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Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue



Facilitating the implementation of a national agreement through local mediation

Successful examples of how mediation works to restore
security in Northern Mali

In 2015, the Malian Government signed the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation with the two coalitions of armed groups that fought for the independence of Azawad in the north of the country, namely the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and the Plat-forme. In order to achieve a lasting settlement to the conflict, the Agreement provides, in particular in Article 28, that «local security advisory bodies, comprising representatives of the State, regional and local authorities, and traditional communities and authorities, shall be established and managed by local executive heads.» Five years on from the signing of the Agreement, these advisory bodies remain to be set up due to discord at the level of the Peace Agreement Monitoring Committee.

Peace agreements between states and armed opposition groups, modelled after peace treaties between nations, often remain unimplemented and consequently fail to bring peace. The effectiveness of national peace processes can be jeopardized by a lack of adherence to the agreement by traditional elites, fighters and their communities; limited awareness of the specifics of the agreement; provisions that are sometimes ill-adapted to local realities; and a lack of trust in justice, security and governance mechanisms.

Only sustained efforts to mediate the implementation of national agreements between all levels of the signatory parties and the communities concerned can achieve lasting peace. Local mediation, in turn, can lead to specific implementation agreements that reflect the spirit of the national peace treaty and allow for its effective implementation.

In 2017, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) was asked by the governors and interim authorities of the Timbuktu and Taoudéni regions to help establish a concerted security

management framework to better address the security challenges facing the two regions. Despite major clashes between the State and armed groups having ceased in 2015 and the parties to the agreement having remained committed to its provisions, an effective peace remains elusive. The northern regions of the country continued to experience escalating banditry; the peace process of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants lost momentum; and joint forces, composed of former fighters and Malian soldiers, were unable to restore stability to large cities in the north of the country.

After several months of HD-led mediation between authorities, armed groups and communities, two frameworks for collaborative security management emerged: one for the Timbuktu and Taoudéni regions, in 2017, and the other for the neighbouring region of Gao, in 2020. The goal of these frameworks is to support interim authorities, governorates and prefectures in safeguarding community cohesion. In addition to including representatives of the interim authorities, governorates and prefectures in the frameworks, they also bring together leaders of the signatory armed groups, the Malian armed forces and religious and community leaders.

These frameworks for collaborative security management have helped their members find common ground, in turn leading to the creation of joint initiatives to provide security along major roads and to communities, to improve collaboration between the signatory armed groups and the Malian State forces, and to support local conflict resolution efforts. The end-result has been the concrete strengthening of communities' commitment to the national peace building process.

Securing the roads between Goundam and Timbuktu

By 2015, the heavily travelled road linking Timbuktu and Goundam had become the scene of constant robberies and attacks by unknown armed individuals. As a result, the free movement of the region's population and accompanying economic activity was severely hindered. After its creation in 2017, the framework for collaborative security management in Timbuktu and Taoudéni committed to setting up military patrols along the road, though the necessary support from the military authorities based in Bamako was not marshalled. In early 2019, following an upsurge in robberies that led young people from Goundam and Timbuktu to demonstrate for state intervention, discussions began anew within the framework on how to respond to the people's demand for improved security.

Thus, from March 2019, the CMA patrolled the Timbuktu - Goundam axis twice daily, for the span of a month, before State forces took over the task and begun offering armed escorts. These patrols, which extend as far as Niafounké, some 250 km south of Timbuktu via Tonka, succeeded in putting an end to robberies, allowing in turn for economic activity to resume. However, stability has remained fragile. Malian armed forces withdrew from the cities of Tonka and Diré, near Goundam, in early 2020, resulting in a resurgence of incidents in these localities and an ensuing cessation of all patrols in May 2020.

Preventing conflict between sedentary and Arab youths from Timbuktu and Taoudéni

Kidnappings, checkpoints, robberies; since 2017, the number of security incidents in Timbuktu City and its surroundings has grown and continues to feed intercommunity distrust. Sedentary young people accused their Arab and Tuareg counterparts of being responsible for these incidents due to their affiliation with armed groups. As of 2018, the youth of Mali's sedentary people and the Arab youth began to challenge each other via radio and social networks, fuelling tensions between the two communities that culminated in clashes in September 2019.

In October 2019, the HD-supported Collaborative Security Management Framework of Timbuktu and Taoudéni organised a dialogue between the young people and the field leaders of the signatory armed groups in the two regions, with the goal of building bridges and easing tensions. At the close of discussions, the parties agreed upon a charter of good conduct for youth of the regions and a follow-up committee of 11 young people was charged with its dissemination. For their part, the armed groups agreed to sensitise young people from their ranks on inter-community cohesion and to demand the immediate cessation of acts of violence.

The recommendations were implemented quickly by the young members of the armed groups and violence by these groups stopped. Indeed, perpetrators of security incidents that have occurred since the signing of the pact of good conduct did not belong to any of these armed groups. With confidence having been restored between young people of the two communities, members of both groups have been able to resume a peaceful coexistence.

Preventing banditry with Operation Alafia

In October 2019, the regional Collaborative Security Management Framework undertook, through the intermediary of the Timbuktu Interim Authority president and the president of the CMA, to advocate with the leaders of his group to commit to fighting the banditry plaguing the region. In response, an operation called Alafia (Peace in Tuareg and Sonrhâï) was launched by the CMA and resulted in operations to secure places frequently affected by security incidents around Goundam, Niafouké, Timbuktu and Ber. Consequently, the region experienced a sharp decline in cases of banditry and robbery during several months, with some 20 arrests of bandits being recorded. Citing a lack of material and financial resources, the CMA was forced to halt this project in April 2020.

Securing the city of Timbuktu

The vacuum left by the absence of defence and security forces in Timbuktu has encouraged the proliferation of bandits, who have engaged in car thefts, robberies and targeted assassinations in the city. Given this, the Collaborative Security Management Framework endeavoured to stabilize the city of Timbuktu by creating multiple forums with Bamako-based representatives and the Malian armed forces. From March to June 2019, this dialogue allowed for the establishment of checkpoints by the police and the gendarmerie at strategic points in the city and for the deployment of a special army force as a deterrent to bandits. Together, these strategies resulted in a decrease in the circulation of weapons in the city, as well as a reduction in the number of targeted killings and acts of banditry. Due to an absence of additional resources, these measures remain short-term.

*There are no more kidnappings,
no more robberies. We are no
longer threatened in our own
homes.*

*I hope that peace is within our
reach. I very much hope so.*

A village chief from the commune of Ber,
circle and region of Timbuktu



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