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# Mali's Fragility: Root Causes and Potential Recovery Pathways

Yaya Koloma<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

Since 2012, Mali has been in crisis, with significant socioeconomic damages over the past nine years. Despite several efforts by national, regional, and international partners, violence is on the rise and spreading, institutions are dysfunctional, and the military remains inefficient, leading to questions about whether Mali has become ungovernable and when the crisis will end. Following the African Development Bank conception of fragility analysis, this paper aims to expose some of the root causes of Mali's fragility and to recommend a few actions to address them. We conduct an in-depth literature review by emphasizing five main dimensions, such as political and institutional, economic, social, and climate-environmental, and geopolitical and geostrategic considered key drivers of fragility. It is clear that one of the main causes of Mali's fragility is the poor performance of institutions and therefore of governance. The spread of the insecurity from the North to the Central region of the country is making the crisis more complex. Particularly, its ramification into inter-communities' conflicts challenge the way to address the whole crisis. Possible solutions may include reorganizing military institutions, strategies, and services, establishing more equitable and well-distributed justice, engaging in dialogue with various communities, including armed and jihadist groups, implementing integrative, conflict-sensitive, and climate-sensitive development projects and programs, strengthening the economy based on the policy of developing regional competitiveness clusters, and finding a better balance between various and conflicting geopolitical interests. .

JEL Classification: D74, F51, I32, Q54

Key words: Fragility, Insecurity, Terrorism, Poverty, Competition, Geopolitics, Climate change, Mali

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## **1. Introduction**

The current crisis in Mali with its significant socioeconomic damages over the past nine years is challenging national and regional political stability and security (Ncube & Jones, 2013) as well as the significant development efforts of the past three decades. Mali was inadequately prepared to contain this kind of multidimensional crisis spread and, specifically to cope with the associated consequences of insecurity, massacres, displacement, social, economic, institutional, and humanitarian burdens. Prior to the current and elusive crisis, Mali had made significant progress since 1994 in a broad range of social and economic indicators, including in roads infrastructures, schools, health, agriculture, the mine sector, for instance. These achievements are branded by high growth rates, improved living conditions, and the gradual establishment of social safety nets. Yet, despite major political orientations and several development strategies, the Mali development pathways have been marked by its erratic trend and have had difficulty in promoting social, economic, and political stability and a sustainable development process. Mali is characterized by almost chronic sociopolitical instability, with periods of upheaval, some of which are related to military coups, occurring on average every fifteen years. These ruptures in the Mali development trajectory, particularly those of 2012 has transformed Mali into one of the major epicenters of the Sahel crisis.

After political independence in 1960, a first five-year development plan, known as the socialist plan, was implemented, and successively transformed into a mixed socialist-liberal plan, then into a resolutely liberal orientation following structural adjustment programs. The hope raised by the liberal orientation has not materialized because the long-awaited benefits have not translated into the satisfaction of the population needs, creating the conditions for permanent civilian unrest and successive rebellions. Prior to the 2012 crisis, a cluster of signals did exist, the awareness that Tuareg separatism was a latent problem, an understanding of the corrupt policy of "consensus", the well-known problem of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the north with the kidnappings of tourists and terrorist attacks in the region (Boeke & de Valk, 2021). For Boeke & de Valk (2021), it is difficult to comprehend, given the huge costs of the crisis, that a more accurate evaluation of the situation did not take place to allow the Malian government with international partners to invest in preventing or mitigating the crisis. Now, despite the agreement in June 2015 between separatist rebels and the Mali government, the country is exposed to multiple reinforcing

risks, violence is increasing, institutions are dysfunctional, the military is inefficient, investments are few, and corruption is rampant (Craven-Matthews & Englebert, 2018).

This underlines the idea that one of the key causes of the current crisis is the poor performance of institutions, hence the governance deficit in changing and evolving contexts that mark Mali's fragility. Mali is characterized by generalized insecurity with its attendant upheavals in political and economic institutions, economic activities, social and interregional exchanges, communities, for instance. The crisis becomes multidimensional. Following Professor and socio-economist Celestin Monga's line<sup>2</sup>, one may ask whether Mali has become ungovernable. The depth of the crisis and its complexity may lead us to answer in the affirmative, because outside the Capital, Bamako, insecurity reigns everywhere and the socioeconomic situation is critical, even in more southern parts of the country. But the levers that exist in Mali, along with the multi-millennial culture, are all assets on which Malians can rely on to design a consistent multi-dimensional response to the crisis and build resilience.

By considering a multidimensional approach, with an in-depth literature review, this note seeks to apprehend some of the root causes of the Mali fragility and consequences and to recommend a few measures to be taken to tackle them while strengthening institutions and communities' resilience which have positive implications for conflict prevention and building a complete resilience. As it is underlined in the African Development Bank (AfDB)'s strategy related to fragility, we will embrace different key dimensions, such as political and institutional, economic, social, and environmental, considered key drivers of fragility, recovery, and resilience.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes briefly the context and the approach to ascertain the perspective we are following. Section 3 explores some drivers and consequences of Mali current crisis and fragility from the extant literature. Section 4 presents potential fundamentals for recovery and resilience, while Section 5 concludes.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://actucameroun.com/2021/08/19/lafrique-est-elle-ingouvernable-la-chronique-de-celestin-monga/>

## **2. Context and methodology overview**

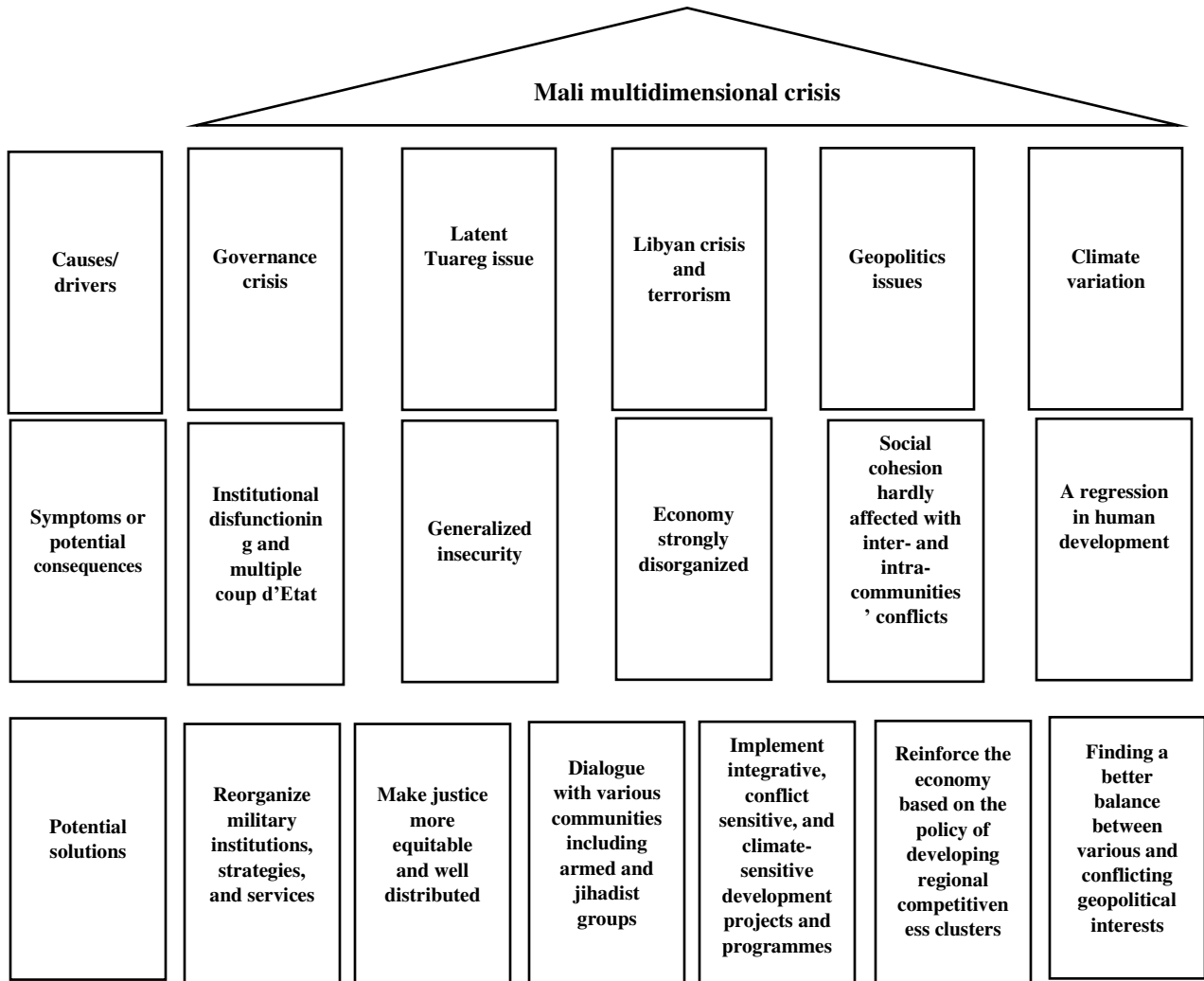
Since 2012, Mali has been in the midst of a crisis that originated with the Tuareg rebellion in the North of the country and was aggravated by a coup d'état in Bamako giving rooms to deeper political, institutional, and social crisis. Since then, the crisis has become generalized and complex with several ramifications in large local areas and communities. As the crisis is multidimensional, we look to the approach developed by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and other institutions on the design of fragility conception and strategy to analyze the main drivers and consequences of the current crisis and fragility in Mali. AfDB's (2018) approach is based on an understanding of fragility as a condition of elevated risk of institutional collapse, societal breakdown or violent conflict, because of demands for inclusion and equity that underlie its multiple forms. Adopting a cross-national perspective, it identifies seven key drivers of fragility which include political, security, justice, economic, social, regional contagion effect, and climate dimensions. Compared with the Bank 2014 assessment tool which was based on four dimensions (economic, social, political and environmental), this approach is a new way of assessing resilience and fragility (States and situations) called Country Resilience and Fragility Assessment (CRFA). It suggests the existence of multiple possible drivers, but any analysis of countries fragility or situations of fragility should consider countries specificities.

This wide view of fragility analysis seems to correspond to the complexity of the situation in Mali. This complexity is related to the diversity of dimensions that the crisis looks to involve. Focusing on key entry points underlying drivers of fragility, our perspective suggests considering the AfDB main dimensions of fragility, such as the political and institutional, economic, social, and climate or environmental considered key drivers of fragility, even for recovery and resilience. However, we believe that other determining factors need to be considered. Therefore, in addition to the above dimensions identified by the AfDB, the other main dimension to be taken into account is related to the geopolitical and geostrategic perspective, which is becoming more apparent and pressing with time and tends to play a critical role in Mali current crisis. The consideration of this fifth dimension means that the Mali crisis, like numerous crises in Africa, is drained by both endogenous and exogenous drivers.

As presented in Figure 1 below, Mali multidimensional crisis presents several causes including the governance crisis, the latent Tuareg issue, the Libyan crisis and terrorism, geopolitical dimensions, and climate variation issues. The result is poor political and institutional

governance performance, widespread insecurity, economic distortions, weakened community ties due to conflicts across various communities because of unequal resources distribution, religious considerations, and resources scarcity due to climate hazards. Understanding these drivers and consequences of the depth crisis is key. Possible solutions may include reorganizing military institutions, strategies, and services; establishing more equitable and well-distributed justice; engaging in dialogue with various communities, including armed and jihadist groups; implementing integrative, conflict-sensitive, and climate-sensitive development projects and programs; strengthening the economy based on the policy of developing regional competitiveness clusters; and finding a better balance between various and conflicting geopolitical interests.

**Figure 1. Framework for understanding the links between several dimensions in Mali current crisis**



Source: Author

### **3. Some drivers and consequences of Mali current crisis and fragility**

#### **3.1 Institutional and political drivers of fragility**

The current situation shows that Mali delays to put in place credible institutions capable not only of effectively constraining and guiding individuals and groups' behavior but also of quickly curbing the harmful effects of crises when they occur. In Bamako, successive crises linked to embezzlement and corruption have finally destroyed the little State that existed. Between 2011 and 2018, 61 denunciations were made by the Auditor General of Mali (Ministry of Justice, 2021). They represent more than CFAF 60.6 billion incriminated as major economic and financial offenses and only 11.4% or CFAF 6.9 billion of the amount have been recovered, knowing that 10 cases had been closed without follow-up and one had been judged. In five years of existence, the Central Office for the Fight against Illicit Enrichment (OCLEI)<sup>3</sup> has only been able to identify three potentially illegally enriched officials, whose records have been recently turned over to the judiciary for prosecution. These facts are deplored by many actors, denouncing a "Republic of privileges" (Sidibé, 2021b) that tends to increase the gap between the governments or the elites and the population. The judicial system has become inert due to political and systemic rent issues, as it struggles to prosecute the major offenders of the republic. By Transparency International<sup>4</sup>, which annually ranks countries according to the population perception of corruption, Mali is ranked 129th out of 180 countries in 2020. More than 60 percent of respondents estimated that corruption would have increased over the past 12 months, between 2019 and 2020, and 21% of public service users reported paying a bribe in the previous 12 months.

The poor governance of the country's resources is one of the main causes of the country's decadence. Based on some of the institutions, the economic policies implemented have neglected to sufficiently explore the environment in which the choices of economic agents are made and to adapt and strengthen associated rules and organizations. A large part of the country has been neglected in the allocation of public resources. Groups and communities, the most vulnerable, have been marginalized or even forgotten. Despite sometimes the acceptable socio-economic performance, it has not been inclusive. The erratic pattern of development trajectories and less

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<sup>3</sup> OCLEI is an independent administrative authority created by Ordinance No. 2015-032/P-RM of 23 September 2015. According to some sources, its operating budget is 1.6 billion CFAF and represents half the budget of the Malian judiciary (accessed information August 2021).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/mali>

inclusive growth provide sufficient social dissatisfaction. The reason is related to the poor governance performance of the State at various levels which has been limited in its redistributive capacity to provide sufficient means for a sustainable improvement in the people living conditions. Above all, it has given rise to the emergence of groups of politicians who have created or put in place a kind of predatory and extractive systems that give them multiple means and opportunities to strip and waste the country's resources at will without the justice system being able to prosecute, judge or convict them. Paradoxically, the emergence of these entities coincides with the advent of democracy in Mali, which has given great freedom without a strong judicial system. It exists more than 200 political parties in Mali 2020. The majority of them are based only on the founder of the party without any consistent basis and no project for society (Wagner & Berthe, 2017).

Being a political party has become a business in Mali due to transfers political leaders receive from the government. From 2013 to 2018, about 14.4 billion CFAF<sup>5</sup> have been allocated to political parties by the government with aims at financing their activities of citizen political formation. While we consider that financing political parties can be a rule, its efficiency is questionable. As Sidibé (2021a) notes, while Western models of democracy, imported in exchange for development aid, have allowed for important social transformations granting more individual, press, association, and organizational freedom, unfortunately, due to the lack of an independent and effective oversight system in place, they have also contributed to establishing spaces for corruption as a mode of governance, leading relentlessly to neo-patrimonial democracies that often exclude youth, women, and ethnic minorities. Indeed, the many powers and political entities have indulged in corruption, embezzlement, and bad governance by creating specific markets and therefore systems that can be manipulated as they wish. These dupe markets, as Shiller & Akerlof (2016) remind us, facilitate the capture of resources, and ensure their transfer, which is necessary for the survival of these particular entities and agents as well as for the reproduction of the system. Concretely, after having governed or during their governance, the public powers (presidency, prime minister, ministers, and their clans) give themselves to the plundering of public funds, their relatives do or come to reproduce the same without worrying. Observing their appetite for the rents that can be obtained, several politicians deploy strategies in this direction. This situation creates a

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.maliweb.net/politique/partis-politiques-le-financement-public-est-il-necessaire-plus-de-14-milliards-fcfa-verses-par-letat-en-six-ans-2906170.html>



strong competition or even co-opetition between families, parties, or relationships of the politicians with the aim of gaining the maximum of political rents. Worse still, this kind of thinking has reached a large part of Malian society, in both urban and rural areas. The competition for these scarce and locally rooted resources has contributed to aggravating the current crisis and generating new specific institutional formations dominated by games of trickery and even bloody conflicts we are experiencing in Mali today. As stated by Cruz and Keefer (2013), the absence of programmatic political parties is a big challenge to public sector effectiveness. In the Mali democratic context, most political parties are not well organized to prevent abuses by leaders or ordinary members when they govern as well as to vigorously criticize the powers that be for breaking the law. This creates a situation that does not encourage compliance with proven standard rules governing public sector performance.

In line with the policy of decentralization in the 1990s as well as all kinds of illegal activities, at the local level, there is significant competition for political power. State and village authorities are being contested by a ‘new elite’ empowered by the wealth generated from illicit markets and a certain ideology associated with radical Islam challenges existing state authority with the aim to cleanse the region from the sins of democracy with Islamic law (Sangaré and McSparren, 2018). Due to weak institutional capacity and the near absence of administration over large swaths of the region, public authorities have been limited in their ability to prevent the acute contestation of legal authority and the associated risks that have led to multiple ongoing crises in the northern and central regions. This crisis seems to escape the States because it has given rise to numerous ramifications that seem to respond to their own logic, very often economic, skillfully camouflaged under considerations of a religious or inter-ethnic nature, or even to some extent respect for human rights (Koloma, 2020).

### **3.2 Widespread insecurity despite increased international military presence in Mali**

Mali was the victim of deadly aggression launched in January 2012 by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) – a rebel Tuareg group – against the main towns by attacking military camps in northern Mali. This rebel attack was facilitated by the return to Mali of a group of former soldiers of Tuareg origin from Colonel Gaddafi's foreign legion in Libya, with heavy weapons and new military equipment. Unfortunately, the resistance of the Malian army

was weakened by a coup d'état in the south (in Bamako) that totally undermined the military chain of command, causing the desertion of many soldiers and creating a boulevard for the takeover by the rebel Tuareg group, who had meanwhile been reinforced by the jihadists. However, after the declaration of independence of Azawad, including the regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu on April 6, 2012, the MNLA was driven out by its Islamist friends, including the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Ansar Dine movement. It was in this context at the call of the Malian transitional government, the French army intervened in Mali, and gradually helped the Malian army to recover a good part of the northern territory. But they refused to Mali army to return to Kidal. Unfortunately, this attitude created mistrust between the Malian and French governments, because since then, after a certain lull and the dispersal of terrorists outside the major cities, insecurity has resumed and even spread to the center of the country.

The crisis has taken hold in Mali, finding relays in areas and regions that were sometimes not originally suspected. It has reached its peak with the enlargement of insecurity in Mali characterized by thousands of attacks on villages, against civilians and the military, often resulting in deaths and sometimes in massive population movements. One of the most recent attacks against civilians resulted in more than fifty people being killed on August 10, 2021, and ten days later more than 15 Malian soldiers were ambushed by terrorist movements. Insecurity has worsened with the contamination of the central regions of Mali, where Islamist groups seem to have found fertile ground, particularly among part of the Fulani community through one of the figures who have become emblematic of the crisis, Amadou Koufa<sup>6</sup>. As in the north, the gradual establishment of armed terrorist groups in the Center has led to the hunting down of local officials, the murder of a number of them through summary executions, setting the area ablaze and transforming it into a so-called inter-community conflict between the Fulani and the Dogon. Who does not have in mind the massacres of one hundred and fifty-three civilians in Ogossagou, on March 23, 2019, and of one hundred and one civilians on June 9, 2019, in Sobane Da, respectively in Fulani and Dogon villages? This insecurity spares no one, traditional authorities, local notabilities, security forces, men, women, and children. By OCHA (2020), at least three to five civilians die every day due to

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<sup>6</sup> Chief of Front de Libération du Macina ou Katiba Macina.

insecurity in Mali, and the latest report released by the MINUSMA<sup>7</sup>, in 6 months, between January and June 2021, nearly 950 civilians were killed.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: Legal forces in presence in Mali (national and international partners)**

Force	Description	Staff (number)	
		2014	2021
<b>FAMa (Mali army)</b>	The Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) are responsible for defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Mali.	13000 <sup>9</sup>	16200
<b>MINUSMA</b>	MINUSMA has been present in Mali since 2013-2014. It has more than 60 nationalities, most of whom are African soldiers, and about 1,000 European staff. Its primary mission is to help all parties implement the 2015 peace agreement and gradually restore the authority of the state even though most efforts are dedicated to self-protection and logistics.	6491	15743 <sup>10</sup>
<b>Barkhane operation</b>	Barkhane force is the French national force. It has replaced Serval (first intervention in 2013) to fight against illegal army groups and terrorists in Mali.	3 000	5100
<b>EUTM Mali</b>	The European Union's presence and activities in Mali are essentially limited to funding and capacity building of Malian security institutions through the EU Training Mission.	506	580
<b>EUCAP Sahel</b>	The European Union operates a civilian mission to provide more comprehensive support in the Sahel region, though its primary focus is on counterterrorism and crime.	0	180
<b>G5 Sahel force</b>	The G5 Sahel Force, which is currently being formed with a transnational focus, is expected to include soldiers from Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger alongside the Barkhane force with the mission of fighting the threat of terrorism and organized crime in the region.	0	5000
<b>Force Takuba</b>	The Takuba Task Force is a European military task force led by Sweden which advise, assist, and accompany Malian Armed Forces, in coordination with G5-Sahel partners and other international actors on the ground.	0	600

Source: Author (from several sources: MINUSMA, Barkhane, EUTM, EUCAP, G5 Sahel websites)

The insecurity is generalizing despite the intensification of the international military presence to fight terrorists and facilitate the return of peace to Mali and administration in the various areas. This echoes President Macky Sall, President of Senegal's speech in November 2019 at the Dakar Forum on "Peace and Security in Africa" asking why despite more massive

<sup>7</sup> United Nations peacekeeping operation in Mali.

<sup>8</sup> <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/08/1102682>.

<sup>9</sup> 3000 soldiers were operational in 2013. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/02/04/une-armee-malienne-tombe-en-ruines\\_1826625\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/02/04/une-armee-malienne-tombe-en-ruines_1826625_3212.html)

<sup>10</sup> Bearing in mind that 16828 staff members are authorized to support UN intervention in Mali. <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/personnel>

international community intervention, the situation continues to deteriorate in Mali? How can the various initiatives on the ground be articulated and coordinated to make them more coherent and efficient? Certainly, in addition to Malian army troops which staff is around 16000 soldiers, more than five thousand French soldiers from the anti-terrorist operation Barkhane<sup>11</sup> (of which at least three thousand are in Mali before French President Emmanuel Macron announces their reduction in May 2021), nearly 15000 MINUSMA soldiers, and 5000 soldiers from the G5 Sahel sub-regional force, are on Malian territory (Table 1). This massive military response must be questioned in light of the expansion of the conflict on the ground. Although the French intervention was initially effective in countering the advance of the jihadist groups and driving them out of the major cities of the North, it is now clear that the situation is bitter. The intervention of international forces in support of Malian national forces is not effective. They seem to have adopted a defensive approach, if not at best a dissuasive one. In the end, France and the international community were only able to eliminate a few Islamist leaders, who were very often quickly replaced. Insecurity has spread, and Malian forces supposedly trained by EUTM fall easily and frequently into deadly ambushes. In addition to the lack of sufficient and quality military equipment, these training are strongly criticized, and their quality is sometimes questioned. The study conducted by Tull (2019) comes up with the following conclusion *“the external support provided to the Malian army in terms of training, advice, and equipment has so far had only a limited impact on the performance of FAMA and on the security situation in general”*. But the author demonstrates that both sides - Mali and its international partners - have divergent perceptions of the problem of Mali's weak army, their respective roles, and the appropriate modalities and strategies for building the army. For Tull (2019), they are locked in a dysfunctional partnership that neither party has an incentive to leave. Moreover, the spread of deadly insecurity to the center of the country raises questions about the military approach to resolving a conflict that has become plural and has many ramifications.

In this perspective, it is worth noting that insecurity is a breeding ground for organized crime, cigarette, drug, and human trafficking. This leads to wars between rival groups to keep up their leadership on the traffic route. As in the northern part of the country, the upheavals in the central parts call into question the governance deficit, the inability of the Malian state to propose

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<sup>11</sup> French Army Operation name in Mali and in the Sahel.

a legitimate mode of governance for all communities, the perception of marginalization, the mismanagement of justice, and corruption. The official justice and governance system has been ineffective in resolving conflicts between Fulani and Dogon for example related to land disputes and property rights, which are contested with grazing and watering areas. Thus, by leading to inter-community conflicts, the Islamist approach is a crucible of social and political instability.

### 3.3 Mali's economy, increasingly disorganized and distorted

Recent economic performance should not hide the fact that the Malian economy is increasingly distorted by the multidimensional crisis. Macroeconomic performance based on the GDP growth rate of about 5% per year has nothing to do with the reality of people's lives; it is a form of illusion, even a mirage of growth.

The real wealth as well as the feeling of the populations shows degradation of living conditions (Figure 2) even though nominal wealth tends to increase, indicating a rise in the life cost. This is all the more worrying because salaries and incomes are not increasing, income opportunities are becoming increasingly rare (partly due to the border closure from the Ivorian side for COVID-19 reasons and other political and security considerations), and massive youth unemployment is tending to increase year after year with no hope of finding even a precarious job in the short and medium-term. At the State level, there is also a sharp decline in public contracts for the benefit of local companies, leading to an inevitable decline in activity for some enterprises, if not bankruptcy for those who largely depend on them. Fortunately, a large number of companies are in the informal sector and have a certain capacity for resilience and flexibility.

**Figure 2: GDP per capita growth (annual %) in Mali (2000-2020)**

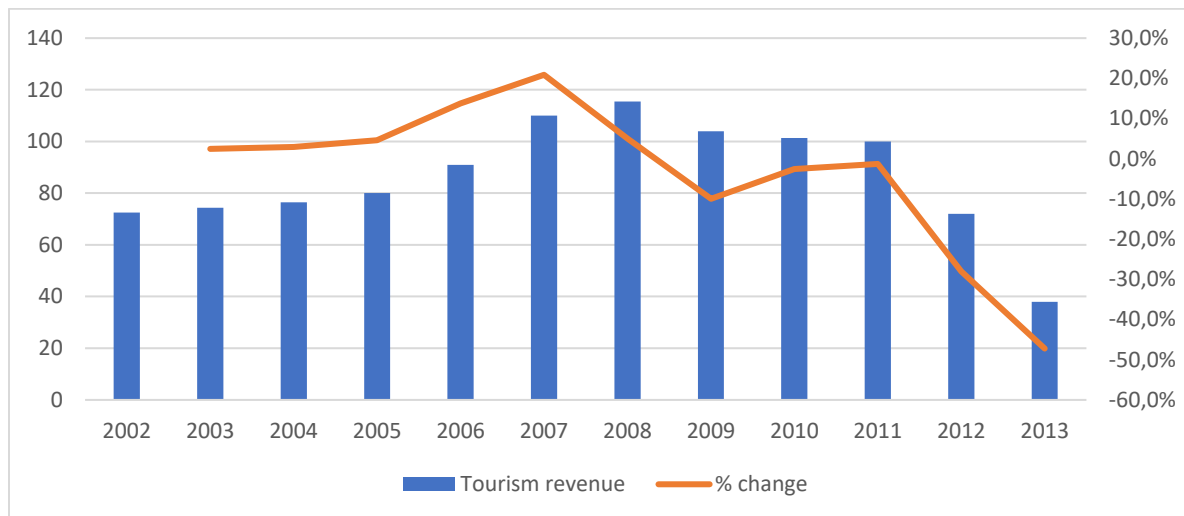


*Source: World Bank Development indicators (accessed September 2021)*

This report is exacerbated by the COVID-19 consequences which have caused significant distortions in the country's economic cycles, delaying economic recovery, threatening many activities and businesses, and causing significant job losses. This is confirmed in the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank recently published reports which respectively state that “the combined COVID–19 pandemic with a military coup d’état in 2020, have taken the economy from strong growth of 5.1% in real GDP in 2019 to a recession in which real GDP declined by 2% in 2020. This corresponds to a loss of 7.1 percentage points (AfDB, 2021) and 4.9 percent in per capita terms in 2020” (World Bank, 2021). According to the World Bank (2021), private consumption declined, reflecting lower remittances, households’ response to health risks, and containment measures, and inflation picked up in May and continued to rise due to low cereal output and supply chain disruptions, in particular in relation with the cotton sector crisis. Indeed, the decline in global demand, which led the government to set a producer price 27% lower than that of 2019-2020, combined with an increase in the inputs price, pushed farmers to limit the area devoted to cotton farming. As a result, cotton production fell sharply to 147,200 tons, a 79% decrease compared to the previous season.

The inter-sectional relationships that were very limited seem to be gradually taking a hit. The economy is highly undiversified (IMF, 2018). To keep the economy moving and to connect economic agents and regions, we need sustainable roads and logistic services. Today, consistent logistic services are rare, roads have become impassable, causing enormous time losses and systematic accidents. This makes it difficult to establish economic links between companies and sectors and weakens the economy in general. Banks have become even more hesitant, often justly. Some have been robbed in some northern cities during the rebel and terrorist invasion. Activities are becoming scarcer, the possibilities of raising long-term resources are becoming more limited, banks preferring to limit the risks, although the amounts granted in credit are experiencing slight increases.

**Figure 2: Evolution of tourism revenues in Mali from 2002 to 2013**

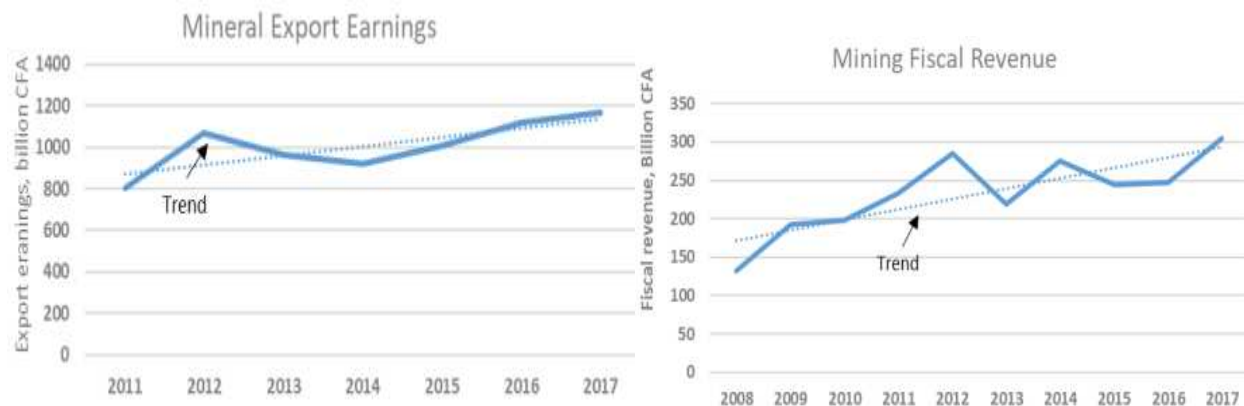


Source: Tessougue & Keita (2016).

Though European tourists' kidnappings in the Sahel started before the current crisis, tourism activities (from abroad) have been completely halted in Mali since then (Figure 2). From the North (Timbuktu, Djenné) to the Center (in the pays Dogon) and part of the South, the economy of tourism does not function due to the deficit of human protection or security. The contribution of tourism to the national GDP was about CFAF 80 billion of income in 2012-2013 (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015), providing direct jobs for more than 30,000 people (Keita, 2019). This contribution has drastically declined and represents almost 0% of GDP and only 5000 jobs in 2015 according to Keita (2019). This affects all sub-sectors or peri-sectors such as hotels, restaurants, transport, crafts, for instance. For the World Bank, the revenues generated<sup>12</sup>, which represented 11.7% of total exports, fell to 4.3% in 2012 before rising to 5.5% in 2018. Despite a slight recovery, especially in the southern parts of the country, this sector remains plagued by the deep crisis that is shaking the country.

<sup>12</sup> They represent the expenditures of incoming international visitors, including payments to national carriers for international transport and any other prepayments made for goods or services received in the destination country. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.RCPT.CD?locations=ML>

**Figure 3: Mining Contribution to Economic Resilience of Mali**



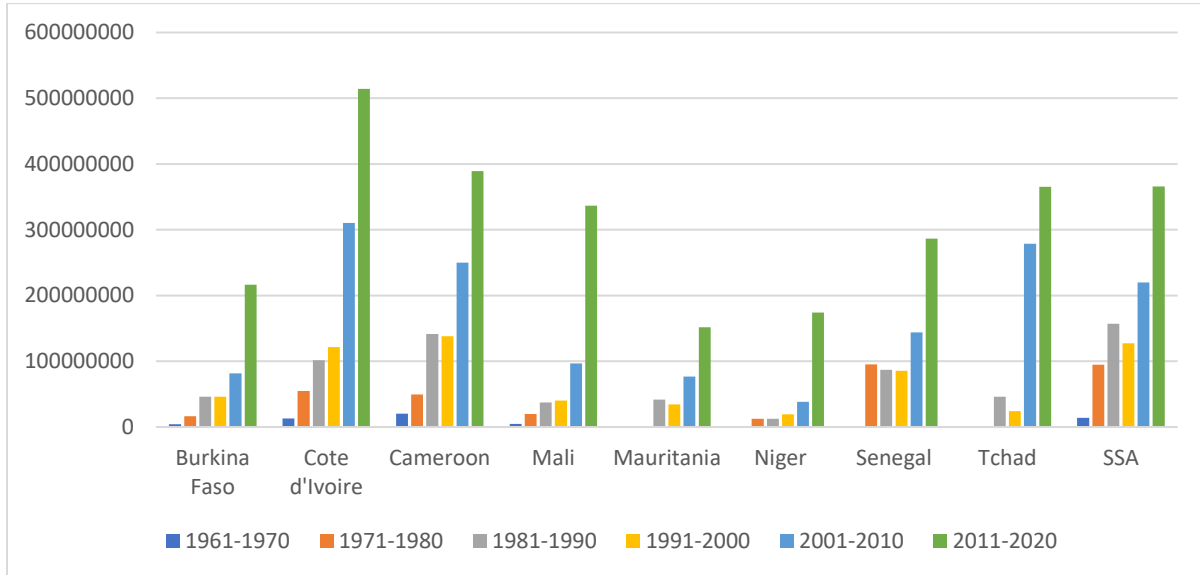
Source: World Bank (2019a)

The agricultural (in part) and mining sectors seem to be holding their own. Particularly, the mining sector contributed 21% to government revenues and 68% of total merchandise exports (World Bank, 2019). Export earnings and associated tax revenues tend to increase sustainably (Figure 3). This performance is fundamentally linked to gold production which has seen a steady increase from 46MT to 71MT over 2014-2019 (Ahadjie, et al., 2021). In addition to gold, increasingly significant production of other minerals tends to develop in Mali, providing significant direct, indirect, and even informal employment. But a good part of the economic activities focused on commercial and industrial enterprises is constrained by the decline in the population's standard of living as well as by the disruptions caused by the conflict. Moreover, wholesalers and retailers have gone so far as to increase the prices of basic necessities to compensate for the loss, not only because the volume of goods sold has fallen, but also because of the difficulty of accessing some of them to buy livestock, for example. Some herds have been completely decimated due to theft or conflicts between sedentary people and herders. The agricultural and especially livestock value chain in the northern and central zones has been deeply disrupted, increasing the price of meat in the markets of Bamako and the regional capitals. Similarly, the connection between the capital and the regional capitals has become problematic because of road closures, ambushes, with its corollary of systematic robberies of passengers and sometimes killings in some areas. This tends to discourage agents from using certain routes and reduce socio-economic and inter-regional exchanges. It appears as one of the objectives of the



armed and jihadists groups' strategy that is to destabilize the political regimes in place locally in order to strengthen their position in different areas.

**Figure 4: Average Military expenditure over 1961-2020 (current USD)**



Source: World Bank Development indicators (accessed September 2021)

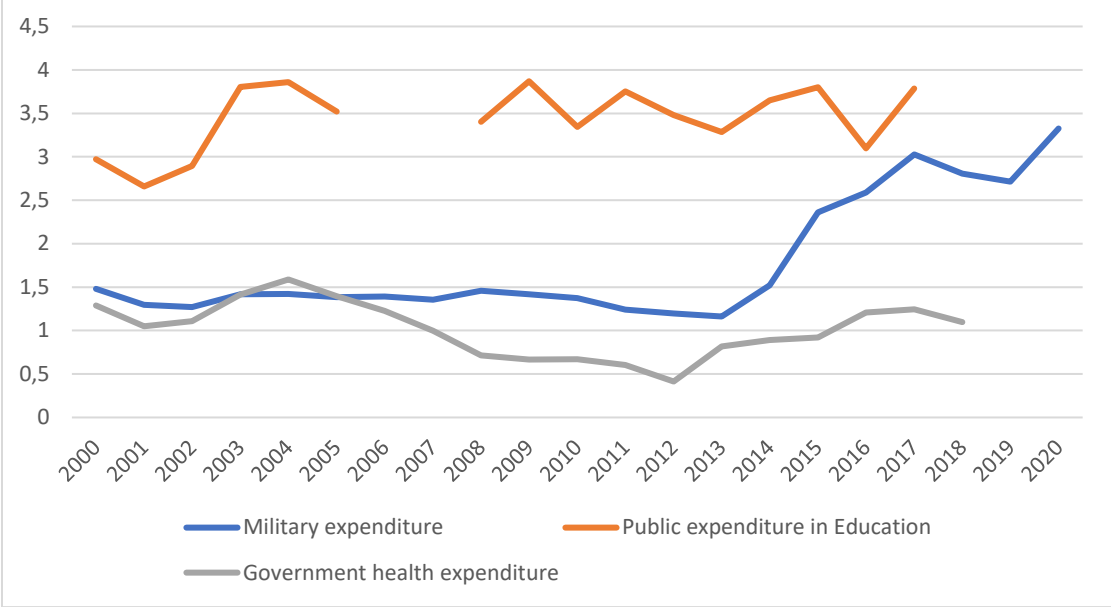
The cost of the current conflict in Mali is huge. By a former Prime Minister, efforts regarding the security management issue tend to concentrate more than 22% of the national budget in 2018<sup>13</sup>. We note that the growth in military spending was stronger in Mali on average during 2011-2020 than over the 2001-2010 compared to other countries (Figure 4), demonstrating the necessity to enhance the Mali army to address the ongoing multifaced perils. But the share is higher<sup>14</sup> for a country as Mali, since resources for the priority sectors such as education, health, food security for instance, are diverting. Actually, although government spending dedicated to the education sector remains higher, military expenditure appears to be growing faster than education and especially than health public dedicated resources, whose share remains below the other two (Figure 5). Moreover, the withdraw of many donors' contributions which represent at least 30% of the Mali's national budget could make difficult the State's ability to carry out its regalian functions. Similarly, support and disbursements for more specific programs are reduced or even

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/boubou-cisse-leffort-de-guerre-represente-plus-de-22-du-budget-du-mali>

<sup>14</sup> From an economic point perspective, this expenditure is a drain on the national and even the sub-regional economy, because most of the resources are used to buy materials abroad. In addition to the salary (pay) paid to the military, a small portion of these resources is spent locally in Mali in local businesses. This is a great loss for the country. A smarter use of these resources will be, in addition to the military-security response, a very important contribution to the process of conflict resolution and peacemaking at the local level.

stopped. Consequently, budget deficit increased sharply from  $-1.8\%$  of GDP in 2019 to  $-6.1\%$  of GDP in 2020, mainly because of lower tax revenue partly due to COVID-19 (AfDB, 2021).

**Figure 5: Military versus social expenditure (% GDP) in Mali (2000-2020)**



Source: World Bank Development indicators (accessed September 2021)

The general trend of the economy, while showing some resilience, will not be successful unless a great deal of effort is devoted to stimulating economic activity and capital spending that can benefit large segments of society. Government efforts need to be concentrated on reducing public spending and prioritizing sectors to be financed. On top, resources dedicated to security sector would be growing as the priority is the country security and basic needs fulfilment for Mali population, particularly in the affected areas.

**3.4 Pernicious social and religious drivers of the crisis**

Driven mainly by the primary and part of the secondary sector (mining) sectors, the recent economic performance seems to have benefited the non-poor more, creating frustrations and anger. Monetary poverty, which had fallen sharply from 71.6 percent in 1996 to 55.6 percent in 2001 and 43.6 percent in 2010 (Gunther et al. 2006; IMF, 2011), is on the rise again due to the warming socio-political and insecurity context. Today, human development indicators have taken a hit. The education sector - the gross primary school enrollment rate fell by almost 10 percent points

between 2012 and 2018 - and the health sector are still in crisis. Entire families can no longer afford three meals a day. This context naturally favors a rise in economic and spatial inequalities challenging the social model in Mali in terms of wealth redistribution and the creation of viable employment or income opportunities. Findings from a study of Etang-Ndip et al (2015) indicate that it is the most educated and wealthiest households, as well as those are less exposed to violence, who have fled the crisis. World Bank (2021) also estimates that the combined health, security, social, and political crises have led to a 5% increase in poverty. This increase, which means an estimated 900,000 new poor, affects both urban and rural areas. This is in addition to the chronic poor whose activities and lives have been severely undermined since the multidimensional crisis in 2012 in Mali and the OPHI & UNDP (2020) estimates of 49.7 percent monetary poverty. Particularly, the cease of tourism activities in the North and in the Center has created more jobless with a substantial drop in individual and family revenue. Table 2 shows that the multidimensional poverty rate is 68.3 per cent in 2018, meaning that more than 2 out of 3 people are severely deprived in the areas of income, education, health, and other living conditions. This rate is 18.6 points higher than the income poverty rate. Thus, people living above the income poverty line are experiencing severe deprivation in education, health, and other living conditions. Overall, more than 13 million of the Malian population are in a situation of multidimensional poverty.

**Table 2: Multidimensional poverty index (MPI) in Mali (2018)**

MPI value	Estimated Population in multidimensional poverty	Headcount Ratio of MPI Poor	MPI Intensity of deprivation (%)	Share of population		
				Vulnerable to multidimensional poverty	in extreme multidimensional poverty	under monetary poverty line
0.376	13 036 000	68.3	55.0	15.3	44.7	49.7

Source: OPHI & UNDP (2020)

The difference in living standards and especially the persistence of a high level of income inequality in Mali has a negative impact on the well-being of individuals, social cohesion, social capital and undermines confidence in the institutions of the republic. This fosters social discontent and fuels social unrest. The resulting social unrest increases the likelihood of mass violence, revolutions, coups d'état, political uncertainty, and threats to property rights; thereby reducing domestic and foreign investment and, consequently, economic growth (Anyanwu et al., 2016).

Then, with the current crisis, more limited resources are dedicated to spending on basic social services and investments for development, which has contributed to spreading conflict areas and particularly affecting indigent young people in search of opportunities. The lack of opportunities for youth and the fact of seeing one's own killed by bullets lead to the multiplication and enlargement of jihadist groups, what we can call “jihadism of circumstance”, a pillar of which is “economic jihadism”. By Sangaré and McSparren (2018), the conflict in the central regions is not simply an extension of the war in northern Mali, other factors based on specific historical events are critical, particularly the long history related to conservative Islam (Box 1). The increase in perception of abandonment or marginalization in the north and central regions has led to a backlash against the State that seems to have neglected major part of rural areas in its successive development programs since the 1970s. This perception has been in favor of an alternative to a democratic system considered to be failing, allowing for the creation of space for new sources of authority (Beau, 2018; Thiam, 2018). This led to confrontations and an inter-ethnic conflict between groups from both sides (Dana Ambassagou from the Dogon side and the group affiliated with Amadou Koufa from the Fulani side), which is currently challenging the centuries-old common life. The conflict is partly activated or revived by Amadou Koufa – the leader of the Macina Liberation Front in central Mali – who has exploited issues like land rights and the potential marginalization of Fulani herders to draw local support (Tarif & Grand, 2021). This leader promotes numerous preaches via WhatsApp to reach as many people as possible, particularly in the Fulani community. For example, in his preaching of April 8, 2018, according to Thiam (2018), the jihadist leader invited all the Fulani to join him by arguing thus: “*the fight for jihad has become secondary next to the one that has become indispensable to fight for the threatened survival of the Fulani ethnic group.*” By playing on the community's fiber, on the ground and through social networks, the Katiba Macina recruits easily and heavily from Fulani pastoralist youth, offering mediation for resource disputes and providing protection and support to farmers and herders, and defining rules for livestock migration (Tarif & Grand, 2021). This has only exacerbated tensions between these ethnic groups, leading to the numerous burnings of so-called Fulani villages under the auspices of Dana Ambassagou, the murders and the kidnapping of animals, even though it is commonly admitted that jihadists and activists of the Fulani ethnic group were the first to burn down Dogon villages and commit murders (Thiam, 2018).

**Box1: Jihadist phenomenon and lifestyle in Fulani community**

Two historical factors can be remembered. The jihadist phenomenon in the Center, which is predominantly based on ethnic Fulani identity, goes back at least to the 18th century, when the Empire of Ghana was attacked as a "holy war" by the Almoravids from Morocco, who were supported by the Toucouleur (Fulani), who were converted to Islam much earlier in the 11th century. They are considered to be among the greatest spreaders of Islam in West Africa through Jihad (Lovejoy, 2015)<sup>15</sup>. The second aspect concerns herder groups lifestyles which have said to have been significantly disrupted with the colonization and the successive Mali governments that have neglected them by various land reforms. Considering sometimes that lifestyles were obstacles to progress, these reforms attempted to "sedentarise" the herder groups (Kalkavan, 2019) but faced strong resistance. Consequently, some pastoralist communities would have been pushed to marginal regions, with an increasing narrower space for their mobile livestock systems (Kalkavan, 2019).

*Source: Author compilation*

The current crisis leads to massive killing of civilians in quest of survival activities (during the fairs, farming, in the villages, or herding, for instance.), curtailing their income-generating activities, starving some of them particularly. Hence, conflicts seem to affect the social fabric, leading to very violent conflicts between certain communities, in particular, the Dogon and the Fulani in the center region. It is reflected in the destruction of entire villages and the taking of hostages by others whose salvation depends on the application of the strong principles of Islam. Villages that for several days cannot carry out their activities, going to the fields and fairs. They are thus deprived of food and other goods necessary for their survival. Public infrastructure such as schools, bridges and ferries are regularly sabotaged and destroyed, including by explosive substances. The severe and violent conflict results in enormous social and humanitarian burdens with massive population displacement. By OCHA (2021), the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) sextupled in three years – more than 386 00<sup>16</sup> in May 2021, compared to 60,000 in April 2018 – due to continued insecurity in the north and center.

In Bamako, social demands are almost systematic. Between national education and higher education teachers, and even central government and local government officials, social and even political tensions have become commonplace. These claims weaken institutions because they represent economic and financial costs that are sometimes too high for the state budget, whose goal is to find the right balance between the various competing expenditure items. The current

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<sup>15</sup> The main leading figures were and even Oumar Dan Fodio (in northern Nigeria, Niger) and Elhaj Oumar Tall (Mali, Guinea, and Senegal)

<sup>16</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021\\_mali\\_humanitarian\\_snapshot\\_juillet22.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021_mali_humanitarian_snapshot_juillet22.pdf)

crisis and its result of the fragility of public revenues and institutions do not encourage budgetary risk-taking.

Ultimately, the social and religious drivers of this multiform crisis are pernicious in the sense they do not comply with any rules except those of the protagonists. Jihadist groups have managed to forge ties with diverse communities to be socially rooted which has increased their influence at the local level (Sandor & Campana, 2019). They have been able to make themselves indispensable by mediating and providing resources and security to their factions in the territories under their control (Sandor & Campana, 2019). This has created a deep rift with communities, especially against their practices. Indeed, this fundamentally consumes the relationships between communities and families, destroys the quasi-peaceful coexistence of people and human life itself while annihilating economic and social development efforts. From the perspective of a systematic thirst for revenge, it creates permanent insecurity and mistrust between communities and makes it difficult to mend the social fabric and rebuild a basic coexistence life. The Malian government should tackle these primary issues head-on, along with security, institutional and economic issues, at the same time, because without social stability, there is no room for development.

### **3.5 Climate and environmental factors not to be neglected**

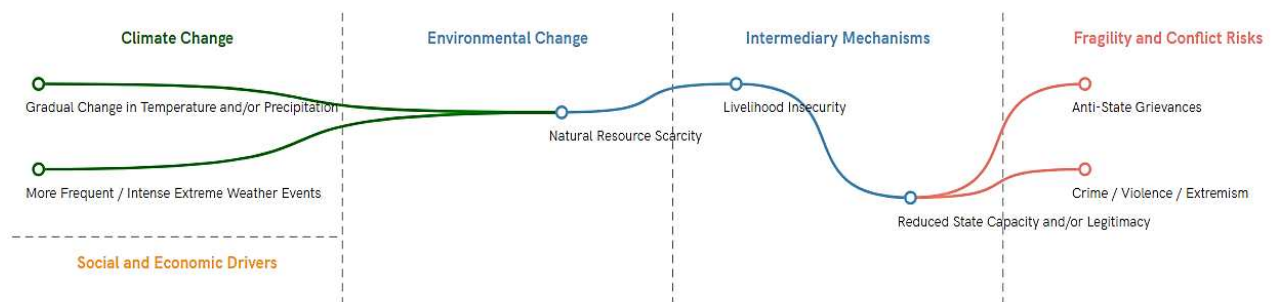
Climate change is in action in Mali and emerges as an aggravating factor of the current crisis. The crisis is characterized by a long-lasting drought whose effects are being severely felt by people in many parts of the country. Although it is difficult to easily assess the effects of climate change on agricultural production (Kouressy et al., 2020) and people lives, it is worth noting that Mali experienced approximately 28 drought episodes between 1980 and 2014, affecting nearly 7 million people for an estimated economic cost of US\$140 million (World Bank, 2019b). According to the World Bank (2019b) estimates, irregular rainfall reduced growth in the agricultural sector by 3 percentage points between 2016 (7.6%) and 2017 (4.6%), causing food insecurity and considerably increasing the pressure on limited natural and fodder resources such as water and pasture, which led to conflicts<sup>17</sup> between herders and sedentary populations.

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<sup>17</sup> By Hussona (2021), research on the so-called ‘heat–aggression relationship’ suggests there is a 10- 20% increase in the risk of armed conflict associated with each 0.5°C increase in local temperatures.

According to Scheffran et al (2019), climate change emerges as a "threat multiplier" because of its role in exacerbating traditional causes of conflict in fragile regions and hotspots where poverty, violence, injustice, and social insecurity are prevalent. The most egregious form is how changes in climate alter competition over increasingly scarce resources (Hussona, 2021). The effects of the climate are accompanied by significant socioeconomic changes by disrupting sociocultural norms and modifying forever the lifestyle and livelihoods of the people with population displacements and humanitarian disasters in some areas of the country (Kouressy et al., 2020; Sangaré and McSparren, 2018). In the northern and central Mali regions, the combined effect of gradual warming and increasingly erratic weather is challenging people's lives and excavating existing grievances by reinforcing support for rebel and extremist groups (Climate Diplomacy, 2019). As local populations compete for access to resources, particularly in the center, communities are turning to ethnic and religious self-defense groups to protect themselves as resources become scarce and competition for political control intensifies (Sangaré and McSparren, 2018).

**Figure 6: Climate change and potential consequences**



Source: Climate Diplomacy (2019)

In addition to years of government neglect in appearance and lack of investment, marked by poor infrastructure and access to essential services, poor employment opportunities, climate variability seems to contribute to the mass recruitment of fighters, falling for easy gains, by separatist and Islamist armed groups (Climate Diplomacy, 2019; Morgan, 2014). For Arsenault (2015), the environment is so harsh, that when jihadists arrive, they easily find supporters. Thus, lacking economic alternatives and seeing their livelihoods threatened by drought, environmental degradation, and intermittent conflict, many youths seek employment and security from armed

extremist groups (Davis 2014). More generally, Bakrania (2013) states that drastic climatic conditions incentivize criminal activity, perpetuating the vicious cycle of insecurity and further deterioration of livelihoods. This echoes the conceptual model depicted in Figure 6, which shows that the potential consequence of climate change characterized by a gradual increase in temperature and/or precipitation combined with a greater frequency of extreme weather events, can lead to the reduction of natural resources, that can result in livelihood insecurity and reduce State capacity to meet the local population needs. When the state capacity is weakened, its legitimacy could be contested due to emerging conflicts between various local groups or communities competing for these resources, leading to grievances, crime, violence, or extremism.

Despite the historical quasi-evidence that mobile livestock systems in the Sahel have the high adaptive capacity and ecological efficiency, land tenure reforms have emphasized agricultural expansion, imposing a changing environment to herder communities whose capacity to cope with the climate variability has been much reduced (Kalkavan, 2019). This situation has been worsened with the rapidly growing population in Mali over the three last decades raising demand for already-scarce arable land, particularly in the context of low State capacity to adapt to and cope with climate change effects (German Institute for Global and Area Studies [GIGA], 2020).

Thus, the resolution of the multi-faceted crisis in Mali should include climate-related solutions to alleviate partially the harsh living conditions of people, especially in the northern and central parts of the country.

### **3.6 Complexity of long-term geopolitical and geo-economic drivers in Mali current crisis**

Mali seems to become a space of competition between different interests, sometimes convergent, often totally antagonistic. These interests are of different scales, national (between different communities), sub-regional or regional (Algeria, Libya, Morocco) and international (between Western countries, led by France, the EU and the United States, and Russia, the Gulf States, and to some extent China). These often-conflicting interests have been triggers and aggravators of the multifaceted crisis in Mali.

Following the various rebellions in northern Mali, particularly by the Tuaregs, and the series of negotiations (from Tamanrasset in Algeria to Sebha in Libya), the Malian army was asked to demilitarize a large part of this vast region of the country. The demilitarization process, which



effectively enshrined the gradual withdrawal of the army and the administration, provided fertile ground for the establishment of the Algerian Islamist groups of the GSPC (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). Hypothetically, this would have been an export strategy and thus rid Algeria of the insurgent groups it had fought but struggled to eliminate completely. A group that had transformed itself and invested in many illicit traffics, notably cigarettes, drugs and arms. Although the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria is at the center of Morocco's interest in this northern part of the country, Morocco has an ancient history with Mali, already through the Almoravid conquest in the 16th and 17th centuries (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015).

The antagonism at the national and even community level is Tuareg irredentism (not all Tuareg), which since the period of independence has refused to be part of the Malian national community. This has given rise to several conflicts, often bloody, which have led some Tuareg tribes to go into exile, notably in Libya, and support the power of Colonel Gaddafi. In essence, the refusal to belong to Mali is interpreted to be linked to the idea of being governed by black communities (Diallo, 2002; Sangaré, 2005). Unfortunately, this disagreement between some Tuaregs and the Malian State or even Sahelian community (southern Algeria, northern Mali, northern Niger, northern Chad) seemed to be used by Gaddafi to support the Malian Tuareg communities to achieve his ambition of forming a League of Great Sahara tribes and establishing himself as a continental leader (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). While this wish could not be realized, the integration and training of Tuaregs of Malian origin into the Libyan army for several years allowed for their massive and armed return to northern Mali after the fall of the Colonel, leading to an uprising and a new rebellion, this time with a more assertive pro-independence focus and in collusion with armed Islamist groups.

To stop the advance of armed Islamist groups in the south, the Malian government requested in January 2013 the intervention of the French army for air support to the Malian army, which eventually turned into ground intervention. While this is salutary, it is now known that the French army's intervention in Mali was prepared (2010) well before the apparent official call for intervention in 2013. Indeed, before 2012, due to many unofficial factors, including the misunderstanding between Mali's successive president, particularly the President Amadou Toumani Touré, and French President Sarkozy's government over the migration and hostage issues, France would have decided to prepare its military intervention in northern Mali. The

conflict and the NATO intervention in Libya with its associated negative consequences in Mali are said to have been considered the appropriate occasion for any intervention. At the same time, it is also said that MNLA, the rebel group, has been politically prepared and supported<sup>18</sup> by some eminent members of the French government to claim their independence by providing them with international support. Their facilitated interventions in the French media and television against the sovereign state of Mali could attest to this. Behind this support may reside some geopolitical and geostrategic interests.

It is noted that the northern part of Mali abounds in enormous mineral resources (very diverse), which multinational firms and major economic powers would be interested in. By granting a large measure of autonomy to the North, or independence, this would weaken the Mali public power and its ability to negotiate with external agents in search of the resources of the Malian subsoil. The difficulties in implementing the Algiers Agreements, as well as the French government's exasperation with the Malian authorities' willingness to dialogue with agents of Malian origin of Islamist groups, including the AQIM-affiliated Katiba Macina and the Islamic State-affiliated Dawlatul Islamia (Ba, 2021), among others, led the French president to call in June 2021 for a reduction in the commitment of French military forces in Mali. This message has been interpreted by some, rightly or wrongly, as a kind of pressure on the Malian government not to engage with these actors. In reality, the objective and strategy of the Malian government (to end the conflict) and those of the French government (to fight terrorism) are not always convergent<sup>19</sup>. Against Western interests, the growing interest of Russia, China, Turkey and even Qatar, which seek respectively to strengthen geopolitical relations with the Malian government or insurgent and Islamist groups with ultimately similar interests.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/8/22/the-french-colonial-designs-in-mali>. The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), an important component of the Malian Tuareg rebellion, proclaimed "the independence of Azawad" on Friday 6 April 2012 in a statement via one of its spokesmen on the French channel France 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ending conflict should mean fighting terrorism and vice versa. After a decade of conflict, Mali's respective governments believe that ending the conflict requires not only military force but also, and more importantly, dialogue with all armed groups, including the jihadists, in order to reduce the suffering of the population and jump-start development investments. But the French government considers dialogue with jihadist groups a red line, even if some of them are Malian. Experiences around the world, notably in Afghanistan, show that fighting terrorism with military force alone has never succeeded in ending the conflict. Keeping a country in a permanent crisis is therefore not the solution.

These interests, sometimes convergent but mostly contradictory, reflect the complexity of the Malian crisis and that of the Sahel. If for some actors, the divergence of interests can be understood (Western countries and Russia, China), for others, it is difficult to appreciate. How to comprehend that France and other Western countries converge on certain postures with Gulf countries such as Qatar, while in fact, the internationalization of rigorist political Islamization is the prerogative of the latter, while the former seems officially to fight terrorism in the Sahel? What is certain is that beyond the apparent reasons that are more about communication, the interests at stake are largely economic. Indeed, the interests of the Gulf States, in particular Qatar, if confirmed, seem to be also linked to economic interests, although camouflaged in a logic of assistance, even Islamic expansion. According to various sources, particularly from France, Qatar is financing terrorism in northern Mali (Gadault & Nicolas, 2021). Behindhand this position, the objectives would be that there is an independence of the North in order to be able to exploit its natural resources, as they have the financial, material and technical resources to do so.

Russia's recent intrusion into Mali, linked to a long-standing partnership and collaboration between Mali and the Russian Federation since the 1960s, is not well understood by France and the Western international community. The government considers that the way out of its insecure situation will be through diversifying partnerships with other governments capable of helping it solve its insecurity problems. A recent unofficial report dated September 13, 2021<sup>20</sup>, that Mali is discussing an agreement with Russia seems to follow this line of thinking. If this news of a security and defense partnership with Russia is confirmed through the signing of an agreement with the private Russian security group Wagner, this will be a great change in Mali's defense and security strategy. According to reports, the agreement would send a thousand of security personal to Mali for six billion CFA francs (about 9.15 million euros) per month. The objective is to train the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) and to provide protection for some of Mali's top leaders, as in the Central African Republic. As some sources have indicated, another non-confirmed point of the agreement would be to guarantee the Russian company access to three mining deposits, two of gold and one of magnesium.

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<sup>20</sup><https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/mali-bientot-des-mercenaires-russes-pour-former-l-armee-nationale-424250>

The massive intervention of China today in Africa, and in the Sahel countries, is viewed with a bad eye by the Western countries and in particular the United States and France, all in search of mineral resources. Although less visible, its security activities are becoming increasingly important. Their scope has expanded along with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Nantulya, 2019). China is the largest contributor of peacekeepers among the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the second-largest financial contributor to peacekeeping operations, accounting for 10.3% of the budget after the United States. The Chinese have short and medium-term needs while the United States and other Western countries seem to anticipate future needs. Hence, the current global stakes are mainly related to the scarcity of subsoil resources (especially mineral resources) and water resources. The North, Northwest and Northeast of Mali are strategic areas in this respect. In particular, the Taoudeni basin and the Liptako gourma (the three borders area with Burkina Faso and Niger) are major strategic stakes for national and regional development, against which various groups tend to have their own interest; this seems to create obstacles, including armed conflicts, tending to slow down its development in order to take advantage of it.

From the Malian perspective, despite a slight difference in opinions, Russia is viewed favorably as a genuine counterterrorism force while they view France's operation Barkhane counterterrorism initiatives in the Sahel as a guise for neocolonialism (Ramani, 2020). In fact, after France's Serval intervention largely congratulated by Malians, many Sahel countries, in particular Mali, are frustrated with the Western counterterrorism policies and outcomes after eight years of conflict. Following their recent, debatable but gradually conclusive experience in the Central African Republic, Russia (and even China) seems to seize this favorable context to help Mali to diversify partnerships with aims at securing economic deals and boosting its geopolitical standing in West Africa (Ramani, 2020). From the French and EU perspective, in addition to economic and cultural interests, Mali is also viewed as a testing ground for Europe's capacity to deal with external conflict and terrorism together. This is consistent with an article published in the French magazine "Marianne" in which General Trinquand (2021) - former head of the military mission to the United Nations - argues that "*the Takuba anti-terrorist military force, composed of special forces units from several EU countries, should serve as a premise for the construction of a 5,000-strong European force in the Sahel and .... thus serve as a laboratory for an effective European force*". Mali does not have this time for experimentation, population is suffering. The urgency is

multifold and the country needs rapid and lasting solutions to move from the crisis to more inclusive security, peace and development. In addition, the combination of five factors would lead one to wonder whether some of Mali's partner countries, including France, the US and European Union want the Malian crisis to end: (1) they refused to Malian army to reach the town of Kidal (the main Tuareg stronghold in Mali) after conquering together the main towns in the North at the beginning of the crisis, (2) they refused to Malian government to engage in dialogue with Malian Islamist groups, (3) they decided to unilaterally stop military cooperation (even temporarily) with the Malian army on the ground and to reduce the number of its soldiers in Mali without any real consultation (4) with other partners, they refused to deliver the military aircraft for the transport of troops to Mali army, even though it had already been paid for by the Malian government, and (5) their opposition to the arrival of private military agents from the Wagner Group to support the Malian army in its fight against the terrorists. This situation creates confusion and frustration, as some interpret it as if some of Mali's partners want Mali's military capacity to be continually undermined.

Many factors are at the heart of Mali's multidimensional crisis: widespread insecurity, poor political and institutional governance, economic distortions, weakening and dislocation of the society, spatial and environmental issues, and geopolitical alarms. Each plays a specific role in the fragility of Mali today, and proper solutions must be found to address them. By adopting a multidimensional approach, such as political, economic, social, institutional, environmental, and geopolitical and geostrategic, to address the drivers of current fragility, it is necessary to build a recovery strategy for a new and more resilient Mali.

#### **4. Elements for recovery and potential pathways**

Though it could take time, recovering from the crisis while enhancing the resilience of Mali as a new nation is indeed possible. The levers exist and must be mobilized to respond vigorously to the crisis of governance and the state of fragility in which the Malian nation seems to be clogging up. Challenges to be met are the fight against insecurity through the diversification of partners and the establishment of better coordination of operations to fight insecurity with partners, impunity, the conduct of institutional reforms and socio-economic recovery, the commitment to climate and environmental issues, and the strengthening of the nation's geopolitical and geostrategic interests.

To do this, justice, the fight against impunity, and more patriotism among Malians (putting the interests of the nation above all else) will be the engines of renewal.

#### **4.1 Reinforce Mali army and innovate in defense and security**

And yet there are levers available. Indeed, although it is very weakened, due to a lack of human, material, and financial resources, the army remains one of the precious bulwarks in this crisis. It fights, sacrifices, loses men often in ambushes, but it stands up to the various armed and terrorist groups. More and more trained and with more ground and air equipment, it could achieve great goals. With the preponderance of crises, it is now commonly accepted that ensuring security and defense is an investment for development.

The Malian Army enjoys a very high degree of sympathy<sup>21</sup> among the population, but it must do more to maintain this support. Military leaders must help the military through training, awareness, and communication, and even appropriate sanctions to limit blunders and executions outside the judicial process. In particular, in the central and northern regions, soldiers should defend and secure themselves while respecting and protecting the population and their property, which will help bring the army closer to its population by gradually regaining communities' trust. This is essential for military intelligence.

Then, it is important to rely on our own armed forces and not on partners who sometimes have other agendas. To do this, it is necessary to define strategies to reorganize a real deployment and repositioning of the Mali army and the administration in order to counter the threats to Mali's security. Strategies and subsequent measures anticipating the gradual reduction of international military support are needed in the short, medium, and long term. Without forgetting the other priority sector, the country should continue to smartly devote a substantial budget to the purchase of more modern equipment (several types of aircraft, drones, military and protective costumes, more sophisticated arms, for instance) and to increase and reinforce the quality of soldiers training, based more on tactics, particularly in this context of asymmetric warfare. While the need for military personnel was estimated at 20,000 at the time of the five-year military programming law<sup>22</sup>,

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<sup>21</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/05/les-maliens-ont-davantage-confiance-en-leur-armee-qu-en-barkhane-ou-la-minusma\\_6087091\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/05/les-maliens-ont-davantage-confiance-en-leur-armee-qu-en-barkhane-ou-la-minusma_6087091_3212.html)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.depechesdumali.com/6262-loi-d-orientation-et-de-programmation-militaire-un-investissement-de-plus-1-230-milliard-fcfa-en-5-ans.html>.

the current complexity of the crisis in Mali and its extension, the regular killing of soldiers, as well as the size of the country<sup>23</sup> and its seven borders should lead to a five-fold increase in the number of soldiers to be recruited for lasting sustainable effectiveness in terms of defense and security. It is therefore important to proceed with a massive recruitment, at least 100,000 soldiers<sup>24</sup> (with a better distribution of functions and over the national territory) to reach the level of the armed forces personnel (in % of total labor force) in fragile countries and conflicted situations. This will include active soldiers and reservists. It is important to improve the professionalization of the army with the creation of different professions regarding daily life. In addition to the basic profession of arms, a large part of the soldiers should be trained in the professions of factories, mines, carpentry, mechanics, sewing, administration, computer science, new technologies, statistics, or personal services, or instance. Also, the training and equipment of the army must be adapted to the local specificities. Between the northern, north-eastern, and north-western desert parts of the country and the central, delta part, the west, the east, and even the south, where the need for equipment and means of mobility may be different.

To this effect, regionalize or relocate the army to strategic areas through local recruitment of young volunteers, the creation of well-equipped local bases, and the improvement of the living conditions of the defense and security forces through a substantial increase in salaries to compete with the amount of money that jihadist groups promise or pay to their local fighters and work to professionalize the army, especially on issues of information and communication technology, to have information channels outside those of traditional telecommunication operators, to set up a central intelligence agency by recruiting highly educated Malians to collect information in order to ensure availability.

At the same time, the need for dialogue with the jihadists, who must or can participate in political negotiations, the peace agreement, or reconciliation, must be emphasized. As mentioned above, many young Malians today become jihadists because of marginalization, lack of jobs, and lack of income-generating opportunities.

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<sup>23</sup> Mali is the eighth-largest country in Africa, with an area of over 1,240,000 square kilometers.

<sup>24</sup> Estimates are based on data available in the World Development indicators Database (World Bank) which indicate that armed forces personnel as a % of total labor force was about 1.02 percent in 2018 in fragile countries and conflict affected situations, 0.8 percent in the World while it was 0.3 percent in Mali, indicating a specific margin for force growth in Mali. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.TF.ZS?locations=F1-ML-1W>.

## **4.2 Strengthen justice and institutions and reform the political system and parties**

The return of justice, carried out according to the rules of the art, is one of the conditions for the beginning of conflict resolution both in urban areas, particularly in Bamako, and in conflict zones. It is a way to establish trust between government and communities. As Sidibé (2020) stated, “the conflict in central Mali is a battle for the hearts of the local people, and only a just administration, serving the people, can bring peace”. Two dimensions can be considered at this level concerning the justice distribution.

The first and indispensable step will undoubtedly be the relentless fight against corruption and financial delinquency, which have become a mode of governance. Without fighting against this cancer which is in the process of metastasizing and reaching all sectors of the country's socio-economic life, nothing tangible will be built in Mali and the future will be an illusion. The recent news about the arrestation of a former Prime Minister and a former Minister of Finance since Thursday, August 26, 2021, for embezzlement of public funds and complicity in embezzlement appears as a new start. That means that the steamroller of Justice is on the move. Following this context, Mali must address institutions failures by underpinning existent structures or by building new, more efficient ones whose nature, means, and prerogatives should be in line with the new challenges of rebuilding the justice legitimacy. The poor performance of some of the institutions in relation to their budget (e.g., OCLEI) should lead to their abolition or to their fusion with other, more efficient organizations. Strengthening institutions without building the human resource capacity to deliver fair justice and track down offenders of public funds will be meaningless. Judges must be regularly sensitized and trained in the problems of financial delinquency, in the new techniques of state theft, and in the techniques that should be developed and implemented to find them and punish them with exemplary sentences. In punishing financial offenders, one should always think of the number of schools, hospitals, roads, water towers, and electricity that could be built with the stolen money. Seizure of the offenders' assets (their homes, businesses, buildings, fields, vehicles, for instance) or the repayment of the stolen amount under 72 to 120 hours should be systematic. This recommendation is one of the innovations which will be implemented in the near future in Mali.

The second also essential is related to the weak and poor distribution of justice in the conflict zones which had very often given way to customary systems of justice in which the local



populations seem to have more confidence. As the traditional justice systems are the primary form of justice available to most Malians, the official system needs to consider them as relays to ease the mitigation of ongoing conflicts through their capacity to mediate local conflicts (Ursu, 2018). To do this, these systems must be strengthened in order to help find bridges between the two systems for a more just and transparent justice. They are supported by customary chiefs and notables recognized for their integrity in the given regions.

At the same time, the reconstruction of Mali will need a renewal of the political dispositions both for the elections and political parties' reforms. More specifically, financing allocated to parties by the government should be drastically reduced as well as their number. For instance, three main political parties might be enough for 20 million inhabitants in Mali<sup>25</sup>. This will help reduce the amount of public funds dedicated to political parties which can be used to address other more useful urgences. This perspective will conduct to the construction of more strong political parties with more resources and a more consistent basis that can clearly take part in building citizenship. Hence, renewing forces present with coherent projects and whose leaders are not incriminated by justice might help to transform the old order into a new, more democratic, more inclusive, and republican order. To this end, political parties should be organized to prevent any of their members (leaders as well as members) from acting directly or indirectly outside the collectively decided programmatic framework. To the extent that continuous improvement in public sector performance is generally associated with the capacity of civil society groups and political parties to organize and engage in constructive criticism, the latter must collectively act on their credibility. When well-organized to monitor each other, political parties can play a key role in the quality and performance of the public sector. Politicians should encourage reform within their parties to increase transparency and accountability, through a better and more programmatic organization, which may help develop skills for sound public funds management.

In addition, a new administrative and political organization is needed which considers a number of local specificities and constraints. This new order will have to offer more political possibilities, more economic opportunities, and more participation at the local or community level,

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<sup>25</sup> But the “national conference of the refoundation”, which will take place from December 11 to 30, will be a good opportunity to decide on the legal number of political parties that can animate political life in Mali.

within a proven standard framework of good governance of public funds for solving population needs.

#### **4.3 Dialogue with key actors and implement conflict-sensitive development projects**

Building a more peaceful and inclusive State should be the locomotive of Mali. As such, dialogue with the various communities is a necessity and must be systematic to promote an end to conflicts and a return to the rule of law. This will be a long process, but it is an urgent need. At the local and regional levels, adopting a participatory approach and abiding by historical and community local codes, individuals, and communities, including youth and women, should debate, village par village, in focus groups or not, to comprehend locally the root causes of the conflict in their direct living environment to be able to come with more endogenous solutions adapted to all. A plan for repairing individuals or families who lose assets and members should be a systematic routine, driven by local leaders and State local and national representatives. As some herds have been completely decimated due to theft or conflicts, for instance, the provision of livestock and the allocation of land to herders in the secured part of Office du Niger can be a sustainable solution that can be deeply considered. At the same time, human and financial resources must be mobilized for the construction and reopening of schools, which should be done with a new layout based on integrity, secure infrastructure, better-trained instructors, and more patriotic lessons, justice, and peace awareness between communities will be taught in the classrooms to promote diversity, peaceful coexistence, and development in conflict areas.

This dialogue must also be planned with the armed groups, particularly jihadists of Malian origin, in order to find solutions for ending the crisis. This has been a necessity since the failure of the Americans in Afghanistan, and even before that, many voices have been raised in Mali to develop a strategy of dialogue with the jihadist groups (Sidibé, 2021a). This echoes the current structural weakness of the Malian army, although it is growing in strength, to secure areas and protect property and people in much of the country, the need to differentiate between the occasional jihadist and the outrageous fanatic, and the need to bring calm to areas plagued by multifaceted violence.

In engaging with various communities and armed groups to bring peace to conflict zones, the Malian government should implement conflict sensitive development projects/initiatives that do not exacerbate existing inequalities between communities. It should deploy a strong communication strategy in local languages (Fulani, Dogon, Bambara, Bozo, Arab, Songhay, Tuareg) through respected local leaders and through social networks (voice message by WhatsApp, for example) to sensitize all communities to stop fighting and insert a dialogue process in parallel with the implementation of sustainable macro, meso, and micro development projects.

As has been sufficiently pointed out, the biggest problem, especially in terms of the ease with which young people are recruited into armed groups, is their idleness and lack of economic opportunities. Therefore, reviving the economic dynamics and re-establishing the value chains, mainly driven by the agricultural sector and the mining industry, while reflecting on the best ways or channels to make growth beneficial to all is a necessity. This revival requires being carried out with the active participation of the economic forces of the nation in order to take into account their needs and to facilitate inter-sectorial relations. It will be necessary to rely on the gradual emergence of national champions in the various sectors of activity by facilitating and strengthening the conditions for this emergence. With the territorial administrative reforms, the Mali government should accelerate the implementation of its policy of developing regional competitiveness clusters around the triptych - agriculture, industry, services - according to the comparative advantages of each region of the country. Given Mali's potential, the strengthening of the current modernization dynamic in the agricultural sector and agro-industrial transformation should be encouraged, re-encouraged, and amplified in order to ensure genuine sectoral articulation and interdependence while allowing the development of quality services around these sectors. Around these poles or even within them, either create employment opportunities with the support of the State or strengthen the disposal so as to facilitate the entrepreneurship of young people in connection with the strategic areas in which they have specialized. The use of the plans of digitalization and the use of the new technologies of information and telecommunication must be supported.

The creation of regional competitiveness clusters, which should go with the return of the State to the different areas of the country, will help the State through the development of the regions to reduce inter-regional disparities. In this respect, new mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth, both intra- and inter-regional, for the benefit of the community should be clearly

designed. For example, mineral resource companies and other companies belonging to regional clusters should be levied a specific tax that will be paid into a regional development fund. This fund will be responsible for financing major regional development projects. Then, also reforming the mechanisms of public procurement in order to increase transparency while seeking to favor national companies with the financial, technical, material, and human capacity to ensure the execution of these contracts. The constitution of groups of companies can be encouraged in order to allow the attainment of a certain level of technical and financial capital eligible to benefit from the State's installation facilities. These facilities would involve a policy of partial subsidization of start-up and operating costs and tax exemption for the actors over a reasonable period of time in return for a certain number of young people being progressively hired (primarily from the region, and secondarily from other parts of Mali if the required skills are not available locally). In addition, with financial institutions and development partners, innovative financing mechanisms to support high-quality investments in various forms will be essential. Measures with positive externalities, such as the realization of essential infrastructures of international quality, already underway - roads, construction of industrial and other office buildings, energy, water, telecommunications, and internet - should be ensured to increase the appetite of actors to take part in the development of regional clusters.

The return of a better-trained, better-equipped, and more accountable administration and defense forces, as well as the gradual establishment of the rule of law at the heart of Mali's new rebuilding dynamic, will be necessary to ensure both the trust and the protection of companies involved in the emergence of the poles.

#### **4.4 Engage in climate-related solutions to conflict**

As climate change can be seen as one of the factors exacerbating the Malian crisis by reducing the availability of resources, it threatens food security, affects livelihoods, fuels the recruitment of extremist groups, worsens community insecurity, and weakens social relations (Kalkavan, 2019). So, the complexity of the underlining relationship over these various dimensions cannot be addressed in isolation. There is a need for a more integrative climate management framework in which farmers and pastoralists, as well as all communities, should recognize themselves and think together, in accord with the dialogue with various other actors and the implementation of conflict-sensitive initiatives. By focusing on climate risk, risk management should prioritize dialogue,

governance, and development interventions to improve resilience to climate change across government officials, local state officials, and local communities, women, and youth (Tarif K & Grand, 2021).

The government must develop adaptive policy frameworks to address resource management and agricultural development and change migration and mobility patterns (Tarif & Grand, 2021). These should support climate mitigation and adaptation strategies that build the resilience of natural resource users, particularly farmers and pastoralists, and prevent violent conflict. It is worth noting that boosting the participation of all local communities in climate-conflict nexus analysis and in decision making on climate adaptation strategies (Tarif & Grand, 2021) will help create rooms for peace, and increase efforts to mitigate climate change consequences, central to much of the environmental protection and restoration work (Hussona, 2021). For example, it is essential to encourage agropastoral families to work together to plant more trees to create several forest areas for their community in a large space to produce not only for their family but for all communities. At this point, it is hoped that access to secure agricultural land, natural resources, and water for farmers and pastoralists, respectively, will be improved and accelerated through the participatory construction, maintenance, and management of agricultural and pastoral infrastructure is expected (Petr, 2021).

This means finding and promoting the best balance between mobile herder and sedentary livestock systems to benefit from the high adaptive capacity and ecological efficiency (Kalkavan, 2019). Accordingly, this involves strengthening the process of recognizing the herders' way of life enshrined in the charter<sup>26</sup> of the livestock system in Mali to reduce the perception of marginalization in their communities, strengthening their ability to cope with the changing environment (Kalkavan, 2019). At the same time, it could be appropriate to increase the political representation of pastoralists, as well as establish a unified legal framework for natural resource management, paving the way for a more harmonious society in which all voices count and are heard. In addition, providing guidance on how to diversify income sources and increase food security through improved food processing, preservation, marketing, preparation, and

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<sup>26</sup> For example, transhumance is recognized as a necessary activity for the valorization of natural rangelands and is taken into account in land use plans in accordance with the provisions of the Pastoral Charter. [https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/assets/files/field\\_protection\\_clusters/Mali/files/HLP%20AoR/Mali\\_Pastoral\\_Charter\\_2001\\_FR.pdf](https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/assets/files/field_protection_clusters/Mali/files/HLP%20AoR/Mali_Pastoral_Charter_2001_FR.pdf)

consumption (Petr, 2021) will be critical to improving agropastoralists' resilience and to conflicts' resolution.

#### **4.5 Engage a process to reconcile the national interest with a geopolitical balance between conflicting Western interests through diversified partnerships**

From a geopolitical point of view, as we could conclude that one of the main causes of this crisis is linked to the economic interests of the world powers, how can and should the Malian government deal with all the complex geopolitical and economic interests of the many world powers on its territory?

Mali's agenda should be different from the interests of these other countries. Since Mali's only expectation is to move from crisis to peace and more inclusive development, it is urgent to quickly develop a win-win strategy while maintaining an appropriate balance between the appetite of the various stakeholders for Mali's subsoil resources and their own objectives. Mali needs to diversify its partnerships to achieve its ultimate goals, even using economic agreements and strengthening its geopolitical and geostrategic position. It is not a question of getting rid of any of Mali's partners, but of communicating and implementing a strategy in which each partner could play a specific role and thus conform to the new dynamic and its rules.

To do this, in parallel with current efforts using several channels to defend the country's interest, Mali should transform the current crisis into opportunities by investing in people. People should be sufficiently educated and trained in all possible scientific and non-scientific fields in a perspective of understanding and mastering the great geopolitical and geostrategic stakes of the world. A strong selection based on rigorous criteria has to be implemented. These highly selected individuals, forged with a strong sense of patriotism, should be supported during and after their education and training pathway to enable them to form solid network groups capable of contributing at any time to the economic and political defense of their country in a crisis situation (Aberkane, 2010), especially vis-à-vis the outside world. A special fund dedicated to the anticipation of major political and armed crises of the type currently experienced in Mali will be necessary.

## **5. Conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to expose some of the root causes of Mali's fragility and to recommend some potential pathways to address them. To this end, based on the AfDB fragility analysis approach, we conduct an in-depth literature review by embracing various key dimensions, such as political and institutional, economic, social, and climate considered key drivers of fragility, even recovery, and resilience. We add the other main dimension, geopolitical and geoeconomics perspective, which seems to play a critical role in the current Mali crisis.

It is clear that the multidimensional crisis in Mali has created significant socioeconomic damage over the past nine years, challenging regional political stability and security. One of the main causes of Mali's fragility is the poor performance of institutions and therefore governance in changing and evolving contexts. Despite several efforts by national, regional, and international partners, violence is on the rise and spreading, institutions are dysfunctional, and the military appears inefficient at this time in addressing the crisis. The spread of insecurity from the North to the Center region of the country makes the crisis deeper and more complex. This creates disruptions in political and economic institutions, economic activities, and social and interregional exchanges. Particularly, the ramifications of the crisis into inter-communities' conflicts challenge the way to address the crisis as a whole.

Although we have tried to show individually the potential role of each dimension, political and institutional, economic, social, and climate, and geopolitical, in the current crisis, solutions should be developed and understood with a holistic approach, building on the same drivers of the crisis. The government should have a multi-level and multi-dimensional response, with individuals, armed groups, and communities, so as to meet the needs and aspirations of the community as a whole. From this perspective, a strategy based on the development of conflict-sensitive projects can help solve the existing issues and anticipate the emergence of inter and intra-community conflicts or the abuses of jihadist groups while promoting opportunities for more inclusion and active participation of all communities at the local level and in the life of the nation.

At the regional and international level, Mali must work with partners. The porous nature of the borders between countries requires greater coordination between the armies of different

countries (the G5 Sahel is in this line) to fight armed groups effectively. With the international community and its partners, based on a better appreciation of the current crisis and the deployment of a new strategy, Mali will be able to deal more easily with the more or less exogenous factors of the crisis. To this end, the diversification of partnerships with well-defined roles will be very useful for better coordination of responses to the crisis. Partner forces should not be left alone to hunt down terrorists. This must be done with national forces on the basis of a defense and security strategy defined according to Mali's best interests. This strategy should include an exit plan that provides for the gradual withdrawal of international forces and their replacement by national forces.

Furthermore, from a forward-looking perspective, it is important to design the right indicators to monitor and evaluate, that can help anticipate and manage new crises when they occur. This requires a permanent revision of these indicators to take into account new realities in an increasingly complex world. In this respect, a multidisciplinary team would be set up, totally independent and far from politics, and totally committed to the general interest.

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