

A Peace of Timbuktu Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking¹

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Background

Mali made its transition to democracy in 1991-1992 after the overthrow of Moussa Traore's 23-year-old military dictatorship on 26 March 1991. A process of military and civilian collaboration fostered national reconciliation, leading to a referendum for a new constitution and elections which brought to power Mali's first democratically elected President, Government, and Legislature. A process of peacemaking between the Government of Mali and the rebel movements in the northern part of the country successfully prevented the outbreak of civil war and presents useful lessons for the international community in preventive diplomacy. After six years of unrest, nearly 3,000 rebels agreed to a process of cantonment and reintegration at the end of 1995, building the trust necessary for some 10,000 more to come forward in the following years and exchange their weapons for the means to readapt themselves to civilian life. This study of the events surrounding the uprising in the North and the measures which restored peace (and those which will maintain it) is the result of collaboration between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

Peacemaking and democracy

The term peacemaking describes the ways in which the armed factions were brought to peace and disarmament through community-based negotiation. Their reintegration into Malian society began the process of peace-building, which includes all the measures necessary to assure peace and security in the longer term. Peace-keeping (i.e. the intervention of

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international forces to establish the security necessary for peace talks) was never necessary in Mali.

The story of peacemaking can only be understood in the wider context of the environmental and political events which have preceded it. The drought and history of neglect in the North as well as the transformation from dictatorship to democracy in the capital are critical factors. The 1990-1995 "Touareg problem" was not an isolated incident. It has its root causes in history and in general economic and political neglect, compounded by drought and a heavy military hand on Mali's northern regions. When General Amadou Toumani Toure ousted Moussa Traore in 1991 at the head of a popular revolution, he was faced with negotiating a peace accord with the rebel movements in the North before handing power to his elected successor. He was successful in that a National Pact was signed on 11 April 1992 before Dr. Alpha Oumar Konare became President of the Republic on 8 June 1992. However, outbreaks of violence continued in the North, and it was left to the democratic Government to restore peace.

Recognizing that peace must come from the people, *Mali's President had the foresight to withdraw many military units from the North and to allow civil society to take the lead in community reconciliation.* Thus, the people became the peacemakers, and persuaded the rebels to disarm. Government reentered the peace process to arrange the demobilization of combatants, managing to find enough resources to organize cantonments and to provide training for the integration of former rebels into the Malian army. After a rigorous selection process had been agreed by all parties, some 1,500 individuals received six months of basic military training and were then integrated into the uniformed forces.

This peace process was remarkable for the way in which the United Nations agencies were able to help, discreetly dropping oil into the machinery of peacemaking. The United Nations helped the Malians to organize the Flame of Peace: a ceremony attended by former rebels, local peacemakers, and a distinguished group of international guests at which nearly 3,000 weapons that had been surrendered by the demobilizing rebels were destroyed in a great bonfire. With less than \$10 million, the United Nations assisted Mali's Government and civil society in peace-building by creating a trust fund to enable former combatants who had not been integrated into public service to make the transition back to civilian life. The training, counseling, and initial capital provided by the trust fund's programme (known as PAREM) has given nearly 10,000 ex-combatants the boost they needed to become a part of the socio-economy

of the North. *The experience shows that not only is peacemaking better than peace-keeping, but it is far less expensive.*

Peace-building under the palaver tree

Mali's peacemaking has been successful in the short term. What remains is the building of lasting peace, which can be achieved only through the economic and social development of the North: this includes tackling difficult issues such as land tenure and decentralization, rethinking education and communications, strengthening democratic governance and civil society to enforce the rule of law.

Certain aspects of the democratic State will be very important to the process of peace-building. The first is genuine participatory democracy not only in the form of the ballot box, but also under the "palaver tree" (that is, in the form of local community debates, or even through rural radio). Furthermore, the Government has encouraged collaboration between the military and the Malian population (and essential element of national reconciliation) and promoted the stimulation and liberalization of Mali's economy (involving a revival of the private sector, better management of public finances, and reduced corruption).

The successful outcome in Mali shows that peacemaking and peace-building are integral parts of the development process. Although the Malian authorities have constantly been short of funds for things which appear essential to the peace-building process, such as training ex-combatants, tracking car thieves, or retraining and re-equipping the police force, the success of the democratic experiment is making Mali into a favoured partner for commercial banks and for development agencies (many of which have cut their funding in neighbouring countries). Democratic governance is profitable in many ways.

Five years on: the lessons learned

What are the risks that the peace in Mali might fail? The two greatest areas of risk are rainfall and civil unrest. A good rainfall brings huge political (as well as economic) benefits, but there is not much that Mali's democratic leadership can do about it. Better management of existing water and infrastructure on the Niger River would help. Mali could have a