



Intra-faith dialogue in Mali

What role for religious actors in managing local conflicts?

The jihadist groups that overran the north and parts of central Mali in 2012 introduced a version of Islam that advocates the comprehensive enforcement of Sharia law. Despite the crimes committed by these groups, some communities perceive them as providers of security and equity in the application of justice. These jihadist influences have polarised communities and resulted in tensions between the diverse branches of Islam.

Against this background, in 2015 the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) began facilitating intra-faith dialogue among nearly 200 local

imams, ulema, qur’anic masters and leaders of Islamic associations. These actors were organised into six platforms of religious actors based in Gao, Timbuktu, Mopti, Taoudeni, Ménaka and Ségou. These platforms seek to contribute to easing intra-faith tensions, as well as to prevent and manage local conflicts, whether communal or religious in nature. The examples below illustrate their work.

MOPTI

Ending competitive recitals of the Quran



For nearly 40 years, the young talibés or religious students around Mopti have regularly competed in duels to see who can give the most skilful recital of the Quran. Known as “Missou”, these widespread duels can gather up to 60 young people and regularly end in clashes, which can result in dozens of injured. One talibé was recently reported to have died. Given the gravity of the situation, in 2018 the governor of Mopti asked for the backing of the town’s platform

of religious actors in engaging with the talibés.

The platform identified around 30 recital groups, mostly in Socoura, Fotama, Mopti and Bandiagara, and began awareness-raising efforts with seven of the groups and their respective marabouts. The members of the platform conveyed the authorities’ concerns about “Missou” and the effects of these competitions within the region’s current security context. The reli-

gious leaders asked the groups to suspend “Missou”, which they agreed to do. The groups’ marabouts were relieved to see that other religious leaders shared their concerns about these duels and added their support to the initiative. Furthermore, the talibé groups also recommended that members of the platform visit locations where the duels usually take place, to reach as many young people as possible.

TAOUDENI

Re-establishing the peaceful exploitation of a well



In 2018, the platform of religious actors in Taoudeni successfully carried out preventive mediation between two neighbouring Arab communities in dispute about access to a pastoral well at Ahel Ali-

minna, in the Taoudeni area. Intercommunal tensions were high, and the fear of violence had prevented use of the well by both people and herds for nearly two months, despite water being a rare commodity

in the area. Mediation conducted by the platform enabled the two communities to reconcile their differences and resume collaborative use of the well.



GAO

Agreeing a successor for the deceased imam of Waguey



Waguey is a village in the rural commune of Bamba, in the municipality of Bourem. Its population predominately consists of two large, extended families. The Touré family consider themselves to be of a higher social class, whereas the Maïga family perceives members of the Touré family to be foreigners.

In 2017, the chief imam of the great mosque of Waguey — a member of the Touré family — died, and another member of the Touré family was ap-

pointed as his successor. However, after this appointment, a highly educated marabout — a member of the Maïga family — moved into the village. Arguing that the Quran recommends that the most literate holy man should be nominated to the post of imam, the Maïga family's worshippers asked that the imam be replaced by the new marabout.

Waguey's village chief and the mayor of the commune, both members of the Touré family,

rejected this request, which led to the newly arrived marabout filing a legal complaint. These events resulted in significant tensions between the two families, and so members of the platform of religious actors in Gao took up the issue. Their intervention managed to restore trust between the two families, and led to the appointment of a new imam acceptable to everybody.

SÉGOU

Resolving disputes between Muslim associations



The platform of religious actors in Ségou carried out a mediation exercise for the Nour al Nour women's association — a group of over 200 Muslim women guided by the ulema who initiates them on how to read the Quran and learn Muslim doctrine. When their principal ulema left in 2017, serious disagreement broke out within the association about the choice of a successor. This led to the association splitting and the creation of a second associa-

tion, named Nour al Nour Islamiya. Over the next three months, public insults were broadcasted via local radio, with each side attempting to discredit the other. This led to a deterioration in social relations between the women. A mission led by the platform focused on the verbal clashes and was able to end the hostilities.

A similar dispute occurred within Ségou's Association of Quranic Teachers and Students (known as AMEC).

AMEC also requested the intervention of the members of Ségou's platform, who managed to resolve the quarrel.

MESSAGES OF PEACE ON THE RADIO



Since 2018, HD has been supporting religious leaders comprising the platforms of religious actors in their efforts to raise community awareness about peacebuilding and social cohesion via radio messages. The leaders jointly identified more than 20 messages drawn from the teachings of the Quran and adapted to the socio-political and security context, which were then recorded and broadcasted on about 30 radio stations in more than six local languages and across six regions. Although it is difficult to evaluate the full impact of the broadcasts, communities appreciated the influence of the messages on their daily lives. In the Ségou area, for example, the radio messages prompted one young man who had joined the jihadi cause to lay down his arms, despite the risks incurred. In view of the messages' positive effect, and at the communities' request, most of the project's partner radio stations continue to broadcast the messages several months after the end of their original contract to do so.

«*Bismi-llahi r-Rahmani r-Rahimi wai salat wa salam 'ala rassoul Allah'*».

This is a message about peace from the religious-consensus-building platform. With regard to good behaviour, the Lord of the universe tells us this: "Indeed, Allah orders justice, the doing of good and giving assistance to relatives. And he forbids depravity, unlawful acts and rebellion. He advises you so that you will remember"². The final Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam³) tells us this: "Fear Allah wherever you are, let good follow evil, thus will you erase it. Conduct yourselves very well in your dealings with people." These are the words reported by Tirmidhi⁴.

A radio message recorded by Ségou's platform of religious actors

- 1 Translation: "In the name of Allah the clement and the merciful, and his messenger, may prayers and peace be upon him."
- 2 Verse from the Al Nahl chapter, "The Bees" (16: 90).
- 3 Translation: "May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him."
- 4 Mohammed ibn Isa Tirmidhi (824 – 892) was a Persian Islamic scholar and author of the canonical hadiths of Sunni Islam.



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