviewed asserted:

> "*The country was going through a multidimensional crisis and we had to get organised in order to stem it. These efforts were probably not made in vain, since we managed to produce key documents. But in what ways were these documents obtained? Did all the vital forces of our nation really take part in the various decision-making processes that involved them? The fact is that the participatory approach was not correctly implemented. The exercise was blatantly biased. We ended up exposing the National Conference as merely a forum for expressing the victors' opinions. That is to say, some did not agree with the decisions at all although they would have to adhere to them to allow their effective implementation. As a result, the National Conference did not have the interactive nature we had been led to believe.*" (Essayist, anthropologist, 4 February 2016, Bamako)

The stakeholders most prominently excluded from the proceedings of the National Conference were the former dignitaries of the single party. Holding the National Conference on the basis of a strong representation of the anti-government movements and political associations was frowned upon by some Malians, as the remark above testifies.

It is worth noting that, unlike other National Conferences which had been presided over by religious leaders, the National Conference in Mali was led by Amadou Toumani Touré, then the president of the CTSP. This Malian particularity can be explained by the legitimacy accorded to Amadou Toumani Touré for having carried out the military coup d'etat against the regime of Moussa Traoré. Moreover, Amadou Toumani Touré had not declared presidential ambitions for the post-conference phase, which enabled him to rise above the political fray.

In his analysis, Ousmane Sow (2010, 1) affirms that "*in retrospect, the two weeks' duration of the National Conference seems insufficient. It was hastily and poorly prepared, and especially it obscured serious problems such as what should be done about the politicians who had led the country and its societal project to ruin. Certainly, 'reconciliation' was spoken of continually. But reconciliation cannot be achieved in a stopgap manner*". This observation was corroborated by some of our interlocutors, who also mentioned the highly compressed timeframe of the National Conference as a major obstacle to the meeting. While there seem to be contradictory assessments of the quality of the organisation, an analysis of the preparations for the National Conference finds many weak points, including:

- the superficial treatment of certain issues during the National Conference, particularly political and institutional matters,
- the short timeframe of the conference, which did not allow sufficient discussions on other crucial problems such as economic recovery and development, all the more so since these topics were well defined within the framework of the four working committees,
- the lack of time to make advance preparations for the National Conference.

In retrospect, former participants to the National Conference voiced a number of complaints and challenges that had affected its results.

> "*The National Conference of Mali took place in a hasty manner; the pro-democracy movement did not have the time and the opportunity to prepare a coherent political project to effect the change awaited by the majority of Malians. The pro-democracy movement came together on March 22, 1991. The UDPM regime fell on March 26, almost a week later. Four months later, the National Conference began. The principal actors had neither the same political ideology nor the same ambitions for the country, nor the same personal, party, or tribal agenda. The proliferation of political parties, following the introduction of the full multi-party system, and the expansion of civil society were not sufficiently regulated. Lastly, the constitution adopted by the National Conference seemed rather a pale imitation of the Constitution of the Fifth French Republic and was thus not adapted to the needs of an emerging African democracy. This is why today we need institutional and other reforms to allow our country to recover and get on a path to progress in all areas.*" (M. D., historian, researcher, former working committee member at the National Conference of 1991, February 2016, Bamako)

It also emerges from our interviews that the issues covered during the 1991 National Conference were of national concern, but were at times very far removed from the priorities of the actors at the grassroots level. Despite the wide range of subjects tackled at the conference, many actors still felt that some questions relating to their various priorities were not sufficiently taken into account:

> "*The National Conference has indeed given Mali its constitution, charter of political parties and electoral code, but do you think these various acts have been able to improve the living conditions*

of our peasants? No! The National Conference allowed political parties to be created without any rigorous criteria, by people from all walks of life." (Retired academic, 21 February 2016, Mopti)

According to many speakers, the regional consultations organised in 1994 in the wake of the conference also failed to address local actors' priorities.

"*At the time of the regional consultations (in Mopti), the organisers had brought in representatives of technical departments, village leaders, factions, district representatives and 'cercle'[3] delegates in order to initiate a regional dialogue. During the consultation, the organisers gave readings from the legislative documents, the constitution and the electoral code, speaking of democracy, the multiparty system, etc. But the unfortunate matter about the meeting was that the topics discussed were of no interest to the peasants since these populations faced problems other than political ones. Thus, not being able to grasp the dialogue themes very well, those who had been invited (especially the peasants) could not participate fully in the discussions and as a result, their aspirations were not taken into account. The organisers were supposed to let the local population choose the topics for discussion and speak in their own vernacular. The government was there to support and advise them. That, however, did not happen. The abuses committed by civil servants for water and forestry and the police (when tax was being collected, for example) had been reported by the people, but the consultations were not able to provide a positive follow-up to their grievances. Therefore, from 1990 to the present day, nothing has changed in the village; on the contrary, other problems have been created, like conflicts of jurisdiction between municipalities and district administrators.*" (Retired academic, 21 February 2016, Mopti)

All in all, the limitations of the National Conference of 1991 can be summarised as follows:

≡ One of the major challenges was the determination of the time allotted to the event. Some analysts conclude that the two weeks proved too short to conduct an in-depth discussion. This justified deferring some specific or sectorial discussions to subsequent thematic national forums (*Etats-Généraux*) on rural affairs, land reform, etc.

≡ Some characterise the process as top-down because it was initiated and directed in the capital Bamako. As a result, an important part of the Malian nation was represented by city-dwellers, and this is reflected in the conclusions, which are generally preoccupied with urban concerns.

≡ The instruments issuing from the conference were rather imitative, since the laws it produced are too closely based on the French texts. A formal solution was found for a substantive problem because even the democratic model with which we equipped ourselves is a Western model.

≡ The recommendations put forth by the National Conference lacked monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The majority of our interlocutors feel that the National Conference should have created a monitoring and evaluation committee, which would have made it possible to avoid certain post-crisis deviations later on. Indeed, the government elected after the conference did not respect certain recommendations of the National Conference.

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[3] A *cercle* is the second-level administrative unit in Mali (below the region).

3.5 Role of the National Conference in the 1991 transition in Mali

The Malian transition initiated during the aftermath of the revolution of 26 March 1991 was conducted by the CTSP. The organisation of the National Conference was a major concern of the transitional authorities. It made it possible to discuss the state of the nation and large-scale plans for the future of the country (such as decentralisation, distribution of powers, basic law, electoral law, the charter of the political parties, national security). On this point, a representative of the leadership asserts: "*I think that the National Conference was well organised because it was inclusive. In terms of an assessment, I would say that it was a positive move in the direction of good governance, since corruption was fought against. But corruption persists nowadays in spite of the efforts made*" (district leadership coordinator, 23 February 2016, Mopti).

In the wake of the National Conference, the Malian Constitution was adopted by referendum on 25 February 1992. In the same year, the presidential elections were held which saw Alpha O. Konaré elected President of the Republic. The implementation of decentralisation reforms was another key outcome of the National Conference, which made it possible to modify the institutional architecture of Mali through the creation of 703 communes (basic territorial communities) and the election of more than 10,000 local officials.

Although it remains the subject of much criticism, sometimes with good grounds, the experiment of the National Conference of 1991 can inspire the present and the future in the search of genuine and lasting peace. In fact, some studies provide laudatory reviews of the national conferences of the 1990s. According to Bah (1999, 21), "*in spite of the different contexts in which they took place and the interference of extrinsic factors, the national conferences represented a special framework for deliberation and debate in order to found a new social and political contract that could preserve peace and support development. The impact on the society as a whole and on the formation of a civic consciousness is significant.*"

National conferences appear to present an occasion to break away from old ways of conducting state affairs, which is a necessary step in order to redefine the order of the state and the legitimacy of its laws.

4 National Dialogue today: Issues and perspectives

4.1 Dialogue experiences since the 2012 crisis in Mali

The National Conference of 1991, taking into consideration the issues surrounding it and the challenges it faced, made it possible to achieve convincing results, such as the adoption of a constitution on 25 February 1992. The priority at the time was to get out of the crisis quickly by promoting the so-called traditional Malian values of dialogue.

During 2012, Mali was confronted with a new socio-political and security crisis. This crisis appeared in the form of renewed armed rebellion by a separatist group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), in the north of the country, and in the occupation of two thirds of the territory by

Islamist militants. In the same year, the country was struck by an institutional crisis resulting from a coup d'état against the administration of democratically elected President Amadou Toumani Touré.

Today, in addition to the usual threats the country has faced, such as wars and organised crime, new threats have emerged, including terrorism and religious radicalisation. Indeed, the current context of Mali poses a number of major problems related to governance, security, reconciliation and justice, which cannot be separated from one another if we are to understand the complexity of the crisis.

At the present time, the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation signed in Algiers in June 2015 is not making much progress, as acknowledged by all of the signatory parties, including the Malian government and the armed movements.

It is also worth noting that the inclusivity of the peace process in Mali is relative. Indeed, many protagonists were not involved in the intra-Malian negotiation process that took place in Algiers. During the Bamako conference, important questions were raised concerning the nature of participation in dialogue processes. One participant noted: "*A dialogue needs two parties, and they must be predisposed to enter into dialogue.*" Indeed, the Malian context shows that there are "*some actors who have been selected for dialogue and others who have been prohibited from it.*" This remark points to core problems related to inclusivity, such as the marginalisation of important stakeholders of the crisis. Such is the case of the leader of the *Ansar Dine* Movement[4], Iyad Ag Ghaly. Another participant raised the question: Can everyone be included in a dialogue? Obviously, the choice of actors constitutes a fundamental step in a National Dialogue process. However, the participants expressed the need for a diversified representation which must include political and institutional actors, civil society, traditional and religious authorities, women representatives, youth representatives, the private sector and communities, but also international actors such as donors.

It is worth noting that besides the Algiers process, the Malian context after the crisis of 2012 has been characterised by the creation of several spaces for dialogue at both the national and local levels. Among those, we might mention:

- The National Forum (*Etats Généraux*) for decentralisation, held on 21 to 23 October 2013 in the Bamako International Conference Centre (CICB),
- The National Assembly (*Assises Nationales*) on the North, Bamako International Conference Centre (CICB), held on 1 to 3 November 2013,
- The Timbuktu Week for Peace and Reconciliation, which took place from 30 March to 4 April 2014,
- The Workshop on the Challenges of Social Cohesion in Timbuktu, on 12 and 13 February 2014,
- The Local Forum for National Reconciliation and Peace (Diré/Timbuktu), held on 27 and 28 March 2014,
- The Gao Regional Forum, held on 10 November 2015.

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[4] *Ansar Dine* ("defenders of the faith" or "victors of religion") is the terrorist group founded by Iyad Ag Ghaly in December 2011, probably after his affiliation to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), with a view to supporting the expansionist inclinations of this organisation. Without a stated programme or goal, this group demonstrated within a few months a frightening effectiveness as it defeated the MNLA, which had begun hostilities with the government of Mali on January 17, 2012. AQIM took Iyad Ag Ghaly's unexpected affiliation as an opportunity to try to conquer the whole of Western Africa. With this intention, it created a movement especially dedicated to the West African sub-region: the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) (Moulaye, 2014, 13).

One must also take into account the institutional dynamics of the process of national reconciliation in progress in Mali. We note the existence of a vigorous and ambitious policy on the part of the head of state, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, formalised by the creation of a Ministry of National Reconciliation (MNR). The MNR, by virtue of its legal remit, is responsible for administering an active policy of national reconciliation with two primary aims: reconstructing the basis of national reconciliation and achieving a definitive solution to the problems of the North.[5]

The institutional framework for reconciliation to enhance national co-existence in Mali has been strengthened by the creation of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). Ordinance 2014-003, establishing the TJRC, sets for it the following missions:

- Contribute to the introduction of a lasting peace with the search for truth, reconciliation, and the consolidation of national unity and democratic values,
- Inquire into cases of serious violations of individual and collective human rights committed in the country, especially violations involving women and children,
- Lead investigations into cases of assault against individual and/or collective memory and cultural inheritance,
- Support intra- and inter-communal dialogue, peaceful co-existence between the people of Mali, and dialogue between the state and the people,
- Promote respect amongst the communities for the rule of law, for republican, democratic, and socio-cultural values, and for the right to diversity,
- Make recommendations in the area of conflict prevention.

To this end, the TJRC plays an important part in the establishment of the frameworks for dialogue by engaging the people who have fallen victim to the crisis. However, the process of reconciliation at the institutional level must not make us lose sight of the social basis for this approach. For this purpose, a study by the NGO Oxfam, "Piecing Together the Jigsaw: Prospects for improved social relations after the armed conflict in northern Mali", highlights the engagement of the communities in local solutions. Indeed, in this study many affirmed that:

> "*solutions to improving social relations must be found at the community level and anchored in dialogue: 'raising awareness', 'communicating', 'listening to one another' are the terms most frequently used. Gathering around the table to speak with each other and look one another in the eyes, sharing a cup of tea, starting a simple and direct dialogue – in the view of the communities consulted, these seem to be the actions which can guarantee genuine reconciliation. The need for communication and understanding is often tied to the need for forgiveness or burying the hatchet.*"
> (Ilaria Allegrozzi and Elise Ford, 2013, 17)

With John Crowley (2000, 2), we define reconciliation as "*any politico-institutional process which offers all the belligerents the possibility of recognising themselves in the peace and regarding it as just.*" According to Crowley, such an understanding implies that "*a negotiation space, when characterised by a rough balance of forces and a minimal, thus mutually intelligible, rationality permits and even forces the parties to name the conflict and to recognise their reciprocal adversity.*" This recognition also implies the recognition of the adversary as interlocutor, before the eyes of everyone.

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[5] See more at: www.koulouba.ml/programme-presidentiel/restauration-securite-personnes-biens-lensemble-du-territoire-national/ (accessed 1 September 2016).

In many cases of conflict, the various protagonists of the crisis recognise the process of reconciliation as a way to end social and political chaos: "*Reconciliation thus becomes the attainable objective of a goal which can be effectively achieved*" *(*Faye, 2011, 26).

4.2 Opportunities for a National Reconciliation Conference

The Malian crisis of 2012 was followed by a transitory period until the holding of a presidential election. Indeed, on 12 April 2012, the president of the National Assembly Dioncounda Traoré was inaugurated as the interim president of Mali, after the withdrawal of the putschists on 22 March 2012 under the terms of agreement with ECOWAS and the resignation of the deposed president Amadou Toumani Touré.[6]

The idea of holding a National Dialogue emerged at the beginning of the transition and gained support in public opinion as a necessary step in the process of ending Mali's crisis. On this point, Abdoulaye Diakité (2012, 1) writes: "*National conference, dialogue, convention, or forum (give it whatever name you like): Malians on all sides thirst for such a consultative arena. (...) After such vicissitudes the Malians realise that they absolutely must gather in a hall to speak with one another as brothers and sisters. They understand that no one can provide the remedies for the ills of our country better than the united Malians. (...) At the level of national opinion, the question achieves near unanimity amongst the various actors.*"

Responding to the popular aspiration for a National Dialogue, the preliminary agreement on the presidential election and inclusive peace talks in Mali signed on 18 June 2013 specifies the need for such an initiative. Indeed, the Ouagadougou Agreement specifies in its Article 3: "*After the election of the President of the Republic and the installation of the Government, the Parties agree to initiate an inclusive dialogue to reach a definitive solution to the crisis.*"[7]

In turn, the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement signed on 20 June 2015 calls for the organisation of a National Reconciliation Conference within the framework of the national reconciliation process. As specified in Article 5:

> "*The socio-political aspect of the cyclical crises in northern Mali must be addressed at the political level. In that regard, a national reconciliation conference shall take place during the interim period, with the support of the Monitoring Committee[8] and with equitable representation of the Parties, to provide an opportunity for the different sections of the Malian nation to discuss in depth the underlying causes of the conflict. Matters discussed shall include the issue of the Azawad. The conference should identify the elements of a solution that would allow Mali to overcome this painful trial, to recognize the value of the contribution of the various sections of its society to the country's*

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[6] For more information on this event, see also http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2012/04/12/au-mali-dioncounda-traore-est-investi-president-de-la-transition_1684481_3212.html (accessed 1 September 2016).

[7] For the document in French see here: http://news.abamako.com/documents/docs/AccorddeOuagadougou.pdf (accessed 1 September 2016).

[8] The CSA (Agreement Monitoring Committee) was instituted by the Malian Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. It comprises the following parties: the Government of Mali, the movements signatory to the agreement, and the mediation team (Algeria as Lead Mediator, together with Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, ECOWAS, the United Nations, OIC, AU, and EU). The permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are invited to take part in the committee. Additionally, if needed, the CSA may ask other international actors and financial institutions to assist in its work (Article 58 of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement issuing from the Algiers process).

identity and to promote genuine national reconciliation. A Charter for Peace, Unity and National Reconciliation shall be drawn up on the basis of a consensus in order to address the aspects of the crisis in Mali that are related to collective memory, identity and history and to cement its national unity and territorial integrity." (Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, 20 June 2015)

Therefore, the National Reconciliation Conference must be approached as a process involving the different territories at all levels of the country, and the various socio-professional, institutional, and political environments, to elucidate a shared vision of the crisis obstructing progress in the country and prospects for moving forward.

During the interviews carried out for this study, the National Reconciliation Conference was described as the process enabling the Malian nation to reconcile with itself and to project itself into a future beyond the serious crisis it has undergone. To this end, the conference should make it possible to mobilise all Malian women and men around the construction of a collective project, erected on the basis of the values, the will, the commitments, and the aspirations of the people.

The National Reconciliation Conference, one of the goals of which is the development of a National Charter for Peace, Unity, and Reconciliation, must be the subject of a methodological and territorial systematisation. To this end, its methodology must break with the traditional approaches to organising forums and other public meetings. Indeed, it should not be a matter of assembling some delegates but a process, spread out over several months, which must involve all the communities, institutional actors, and civil society, and shall conclude by reaffirming the commitments, values and conditions of co-existence, as well as the emergence of a new social contract.

However, many actors contest the legitimacy of the current approach to National Dialogue and reconciliation. On this point, one of our interviewees remarked:

"*We believe that the dialogue currently in progress in Mali, as a way forward, is running from top to bottom, which will inevitably constitute an obstacle to the implementation of the resulting document. Grassroots communities feel that there has been a lack of [a] participatory approach so far. Their points of view were not taken into account. Moreover, we might say that everything has been discussed elsewhere, up to the point that some felt the agreement did not concern them. Nonetheless one must make use of past experience to support the on-going process. If we draw on the glorious heritage of each ethnic group to find different perspectives on crisis management, these may allow us to find a solution adapted to our socio-economic and cultural context.*" (Malian politician, former minister, former member of the pro-democracy movement, 11 February 2016, Bamako)

4.3 Current political framework for a National Dialogue

The Malian political sphere is enthusiastically embracing the introduction of a genuine National Dialogue. Indeed, both politicians within the majority and the opposition are calling for a dialogue on a national scale. One of our interviewees remarked:

"*The political process to bring about a swift, an effective, and above all a lasting response to the crisis of development and governance must comprise (...) an inclusive political dialogue on the*

future of the northern regions. The first lesson to be learned from the crisis is indeed the imperative need to abandon the usual approach to ruling Mali as a whole and the North in particular. This is why it is crucial and urgent to establish an inclusive political dialogue in order to hear from the various constituents of the North about their vision and their conception of the future, of their future, living together in harmony and complementarity as in the past. (...). Mali has to have an intra-Malian dialogue to resolve this painful, fratricidal conflict. It is a matter of letting the people speak so that they can say what is on their minds and make their real wishes known. (...). An inclusive political process by definition should not exclude anyone a priori. Thus the armed movements, ethno-cultural resistance groups, civil-society associations, elected officials, religious and customary leaders of the North, first of all, and those of the other regions of Mali as well, all are called upon to take part in the necessary intra-Malian dialogue." (Malian political actor, Brussels, 2013)

Although there is a widely shared interest in a National Dialogue, many questions are raised concerning the nature of this dialogue and more particularly the actors to be involved in such a dialogue in Mali's present socio-political, institutional, and security situation.

Malian politicians broadly share the concern that National Dialogue can fall victim to instrumentalisation, which implies the need for safeguards, including planning it in a transparent and open way. Dialogue should not serve merely as a purgatory. With regard to organising the National Reconciliation Conference, many participants pointed to the need to avoid reducing the scope of discussions and falling into a 'folkloric' process.

Even if many voices are raised in protest, most interlocutors agreed that for the organising process of the aforesaid conference, the dialogue must begin at the local level (i.e. the village, the commune) so that it included major concerns of the various communities before raising them to the national level.

A major issue of concern will be the ability of the present authorities to organise this dialogue. Indeed, Malians seem to have lost confidence in the current leaders, which makes dialogue difficult, since one of the essential conditions for such dialogue is the actors' confidence in the integrity of their leaders. According to the 7th edition of the Mali-Mètre report prepared by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (March 2016, 8), a survey on the topic of confidence in institutions found that "*the actions undertaken by the Government are not well appreciated by the large majority of the citizens: two thirds of those surveyed (64%) are not satisfied (38%) or only somewhat satisfied (26%) with its actions, against less than one third (29%) who are satisfied, without significant difference according to gender.*"

If the preferred operational approach to implementing the National Conference takes as a starting point a bottom-up methodology, this is not manifested in the official discourse. Neither do national authorities reference the experience of the National Conference of 1991 in their arguments. It should be acknowledged that the current context differs strongly from that of 1991 in the sense that the institutions are in place and that the political authorities enjoy electoral legitimacy following the general elections of 2013, which voted the president of the republic and the 147 deputies into office.

5 Support roles by international actors

5.1 International partners during the democratic process in 1991

In 1991, after the fall of the regime of President Moussa Traoré, Mali's international partners assisted the dynamics of renewal by lending their support to the pro-democracy movement. At the time, international actors were keen to encourage the emergence of democratic states in Africa following the La Baule summit in France (1990).

Within the framework of the National Conference, the general secretariat cites the participation of external observers and contributors whose roles did not jeopardise the independent nature of the meeting.

> "*Our technical and financial partners supported the National Conference financially because they favoured the holding of this meeting. It is likely that without their support Mali would be in chaos. No one denounced this aid.*" (Former minister, former member of the National Conference of 1991, 11 February 2016, Bamako)

> "*The role of our technical and financial partners – France, the United States, the Netherlands, Switzerland, etc., who helped conduct the meeting – could be characterised as providing support and guidance on political questions. It also should be stressed that international actors also supported the organisation of the general elections, which followed the National Conference. Their roles were not overly visible, and their action did not tarnish the credibility and independence of the meeting.*" (Malian politician, former minister, former member of the pro-democracy movement, 11 February 2016, Bamako)

5.2 Role of the international partners in the post-2012 peace negotiations

The international community lent substantial support to the intra-Malian negotiations process in Algiers. Indeed, the talks were conducted under international mediation presided over by Algeria. Other actors assisted in the process, such as ECOWAS, the European Union, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad. Lastly, France and the USA maintained a discreet but steady presence in Algiers and in the negotiations process.

Article 52 of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement specifies that, since the mediation team is the political safeguard of the agreement and respect for its provisions by the parties, it shall continue to offer its good offices to the parties, advise the parties during the process of implementation, and play the role of last recourse on the political and moral levels in the event of serious difficulties. Article 54 also specifies that the international community shall oversee scrupulous implementation of the agreement, and is committed to assisting efforts toward this end. Lastly, Article 57 specifies the installation of a

Monitoring Committee for the implementation of the agreement (CSA) supported by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission (MINUSMA) and other international partners. [9]

The current process of reconciliation in Mali involves many international partners who support the efforts of the national actors to construct a lasting peace. For example, the Support Project for the Process of Dialogue and Reconciliation (PAPDR) of the German Corporation for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit – GIZ) lends continuous support, both technical and financial, to the MNR for the organisation of local, regional and National Dialogue forums.

If a strong involvement of international actors in the Malian process constitutes a major guarantee in terms of mobilising financial resources to implement the agreement, an excessive externalisation of the Malian reconciliation process presents a number of risks:

- The strong intervention of international partners, while seeking to stabilise Malian institutions, could bring about a merely superficial reconciliation while failing to resolve the real issues,
- The partners' strong financial contribution in support of the process might position the stakeholders all the better to reap the peace dividends without necessarily producing an authentic dynamics of reconciliation,
- Focusing the process on the signatory parties to the detriment of the political and societal actors would limit the accountability of those in power, vitiating the fight against corruption.

It also appears, based on our interviews, that the current crisis is marked by an international dimension, which obscures a great number of Malian factors. Some Malian actors have completely denied that any national reconciliation would be possible on the basis of the agreement issuing from the Algiers process, because it was conducted outside of Mali and without the participation of all Malians. Many actors believe that, since the Malian nation was not a stakeholder there, the agreement cannot work for Mali, as it is "*the agreement of the international community*". The objective of the National Reconciliation Conference, for this reason, must be to establish a direct dialogue amongst Malians and not through intermediaries.

6 Lessons, principles, and recommendations for National Dialogue

6.1 Lessons from the 1991 National Conference

The experience of the National Conference of 1991 holds invaluable lessons for the renewal of the National Dialogue in Mali. We would like to highlight the following ones:

- The integrity of the leaders and conductors of the National Dialogue is imperative. The actors of the dialogue owe one another their trust. If this was the case in 1991, it is much less true in the

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[9] According to Article 59, the CSA is to be chaired by Algeria as Lead Mediator, assisted by Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad as vice-chairs.

present context. This trust rests on certain factors, such as the honesty of the conductors of the dialogue, and their ability to stand "above the fray".

≡ The dialogue must focus on a problem of general interest. It must not have a corporatist dimension or serve as a platform for a particular group to gain power.

≡ The dialogue must have an inclusive dimension, i.e. it must not exclude particular constituents of the nation. In 1991, it was of great importance that the rural population and Malian diaspora participated in the dialogue.

≡ Legitimacy and balance in terms of the representation of various perspectives are fundamental to the success of the National Dialogue.

≡ The objectives of the dialogue and the mandates of the delegates must be clearly defined, in order to guide discussions and to arrive at authentic conclusions.

6.2 Fundamental principles

The revival of National Dialogue in Mali within the framework of the organisation of the National Reconciliation Conference must be constructed upon the following fundamental principles:

1. Beginning with the collective deliberation of the various communities on the causes and origins of the crisis, the problems it poses, and possible responses to them, while highlighting the values to be promoted in order to emerge from the crisis.

2. Opening a public discussion on the current methods of governance of public affairs and the necessary political, institutional and economic reforms.

3. Systematising the participation of the totality of Malian society in all its diversity, both in terms of its territorial as well as its socio-cultural composition.

4. Taking stocks of the levels of community knowledge and know-how in the means of social, institutional and political regulation and their use for peace, national reconciliation, and development.

5. Mobilising the material, intellectual, and even financial contributions of all the living forces of the nation that are political actors – associations, academics, women, youth, the diaspora – in a participatory and inclusive process.

6. Ensuring the political and institutional anchoring of the process through a broad spectrum of social and media activity.

7. Establishing an institutional mechanism for monitoring the recommendations. Such a mechanism will have to periodically evaluate how the implementation of recommendations is advancing.

8. Marshalling all the international partners intervening in Mali, leading them to comply with the process by providing assistance that takes into account the aspirations of the Malians.

6.3 **Working recommendations for National Dialogue**

The methodological process of organising the National Reconciliation Conference within the framework of the revival of the National Dialogue in Mali must be spread out over a period of at least three months, starting with community circles and ascending to the national level. The methodology of implementation must be structured around seven stages:

- **Stage 1:** Create a methodological framework and ensure the establishment of a working mechanism. This is a matter of setting up a small team of experts tasked with proposing the topics for discussion, designing the strategy and the technical and pedagogical tools for facilitation and reporting, planning the overall process, and finally, selecting the steering committee for the conference.
- **Stage 2:** Develop a communication and information strategy for the general public in order to ensure that the approach is well understood in its ends and means, so that it becomes socially and institutionally well-rooted.
- **Stage 3:** Offer training at the national and regional levels in facilitation and note-taking methodologies and tools for the regional and national synthesis.
- **Stage 4:** Conduct citizen dialogues at the level of each *cercle*. These dialogues will take place during the same week, if possible. Each commune may be asked to cover the subsistence expenses of their delegates as a contribution to the National Dialogue. The central state could contribute an allowance for transport.
- **Stage 5:** Conduct the regional synthesis, which should be organised during the same week in all regions, joining delegates of the citizen dialogues in each community and representatives from the political, administrative, and socio-professional structures of the region.
- **Stage 6**: Conduct the national synthesis, which will bring together delegates from all regions and representatives from the political, administrative, and socio-professional structures of the national level, along with representatives from the diaspora and from national and international institutions.
- **Stage 7:** Systematise the broad outlines of the reforms to be undertaken and of the National Charter for Peace, Unity, and Reconciliation with a cross-cutting synthesis of all results by the steering committee and a team of experts.

The steering and coordination mechanism for the implementation of the National Reconciliation Conference must include at the national level: a National Coordinating Committee, a Technical Support Centre on the level of each region, for the district of Bamako and at the level of each *cercle*. A text drawn up at the level of the prime minister will specify the mandate, the composition, and the procedure for each of these structures.

7   Conclusion

In Mali, the crisis of 2012 shook the conditions of peace and co-existence and weakened the state and other institutions. Following this crisis, all Malian actors called for a process of national discussion in order to allow all the children of the nation to come together again and collectively set forth the new social contract which must bind Malian women and men. For this purpose, the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement issuing from the Algiers process envisages a National Reconciliation Conference "*in order to*

allow a full discussion amongst the constituents of the Malian Nation of the major causes of the conflict"
(cf. Article 5).

In any society, National Dialogues intervene in a specific socio-economic, political and security situation. Indeed, in the case of Mali, the current discussion concerning a new national conference intervenes in a context characterised by a lack of security and stability. This fragility of the state is to be understood in the light of its programmatic weakness, the security crisis, the rise of radicalisation and extremism. For many interlocutors, one cannot reflect on National Dialogue without questioning the state of the nation, citizens' relationship to the republican institutions, but also the economy of the rebellion and its consequences for political structures at the local and national levels.

The discussions held also made constant references to traditional forms of dialogue:

> "*When problems arise amongst ourselves which are particular to us, we also have our particular manner of coming together to find a solution. Here in Mopti, it is the hall of the village chief. When the problem is serious, the Mopti village chief convenes the other chiefs of the district and gathers the Imams, the chief griots, the hunters, etc., to discuss it. Each time problems arise, they are fruitfully resolved, because we always have recourse to our 'rules of the game' which are based on our traditional values, on honour and dignity.*" (Village chief, 22 February 2016, Mopti)

Thus, regarding the organisation of the National Reconciliation Conference, many Malian actors feel the need:

- to articulate traditional and modern mechanisms in an innovative process for conducting the National Dialogue,
- to take account of the new spaces of dialogue now offered by new communication and information technologies.
- for inclusiveness in the sense of the legitimacy and representativeness of territorial, political, civil society etc. actors,
- to conceive the organisation of the National Dialogue through an ascending approach, proceeding from the base levels (hamlets, sections, villages, communes),
- for a more extensive temporality (beyond that of the National Conference of 1991, which lasted fourteen days),
- to make an exhaustive diagnosis of the state of the nation before holding the National Dialogue,
- to nominate an independent figure to lead the process of National Dialogue, in order to ensure its independence and credibility.

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