

LESSONS FROM MALI'S ARAB SPRING: WHY DEMOCRACY MUST WORK FOR THE POOR

Christian Aid Occasional Paper Number 8

By Yacouba Kone, Country Manager for Mali

September 2012



CONTENTS

Executive summary	2
1 Mali's democratic struggles: context and historical background	5
2 Mali political economy and reasons for the current crisis	11
3 Analysis – an 'Arab Spring' hijacked	14
4 Conclusions and recommendations	16
Endnotes	17

Christian Aid's Occasional Paper (OP) series reflects work carried out by Christian Aid staff and others on a range of development topics. Although OPs are addressed to an audience that includes policy-makers, academics, the media, other non-governmental organisations and the general public, some prior knowledge of the topic may be needed to understand fully some of the papers.

Disclaimer:

OPs are published in the name of the author(s). Their views do not necessarily reflect those of Christian Aid and should not be so attributed.

This paper was produced with additional research and editorial support from Eric Gutierrez, Christian Aid Senior Adviser, Accountable Governance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the first quarter of 2012, the landlocked west African country of Mali was rocked by a full-blown separatist rebellion in its northern regions. By March, just as the country was about to celebrate 21 years of its much earlier version of the 'Arab Spring', restive soldiers in the capital Bamako staged a coup and deposed the democratically-elected government. As state control crumbled in the north and the central government collapsed, hardly any of Mali's 15 million-strong population made the effort to stand up to defend their 'democracy'.

A puzzle therefore emerges. Up until these events, Mali enjoyed a reputation for stability and relatively good governance. Since 1991, when a dictator was overthrown, the country has experienced relatively democratic elections and smooth handovers of power from outgoing to newly-elected central governments. From 1995-2005, Mali posted an impressive and steady annual economic growth of 5.8 per cent, far outpacing other African countries. The country was therefore admired as a model low-income democracy.

And yet, in the space of just a few weeks this was all in danger of being reversed. For Christian Aid and its

partners, this turn of events has been particularly disappointing. There had been high hopes for more permanent changes – particularly since Christian Aid's Mali country programme had steadily been seeing results in recent years that were by no means insignificant, and it had been poised to start a new, much more ambitious programme. A 'Sahel framework', covering not just Mali but also Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger, had just begun to be implemented. This was designed to address the challenges of inequality, lack of sustainability and poor governance in the sub-region, in line with Christian Aid's new strategy Partnership for Change. Instead, the organisation found itself evacuating field-based staff and their families to the relative safety of Bamako, the Malian capital, and to Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso.

Thus, questions are now being asked. How can state control in the northern regions break down so quickly in a country where decentralisation should have already been working? How can apparently stable institutions – particularly a democratically-elected central government respected throughout Africa and beyond, and which was, in any case, due to step down by April 2012 – collapse and

come to ruin so quickly? But more importantly, why did the majority of Malians not bother to make a stand to defend their democratic institutions?

This paper attempts to provide some answers. It argues that Mali's current crisis – the most difficult and challenging since its independence in 1960 – is predominantly due to a democracy that did not work for the poor. Mali was a pioneer of the 'Arab Spring' when it kicked out a dictator and installed a new constitution. But what consolidated as a result of this "Arab Spring" was not a real democracy. Rather, it was the entrenchment of a narrow elite that based its power more on patronage and less on popular support, in a bid to control the central government and the economy – both licit and illicit.

As a consequence, poor people's access to productive assets, such as land and water, was increasingly threatened by a regime intent on giving them to agro-investors at the expense of smallholders. Cotton, once the country's main export crop, has increasingly been abandoned. Gold mining, currently enjoying a boom worldwide, is delivering more benefits to the multinational corporations with operations in Mali rather than to the

citizens who, in theory, own those resources. Furthermore, there has been growing evidence pointing to high-level collusion or actual involvement by authorities in a new and highly lucrative 'business': the trafficking of drugs.¹

The elite that controlled the government and the economy appeared to be interested only in short-term gains and benefits. There appeared to be no interest in long-term productive investment, such as introducing policies to enable small-scale producers to expand and intensify agricultural production. In fact, it may even be argued that this narrow group of powerful people had an interest in keeping the state weak and its infrastructure underdeveloped. This is because it is easier, for example, to benefit surreptitiously from corrupt land deals and mining contracts if the government's regulatory, enforcement and oversight powers are weak. Drug smugglers can make more money if authorities are more corruptible. A weak central government, a fragmented political and social structure, and impoverished towns often cut off from the capital, have kept vested interests satisfied.

Furthermore, the pattern of politics that

emerged after Mali's 1991 'Arab Spring' was one that sustains elite rule, rather than deepens democracy.

Ethnic politics consolidated for the first time since independence – the president, Amadou Toumani Toure, strengthened himself and his inner circle, rather than the state that all ethnic groups shared. He appointed friends and people from his region of origin to key positions. The so-called 'consensus' style of leadership was actually a systematic disabling of the opposition; hence there was no real debate on how to address the key challenges facing the country.

All indications show that Mali has now turned for the worse. An increasing climate of repression and intimidation has descended on the capital. Journalists are being abducted and beaten, soldiers opposing the junta are being tortured and forcibly 'disappeared', and armed gangs are allowed to move with impunity. In the meantime, a separatist, extremist state in the north has been declared, with its own vicious and violent competition between the different players.

The lessons of Mali need to be learned. When 'Arab Springs' happen, the democracies that emerge must be made to work for the poor majority,

not serve the interests of the minority. If democratisation remains a façade or is hijacked by a self-interested elite, then sustainable livelihoods cannot be secured and the gains of democratisation can be easily reversed. Moreover, political structures could easily unravel if real settlements are not reached and agreements are not made on what constitutes fair sharing of the gains that the economy can provide.

This paper seeks to provide answers to the question of what development agencies like Christian Aid ought to do, in the short-term and the long-term, in situations where the local democracy fails to deliver for poor communities in places such as Mali – a country that offers a critical case study on why democracy must work for the poor.

1 MALI'S DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLES: CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Signs of unrest first emerged in Mali in November and December 2011, when demonstrations in the northern town of Menaka called for the independence of the northern region, known as 'Azawad'. By 17 January, 2012, a full-blown offensive by an alliance of rebel groups was under way and the army lost control of the towns of Menaka and Anderamboukane. On 4 February, Touareg rebels moved to

capture two military camps and control the northern town of Kidal.² By Wednesday 8 February, nearly 60,000 people had fled their homes, crossing into the neighbouring countries of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. Mali's military was also forced into a humiliating retreat across the north-eastern border, from the town of Tinzaouaten and into Algeria.



The death toll from the fighting remains unconfirmed,³ but photos of dozens of dead Malian soldiers were soon circulated on the internet and subsequently reported by the media in the capital, Bamako.⁴ It was rumoured that up to 300 soldiers had been slaughtered. Angry spouses of soldiers from the Kati Barracks – situated 15km from Bamako – marched in fury to the presidential palace, openly accusing President Amadou Toumani Toure of collaborating with the rebels.

Toure, however, simply dismissed the demands of the spouses, just as he had dismissed the December demonstrations in Menaka. On 8 March during the official celebration for International Women's Day, Toure called the spouses' march a 'manipulation of coup plotters'. He then made it clear that he would deal with these coup plotters, while saying little about the military's losses in the north.

Toure gravely underestimated the level of anger. On 21 March, the eve of the 21st anniversary of Mali's own 'Arab Spring', hundreds of soldiers mutinied and attacked Koulouba, Toure's residence. He managed to flee, and was saved only because presidential guards provided cover for him and his family.

The soldiers' uprising now appears to have been spontaneous. Toure had been due to step down within weeks, having already served two terms as president, with elections scheduled for April 29. While Toure was widely respected and led a coalition with broad support, no protests or popular demonstrations followed his ignominious ouster. Toure had lost support, and the political structures that had become synonymous with his person came down with him.

The collapse of state control over the north of the country, followed by a military coup in the capital, was a crushing blow for Mali – the country that had developed a reputation for political stability and experienced steady annual economic growth of 5.8 per cent from 1995 to 2005.⁵ In the space of just a few weeks, it seemed that all Mali had achieved over the past two decades had been reversed.

The country's achievements are by no means insignificant. In a region where authoritarianism is the norm rather than the exception, Mali's democratisation was decades ahead. Agitation for democratic reforms had begun in the late 1970s and were picked up by the early 1980s, as the country reeled from the impact of a prolonged drought and famine, as well as the damage of structural adjustment policies. By early 1991, Mali's 'Arab Spring' was afoot, and a transition from a highly authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy was clearly evident.

The transition from colonial rule

The former French Sudan became independent from France on 22 September 1960, and adopted the name of Republic of Mali, following the collapse of a short-lived federation with Senegal. The first elected president, Modibo Keita, put in place a one-party system with a socialist orientation and strong ties with eastern European countries. He muzzled his political opponents and pursued an economic strategy that never delivered, impoverishing urban and rural areas. The economic hardship, compounded by the exactions committed by his militia, exacerbated social tension. On 19 November 1968, Keita was overthrown by a junta of 14 military officers. He died in 1977 while in detention at the military barracks of Djikoroni Para, in circumstances that remain unexplained to this day. Keita's death triggered demonstrations by students' and teachers' associations calling for a return to civilian rule, which the junta met with violent suppression.

The junta put in place a Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN), led by Lieutenant Moussa Traore, which promised a quick return to civilian rule through free elections. There are indications that the coup was initially backed by the population, predominantly in urban areas. However the police state became increasingly heavy-handed and harassed academics, teachers and activists who criticised the military regime. Most of these critics had to flee the country in order to avoid being deported to the infamous Taoudenni prisons in the Malian Sahara. Taoudenni is a salt mine in the middle of the Sahara desert and is at least 650km by camel trail from the nearest town (see map, previous page).

In 1972-1973 a devastating drought hit Mali. This was followed by a famine that resulted in thousands of deaths, particularly among the pastoral communities in the northern regions. International aid poured in but was quickly misappropriated by members of the junta. The international press criticised the 'Palaces of Drought' built by some junta members in Bamako, but the regime took no measures to investigate the charges or stop the further embezzlement of humanitarian aid.

Traore ruled the country through the junta, but never felt fully secure in his post: he continually accused ex-allies of plotting a coup. The best-known cases are those of Tiecoro Bagayoko and Kissima Doukara, among the 14 officers that conspired to overthrow Keita, who were arrested and died in detention in Taoudenni. However, after 10 years of junta rule marked by a continuing struggle with political opponents and a nascent democracy movement, Traore took steps to secure a semblance of legitimacy. He created a political

party, the Democratic Union of the Malian People (UDPM), called for single-party elections, which he won, and was installed as president in 1979.

The 1979 elections, however, did little to placate students who had become increasingly vocal in their calls for democracy. In 1980, following student demonstrations through Mali's main towns, the student leader Abdoul Karim Camara was arrested and tortured to death. From then on, the hostilities between Traore and the student association of Mali (l'Union des Élèves et Étudiants du Mali) became open and increasingly violent. The regime responded by closing schools and universities for two years. This further affected education levels in Mali, which were already among the lowest in the sub-region.

Still reeling from the adverse impact of the drought and famine, and compounded by the mismanagement of the economy and the national budget, Traore's government asked for a bail-out from the twin institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (IMF/WB). The bitter pill of structural adjustment policies further isolated the regime, perpetuating the economic difficulties the population was facing. The reform of state-owned enterprises, the layoffs in the government sector and the freezing of civil service recruitment led to high unemployment rates in urban areas. Meanwhile, the liberalisation of cereals marketing dealt a crippling blow to investments in the agricultural sector – many producers simply abandoned their businesses to join the ranks of the unemployed.

The situation was further exacerbated by the corruption and impunity of those in power. Allies and elites associated with the regime, particularly the president's immediate family, were protected by the government despite their involvement in financial scandals. Civil society groups emerged and became stronger in their demands for democratic changes and a multi-party system.

In June 1990 in a speech at La Baule, the Franco-African summit, French president Francois Mitterand tied French development aid for its former colonies to democratic reforms. In response, the Traore regime made some improvements, such as allowing the creation of an independent press and independent political associations. Two parties – National Congress for Democratic Initiative (CNID) and Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) – were created. Nevertheless, the momentum to oust Traore had already gathered force. Frequent protests, led by youth and women leaders, called for the resignation of an increasingly despised dictator. The regime reacted violently.

The pioneer 'Arab Spring'

On 22 March 1991, student demonstrations in Bamako were violently shut down, killing hundreds in the process. Four days later, when soldiers were given further orders to shoot, they not only resisted, but remarkably, they turned around and arrested Traore instead. After 23 years in power, Traore had finally been ousted in a military coup. The soldiers who arrested him were led by Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure, who immediately promised multi-party elections within a year. One of Toure's first acts was to create the Transitional Committee for the Welfare of the People (CTSP), which included, in addition to its military members, civil society groups and political associations that formed the democratic movement. The CTSP took charge of governance during the transition period. It presided over the National Conference, which drew up the new constitution and scheduled legislative and presidential elections.

True enough, no new dictatorship was installed – contrary to the trend in other countries where coup plotters further entrench themselves after tasting power. By the end of the transition period new elections had been organised, and in 1992 Alpha Omar Konare became the first democratically-elected president.⁶ Unlike Traore, who had been elected president in 1979 with 99 per cent of the vote, Konare was elected with 69 per cent in the second round. However, within five years he had become unpopular. When he ran for re-election in 1997 he won much fewer votes, despite a boycott of the ballot by the main opposition parties.

Konare assumed power at a time when rebellion and insurgency had broken out in the north of the country. Deeply unhappy with the central government's lack of attention, and unable to secure protection for their economic assets and businesses, many ethnic Touareg communities turned insurgent. Konare managed the conflict by striking deals with the rebel leadership, and agreed to the formation of a state-backed rebel militia together with the integration of rebel units into the national army. But this approach proved to be disastrous. The lack of transparency in forging deals and 'peace agreements' created discontent among the army and the wider populace. The exactions committed by the rebels, the militia and the national army escalated into a humanitarian tragedy that triggered refugee flows to neighbouring countries.

And yet, the early years of Konare's presidency introduced promising reforms, such as the strengthening of a free press, civil society organisations and political parties. More than 100 political parties were legalised and over 4,000 NGOs and associations signed agreements with

the government to undertake development activities.⁷ An institutional decentralisation policy aimed at strengthening local governance and community-based development was adopted in 1992.

This decentralisation paved the way for the emergence of locally-elected governance authorities aimed at promoting local development. This initiative raised many expectations, particularly in rural areas where communities had only ever been administered with top-down, rigid rules since the colonial period. Decentralisation promoted communities' participation in the decision-making process for their own development. Over 703 local entities called 'communes' were created at village or pastoral fractions level. The reform was completed in 1999, following the first free elections at commune, cercle (district) and regional levels. The 703 communes were each led by mayors elected by the municipal council.

Before long, Mali developed a reputation that attracted many donors, which in turn created a boom in the NGO sector. This opened doors to alternative approaches to development that focused on poor and marginalised people in rural areas. Many students graduating from university found employment among the NGOs. A shift in mindset became apparent: whereas young people had previously aspired to work as civil servants and bureaucrats in towns, more of them were now keen to play a key role in the sustainable development of their communities.

Konare's two terms in power saw political parties and civil society organisations determined to act as monitors to counter abuses and prevent setbacks to the democratisation process. Thus, the Coalition of Political Parties of the Opposition (COPPO) was created. COPPO organised demonstrations and sit-ins whenever it appeared that the regime was hijacking the achievements of the 1991 revolution. The student association of Mali became powerful and respected by the population, mainly due to its capacity to mobilise its members and other communities.

Democratisation begins to unravel

As Mali's check-and-balance systems were starting to embed themselves to consolidate democracy even further, a key problem reared its ugly head: corruption in the administration continued to grow. It became almost impossible for people to access public services without paying bribes. The quality of the public infrastructure deteriorated quickly as a result of this corruption by civil servants. And despite the funding of major development

programmes by international financial institutions and bilateral donors, in the areas of education, health and rural development, the impact on poverty eradication was limited.

The situation in schools and universities became desperate, due to the lack of basic infrastructure and a curriculum that was not adapted to the context. All the major reforms undertaken in education failed as a result of mismanagement and the misappropriation of the meagre budget allocated to this sector.

While devolution was certainly welcome, the impact of decentralisation on poverty alleviation remained limited. Illiteracy and the lack of training given to newly-elected authorities handicapped the communes' ability to function. The central government's frequent interference in the communes' decisions discouraged local participation. Moreover, the communes failed to deliver basic services to their communities due to the scarcity of resources. Tensions over the management of lands and other natural resources were rife nationwide. Corruption and the lack of accountability of the commune leaders affected the population's willingness to pay taxes.

In other words, there was no real devolution. Instead, decentralisation was made to serve a political purpose – it was exploited by two successive regimes to nominally demonstrate their commitment to strengthening local governance and empowering citizens. It was sold to citizens as the panacea against the territorial claims of the rebels in the north. But these claims were to be quickly disproven. The involvement of many mayors in land speculation and embezzlement, and the lack of prosecutions against these civic figures, discouraged public support for the decentralisation process. Most importantly, communities started to perceive decentralisation as the government's ploy for escaping its responsibilities to its poor citizens.

The absence of strong leadership for addressing issues of poor governance discouraged private investment in the economy's main sectors: agriculture and gold mining. Land owned by many farmers – particularly in semi-urban areas – was grabbed by the new, arrogant middle-class elites associated with the regime. While Mali became one of the major gold producers in Africa, the industry's impact on the economy was almost negative. Civil society organisations challenged mining companies' poor human rights records, while the judicial system became a tool in the hands of those in power and their associates. In short, the transformational change expected from the 1991 democratic revolution never became a reality.

Food security worsened under Konare's presidency. Mali's chronic malnutrition rate breached the 30 per cent threshold set by the World Health Organisation (WHO), rising to 32.8 per cent. Although food security was supposedly a top priority in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, poor governance in the agricultural sector affected the productivity and revenue of small-scale producers. Some accused the regime of promoting a 'democracy of famine'.

During 2000-2001, in protest against the mismanagement of the cotton marketing board, the association of cotton producers went on strike and called on their members to stop producing cotton, the country's main export crop. Both members and non-members of the association actively supported the strike. The result was a 50 per cent fall in cotton production and a consequent drastic reduction in state revenues earned from its export.

The growing problem of corruption

After two terms and 10 years in office, Konare stepped down in 2002 as stipulated by the constitution. Amadou Toumani Toure became an independent candidate with no political party, following his resignation from the army. He went on to win the elections and made a comeback as a legitimate president in June 2002. One of his first acts was to appoint a prime minister from the Touareg community: Ahmed Mohamed ag Hamani. This reassured minority groups fighting for greater recognition of their identity and economic development for the northern regions. Furthermore, Toure appointed people from different backgrounds as members of his cabinet.

Toure's vision was a 'consensual leadership' with no formal opposition to his regime. Over time, this vision eroded the quality of state decision-making: no real debates took place, 'group think' emerged and only policies explicitly aligned with the president's thinking were considered. The democratic movement that had led the 1991 revolution became increasingly disappointed. This was exacerbated when some top officials from the despised Traore regime were appointed as cabinet members or diplomats in Malian embassies. Despite these criticisms, Toure was very popular, especially among the youth and soldiers. Outside Mali he earned the nickname of 'soldier of democracy'.

To counter the growing problem of corruption, Toure appointed a general auditor to control the management of public services. The general auditor's reports were widely commended by donors and Malian civil society organisations; however, the corruption cases subsequently

discovered by the post-holder went unpunished, especially when the individuals involved in illicit embezzlement were associated with the regime.

Meanwhile, a 'theatre' for managing public opinion was created – those involved were quickly dismissed, but were later quietly re-appointed to other positions, such as chairman or member of the board of a state enterprise. It was only a matter of time before allies and officials of Toure's regime became branded as 'billionaires of democracy' by Malian citizens.

In 2004-2005 another severe food crisis hit Mali, the consequence of a drought and a locust outbreak. Malnutrition levels rocketed among children and other vulnerable groups, particularly in the central and northern regions prone to recurrent crop and pasture failures. The government failed to provide the population with adequate support, despite the donations from bilateral and multilateral donors. Regardless of the fall in his popularity, Toure was re-elected in 2007 for another five years, after a controversial ballot.

As Toure started his second term, hostilities broke out once again with rebel groups in the north. Toure's approach, similar to Konare's, was to negotiate a new peace agreement – but this time under the mediation of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Because Toure was an army general, he was expected to be better at finding sustainable solutions to the northern rebellion. But it appears he was repeatedly out-manoeuvred. Recurrent attacks put the rebels at an advantage in the negotiations. Furthermore, Toure strengthened ties with Libya at the expense of relationships with other neighbours, especially Mauritania and Algeria – countries that were likely to be key actors in any peace deal with the northern rebels.

In 2009, the army and many officials in Bamako were furious when Gaddafi met rebel leaders in the Sahara near Timbouctu, without the presence of a Malian official. This raised suspicions that Gaddafi and Toure had forged a secret deal over the future of northern Mali. The country became increasingly seen as the weak link in the fight against terrorist groups in the Sahel. By late 2011, Toure's handling of the northern insurgency was being widely criticised, particularly within the army.

To summarise, Mali – one of the world's poorest countries – has been crippled by conflict and several natural disasters since its independence in 1960. Nevertheless it has consistently attempted to democratise itself and achieved a

remarkable political victory by ousting a powerful dictator and installing a constitution by 1991. Since that time, it enjoyed a reputation for relative stability, occasionally being described as a model 'low-income democracy'. But there remained serious flaws in its democratisation process – flaws that appear to have been overlooked. Despite over 20 years of formal democratic institutions, the poor and the marginalised continued to lack equitable access to productive assets. Land-grabbing became widespread. Corruption and impunity

by the regime and its allies exacerbated discontent among the poorest and further alienated the youth. Stability in the restive northern regions became elusive.

Consequently, when fighting broke out in the north and a military coup was launched in the capital, few were surprised at Mali's quick descent into chaos – from stable state to fragile state in just a matter of days.

2 MALI'S POLITICAL ECONOMY AND REASONS FOR THE CURRENT CRISIS

As previously stated, a main actor of the 'Malian Spring' of 1991 was Amadou Toumani Toure, an army colonel who disobeyed orders to shoot at students and who instead arrested Moussa Traore. Toure had become very popular – not only in Mali, but also across the continent – when he handed power to a democratically-elected president following a successful transition period, rather than installing a new dictatorship. The majority of Malians welcomed his return to power 10 years later, after living under a Konare regime characterised by corruption, nepotism and insecurity.

Unfortunately, Toure failed to put in place the strong leadership necessary for restoring state authority. He appointed friends and people from his region of origin to control the administration and the economy. For the first time after independence, ethnicity became an issue in Mali. Toure's style of 'leadership based on consensus' was not appropriate for undertaking the structural changes needed to address the country's key challenges. There were no opposition voices in parliament. Mali thus became an irony; although it was widely considered a democratic country, socio-economic conditions continued to worsen, as indicated by the Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Elsewhere, cotton production, for generations the mainstay of the economy, continued to deteriorate. It is estimated that a third of Mali's population is directly or indirectly dependent on cotton production. As Mali's main export crop it contributed about 30 per cent of the country's foreign revenue earnings. Lack of state support as well as the adverse effects of unfair competition from cotton producers in developed and vastly more affluent countries contributed to the crop's steady decline in Mali.

Agricultural adversity and lack of justice for the poor

A key issue that has significantly aggravated Mali's agricultural problems is the lack of land tenure security: a problem with many root causes. Traditionally, women cannot own land, while migrant populations have virtually no access to land ownership. Meanwhile, there is a long-running conflict between customary land tenure practices and western concepts of state ownership of land, inherited chiefly from the French. One such concept is the state's right to expropriate land from traditional holders, even titleholders if necessary. The government has exercised this right by leasing or allocating large blocks of land to agro-investors, particularly within the Office du Niger (ON) zone.

Many of the smallholders directly affected see these land deals not as public investments, but as 'land grabs' that directly threaten their food security and livelihoods. They attribute many of the decisions taken to corruption. Indeed, little has been done to ensure that displaced families are properly compensated. The main wound of Toure's regime has been the lack of justice for the poor: each day saw individuals and families deprived of their lands with no right to appeal.

A case in point is Malibya Agriculture, a Libyan company that obtained 100,000 hectares of irrigated land around the town of Macina to produce rice and other agricultural products, all of which were to be exported back to Libya. A bilateral investment agreement for an initial 50-year period was signed in June 2009, renewable for another 99 years. Malibya won generous terms, including unrestricted access to water; rights of exploitation to surface sand, gravel and stone for construction purposes; exemption from the land tax; and no obligation to hire employees locally or sell its produce locally. When construction work on a water canal began in 2009, this triggered clashes between the company and local villagers whose croplands and communal properties (including a cemetery) were destroyed, uprooted or expropriated. Clashes also erupted between company security and cattle breeders forced from their traditional routes and grazing areas.⁸

A USAID Land Tenure Assessment Report concludes that the lack of land tenure security 'limits the willingness of small-scale producers and agro-investors to invest in expanding and intensifying agricultural production'. Violent clashes rooted in land tenure issues had also risen to alarming levels, even before 2012. Consequently, it is evident that there has been a policy failure on land tenure security – a key reason underlying the overall public apathy towards the events of March 2012.

With agricultural policy becoming increasingly bogged down, gold has since become Mali's main revenue earner. The country is Africa's third-biggest gold producer (after South Africa and Ghana), producing 52.4 tonnes in 2010.⁹ This accounts for 15 per cent of Mali's GDP and up to 70 per cent of foreign revenue earnings.¹⁰ In fact, the gold industry enjoys a fairly strategic role in the country. For example, an American Peace Corps volunteer reported that on his arrival in the country, the immigration landing card he filled out did not bear the emblem of Mali's border authorities, but instead, the name of gold mining company AngloGold Ashanti written 'in big gold letters'.¹¹

Sadly, gold mining delivers more benefits to the multinational companies operating in the field than to Mali's population at large. For most gold mines, the government of Mali is only a minority owner and its capacity to monitor production and profits, and thus draw much-needed revenues, appears to be severely lacking. What's more, it is difficult to draw conclusions on profits being made in the mining industry. For example AngloGold Ashanti, like many multinationals, routinely uses tax havens, making actual profits (or real losses) difficult to establish.¹² Many of the company's subsidiaries and joint ventures were originally incorporated in the British Virgin Islands or the Isle of Man.¹³ On the company's website, the 2009 information for investors showed that three of its five principal subsidiaries were incorporated in the British Virgin Islands (AngloGold Offshore Investments Ltd) and the Isle of Man (AngloGold Ashanti Holdings Plc and AngloGold Ashanti Holdings Finance Plc).¹⁴

One coping mechanism ordinary Malians have adopted, as a means of dealing with the poverty and lack of productivity, is to emigrate to work in 'greener pastures'. Although this delivers short-term cash, it cripples Mali's long-term agricultural productivity. Most of those who migrate are young men: their departure leaves their communities deprived of productive labour, with predominantly women and children left to work in the fields. The most heavily-affected areas are the western region of Kayes and the northern regions, from which many Touareg youths migrated to Libya to work as armed guards for Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

Consequently, when the Gaddafi regime collapsed in 2011, many of these men came back armed, forced to return to a country where jobs and trades could scarcely be found. The parents of some of these young men left Mali a long time ago, while others were ex-fighters in past rebellions in the north. Surprisingly, Toure welcomed their return with their weapons, ignoring all warnings from France, the USA and other heads of states. These armed men simply sent a delegation to Bamako and promised loyalty to the regime. In return, the minister of territorial administration travelled to the north to meet them, and inspected their impressive military equipment. But no move to disarm them was even considered. In contrast, other neighbouring countries like Niger made sure that their own Touaregs returning from Libya were disarmed.

The crisis deepens

Over the past 50 years, the different Malian regimes have failed to capitalise on the lessons from past rebellions in the north. Instead of developing policies leading to a sustainable solution to the problem, they have relied on

external mediation or simply on corrupting the heads of the different rebel movements. The government has faced Touareg rebellions at least three times since independence: 1963-1964, 1990-1996 and 2006-2009. But these were resolved 'with a combination of military might and negotiated concessions'.¹⁵

In October 2011, the newly-returned well-armed soldiers created the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). The movement received little attention, despite evidence that it was already building tactical alliances with the Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and a new fundamentalist militia, the Ansar Dine. The inattention given to this clearly imminent threat merely confirms that northern Mali has increasingly been abandoned by the government and its donors, leading to a 'policy failure of significant proportions'.¹⁶

Another crippling policy failure was the string of corruption scandals that rocked Bamako in 2010-2011, chiefly surrounding the embezzlement of aid and bribes made by foreign firms. These scandals have been ignored by the regime. The most high-profile scandal involved Oumar Ibrahima Toure (no relation to the president), who was the Minister of Health and leader of one of the main parties supporting the regime. He was forced to resign in 2010 after an internal investigation by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis found that US\$4m had been stolen from its grants to Mali. Donors eventually suspended their contributions to the Global Fund.

As unemployment among the youth increased sharply, it became nearly impossible to get access to public employment without bribes or a connection with the regime. To get recruited into the army, the police or gendarmerie, one must have a relative who is a general or colonel. This explains the lack of professionalism in the army, where the bulk of officers are relatives of people associated with the regime. The same system has prevailed in the administration of justice and the law.

Towards the end of 2011, the situation began to boil. The lack of leadership in addressing the emerging armed challenges in the north – from Azawad secessionists and Islamist extremists, to criminal smugglers of various forms – further weakened the state. Instead of facing the threats squarely, the opposition was muzzled, and no contrary opinions or views were allowed in parliament. Thus, when mutinous soldiers made their move on the 21st anniversary of Mali's 'March Revolution', few were surprised; it took just a few days for the country's democratic structures to crumble while its people simply stood and watched.

It is ironic that as soon as the military junta took over, almost immediately it lost the very area it had claimed it could better secure. In the absence of a constitutional government in Bamako, rebels in the north proclaimed independence for a new 'Republic of Azawad'. The coup, as well as the independence proclamation, quickly drew widespread international condemnation. Sanctions were immediately imposed by ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States), but this did more to hurt the poor in their

already fragile economic condition than to discipline the mutinous soldiers or force the rebels to the bargaining table.

Despite efforts to reinstall constitutional order quickly, it is quite clear that the political crisis deepened. Now, a humanitarian disaster looms. Like neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire – the once acknowledged 'capital' of west Africa that quickly descended into conflict – Mali has similarly transformed swiftly from a stable state to a fragile state.

3 ANALYSIS – AN 'ARAB SPRING' HIJACKED

This report is an attempt to provide answers to the question of what development agencies like Christian Aid ought to do, for the short-term and the long-term, in situations where the local democracy does not work for poor communities in places such as Mali.

Mali is one of the world's poorest countries. Geographically-speaking it is west Africa's largest nation, with a land area of 1,240,278km² – two-thirds of which is arid desert, with the rest made up of semi-tropical fertile plains along the Niger River and its tributaries. As a landlocked country, its nearest foreign port is in Cote d'Ivoire, approximately 1,000km from the Malian capital, Bamako.

In 2010 Mali's population was estimated to be just over 15 million,¹⁷ an estimated two-thirds of whom live on less than a dollar a day. The country has twice suffered a major drought and famine, in 1973-1974 and again in 1984-1985, which has significantly slowed its development. Even today, the impact of these disasters is still widely evident: Mali is a major victim of climate change.

In 1950, Mali's annual average rainfall was 772.9mm. This had fallen to 594.6mm by 2002, a drop of 23 per cent in over 50 years. This level of decline is disastrous for a country in which agriculture accounts for 41 per cent of GDP and where up to 80 per cent of the population depend on the rural sector for their livelihoods. Needless to say, desertification is proceeding at an alarming rate, leaving thousands of hectares unproductive for crop production each year. As a result, Mali continues to be heavily dependent on foreign aid for its development.

In light of these conditions, Christian Aid has sought to 'equip and empower greater numbers of poor and marginalised people to protect and claim their rights to the resources and assets essential for a secure livelihood'.¹⁸ Christian Aid first became active in Mali in 1973-1974, in response to the severe drought and famine that destroyed much of the country's productivity at the time. Christian Aid supported communities in the most vulnerable regions in setting up mitigating measures for the food crisis, and later on went to support wider initiatives and projects for longer-term food security. An office was set up in Bamako in 1996, and from that time more advocacy initiatives were launched. For example, Malian partner organisations played a vital role in Christian Aid's global debt relief campaign.

Over the years, a wider, more strategic plan for the Sahel, not just Mali, developed. Slowly, gains began to accumulate. Marginalised producers and landless producers were able to earn a higher value from their produce. They started to

learn how to formally acquire land and access not only water, but also credit facilities and the wider market. Areas with desertification and degradation problems were identified and measures were put in place to halt the process. Links with actors who had knowledge of climate science were established. Women became increasingly visible, and their voices heard.

However, it became quite clear that livelihoods could not be secured and the gains could easily be reversed if Mali failed to complete its journey towards democratisation. But the system put in place by President Amadou Toumani Toure and his allies, which they called a 'consensus', was not democracy at all. Rather, it was a system of patronage to co-opt the leadership of the various parties and muzzle any opposition.

As explained by the former editor of a French academic journal, Roland Marchal, Toure's approach was a way of managing the political arena in a more subtle yet effective way, whereby any public debate on governance and corruption is pre-empted. The outcome, Marchal points out, 'was more a democratic stagnation than a real taking root of democratic practices and institutions in the country'.¹⁹ He emphasises that there was a serious discrepancy between the public image of Mali that was cultivated and the reality that prevailed on the ground.

In other words, what was achieved was more the construction of a façade, rather than the real substance of democracy. Marchal explains that this patronage system that undermined democracy in Mali 'was made possible by the increasing criminalisation of the ruling elites, including the military'. The first step in this criminalisation was wanton engagement in corruption, which later 'branched out' to the lucrative drug smuggling business.

More than corruption, 'allegations about drug trafficking have been numerous in the Malian free media, and have systematically targeted the former president's inner circle', Marchal points out.²⁰ In 2009, a cargo plane that appeared to have originated from Venezuela crashed after taking off from a remote airstrip in the town of Gao in northern Mali. UN investigators were surprised at the size of the aircraft, which had been emptied of its cargo and burned to remove evidence. They believe the aircraft could have been carrying up to 10 tons of cocaine, which can fetch a wholesale street value of US\$330m in the streets of Chicago.²¹ The implication is that an operation of this sort could not have proceeded without high-level complicity, and it is the only main case that is known of, simply because the aircraft crashed.

The limits of Africa's democratisation processes

Mali therefore emerges as a case study for understanding the limits of current democratisation processes in Africa, particularly the failure to bring about social justice and relative levels of economic prosperity, especially to those who are already marginalised. What has been demonstrated in this report is that after more than two decades of formal democratisation, the poorest and most marginalised communities in Mali still do not have an effective political voice in state policy-making and decision-making. In other words, democracy has existed in form but not in substance – as evidenced by the glaring inequality in the access to productive assets, the failure of decentralisation and the general neglect of the northern communities.

Moreover, the links between state institutions and local communities remain tenuous. For example, it remains difficult for local communities to discuss their problems and secure action from their political leaders. Moderate traditional community leaders, with whom humanitarian or development workers have nurtured working relationships, are increasingly being marginalised. Their ability to facilitate

agreements in a community that once sought their guidance and judgement is being shaken by the takeover of other political powers – such as non-state armed groups and organised criminals – who overrule traditional leadership.

In this vastly changed environment, Christian Aid may need to consider a new engagement strategy with emergent key actors. For example, the organisation may want to look into engagement with entrepreneurs and traders who may have better links with communities in the north. It can also look more seriously at the role of markets: can they become places where people divided by conflict meet, interact, develop trust and build firmer relationships over time? But perhaps more urgently, Christian Aid may also need to look at how future humanitarian programmes can be designed to strengthen local democratic structures and, in doing so, improve chances that democracy will work for the poor over the longer term.

Mali's slide into fragility and conflict needs to be arrested – and the best way to do this is to return to the original plan of genuine democratisation, before it was hijacked and transformed by a corrupt and criminal elite.

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mali is experiencing its most difficult and challenging period since its independence in 1960. The country is now divided into two entities: the north and the south. Up to 60 per cent of the country is currently under the control of separatists and terrorists of different origins – Ansar Dine, Mujao, AQIM and others – all espousing a form of religious extremism and all involved in illicit trans-Saharan trades.

The insecurity in the northern regions is a major threat to any humanitarian and development work. More than 300,000 people have moved southwards of the country or to neighbouring countries as refugees. The human cost of this situation is alarming. The poorest and the elderly who have remained in their villages are waiting for some support from humanitarian agencies, but many of these agencies have already left the region. At the same time, politicians from the African Union and ECOWAS are constantly meeting and talking without reaching any compromises aimed at alleviating the plight of the population.

The control by extremist groups of Koranic schools and madrassahs in the occupied towns of Gao, Kidal and Timbouctu is likely to develop a form of Islamic fundamentalism that can embed intolerance and could soon destabilise the whole region. Many of the youth have already started to attend rebel training centres in order to receive financial support from Ansar Dine. Well-intentioned financial and logistical support from countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar are being subverted by local jihadists, to take advantage of the economic hardships and attract a wider following. In short, it is not far-fetched to anticipate that northern Mali could one day become another Afghanistan. The best solution to extremism is still democratisation and development, which can be made more possible by intensifying solidarity with the people of Mali.

Christian Aid has now been operating in Mali for nearly 40 years and has played a key role in this democratisation and development. With the country's current crisis, Christian Aid needs not only to continue its work, but also to become more ambitious in expanding its track record. Among other things, Christian Aid has already developed a track record in Mali by:

- supporting the emergence of a strong civil society in the country, through capacity development and the financing of development projects
- promoting ecumenism, tolerance and continued dialogue among the different faiths

- raising community leaders' awareness of gender and environmental issues and, consequently, supporting the improvement in their degree of participation in relevant decision-making
- supporting partners, particularly women and youth groups, in influencing the budget allocation of their communes in the framework of the decentralisation process
- addressing issues of adaptation to climate change, access of the poor to low-cost energy, and empowering women in markets.

Christian Aid must now build its ambition in national advocacy, in the same way that it influenced the government's 2005 decision to declare a state of food crisis in Mali – a decision that paved the way for an increase in the national stock of cereals and the implementation of food and nutrition programmes in the most affected regions, thus saving lives.

It is important to take a holistic approach to the development of northern Mali. Security should be the primary goal of the new government, to permit the return of the displaced population and humanitarian agencies. With the support of donors, special development funds for the northern regions should be put in place and managed by an independent agency. This should prevent any misallocation of the resources for this programme. Specific efforts need to be deployed to rebuild the harmony between different ethnic groups. Unlike many other African countries, such inter-ethnic harmony was once the strength of Malian society.

Learning from the recent events in Mali, Christian Aid should put more emphasis on integrating governance issues into its humanitarian and development programmes. Finally, the organisation's Strategic Change Objective aimed at 'tackling violence, building peace' – an objective that forms part of the new corporate strategy – can play a key role in achieving a genuine 'partnership for change' in the current context in Mali.

ENDNOTES

1 See for example Nigel Inkster and Virginia Comolli, *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States: The Problems of Prohibition*, Routledge, 2012.

2 Details are sketchy, but see aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/02/20122416445129368.html and af.reuters.com/article/maliNews/idAFL5E8D8A0G20120209?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0&sp=true

3 It was reported that at least 82 soldiers were summarily executed in the town of Aguelhok on 24 January, 2012. See 'Mali says soldiers, civilians executed during Tuareg clashes,' ReliefWeb, 13 February 2012, reliefweb.int/node/476532

4 Mali's media has a reputation for being one of the freest in Africa. Reporters Without Borders has consistently rated it as having a free press. See *Press Freedom Index 2011/2012*, en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html

5 Economic growth figures were calculated using World Development Indicators. Nicolas Van de Walle, *Foreign Aid in Dangerous Places: The donors and Mali's democracy, 2012, p4*, wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/2012/en_GB/wp2012-061_files/87875839275958330/default/wp2012-061.pdf

6 For more on Mali's transition to democracy, see Richard Vengroff, 'Governance and the Transition to Democracy: Political Parties and the Party System in Mali,' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 4 (31), pp541-562, December 1993; and Jamie Bleck, *Countries at the Crossroads: Mali*, Freedom House, 2011, freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/MALIFINAL.pdf

7 Sources for these figures include: www.matcl.gov.ml/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=143&Itemid=95 and also: www.matcl.gov.ml/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=71

8 For full details, see USAID, *Mali Land Tenure Assessment Report*, September 2010, aec.msu.edu/fs2/promisam_2/references/ARD_2010_Mali_Land_Tenure_Assessment.pdf

9 Gold has enjoyed high prices in recent years. In 2010, it was selling for just about US\$1,000 per ounce. This means that Mali's production of 52.4 tonnes would be valued at roughly US\$1.68bn. The same production levels today, when gold is worth over \$1,500 per ounce, would potentially give Mali US\$2.7bn in gross revenues.

10 Reuters, 'Mali to raise gold production 52.4 tonnes in 2010', December 2009, af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJOE5BL01520091222

11 The Peace Corps volunteer was Timothy Rodriguez, who gives an account of this in his paper, 'Activist Commentary: International Development – An Account From Mali', *Peace Studies Journal*, May 2012, peaceconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Rodriguez-Pp.-97-106.pdf

12 AngloGold Ashanti, the third-biggest mining company in the world, is in joint ventures, owning a 40-41 per cent stake in three gold mines in Mali (Morila, Sadiola and Yatela), while the government has an 18-20 per cent stake. The other owners are Randgold and IAMgold. In its 2011 financial reports, AngloGold reports having production costs of US\$863 and US\$830 per ounce of gold produced in Morila and Sadiola respectively – this equates to a profit, since gold was selling at US\$1,500 per ounce. However, it reports production costs of US\$1,623 per ounce produced in Yatela, meaning it was operating at a loss (see www.aga-reports.com/11/financial-statements/review-of-operations/continental-africa/mali). It could not be ascertained, however, whether other company subsidiaries that did business with these three mines posted profits, as they are incorporated in secrecy jurisdictions.

13 www.anglogold.co.za/subwebs/InformationForInvestors/AnnualReport00/report/Inv_psjv.htm

14 www.anglogold.com/subwebs/InformationForInvestors/AnnualReport09/subsidiaries.htm

15 See note 5

16 See note 5, p3.

17 More on Mali's background and description as a country is available from *Christian Aid Mali CPSP (Country Policy and Strategy Paper)*, 2006-2010.

18 See Christian Aid's strategic framework for 2010-2012: *Turning Hope Into Action: A vision of a world free from poverty*, Christian Aid, 2009

19 Roland Marchal, *The Coup in Mali: The result of a long-term crisis or spillover from the Libyan civil war?*, NOREF Report, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, May 2012, peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/3a582f1883e8809a0e18cd2d58a09a81.pdf

20 Ibid, p2.

21 'Sahara Cocaine Plane Crash Probed', November 2009, bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8364383.stm



UK registered charity number 1105851 Company number 5171525
 Scotland charity number SC039150
 Northern Ireland charity number XR94639 Company number NI059154
 Republic of Ireland charity number CHY 6998 Company number 426928

The Christian Aid name and logo are trademarks of Christian Aid.
 © Christian Aid September 2012 13-474-J642