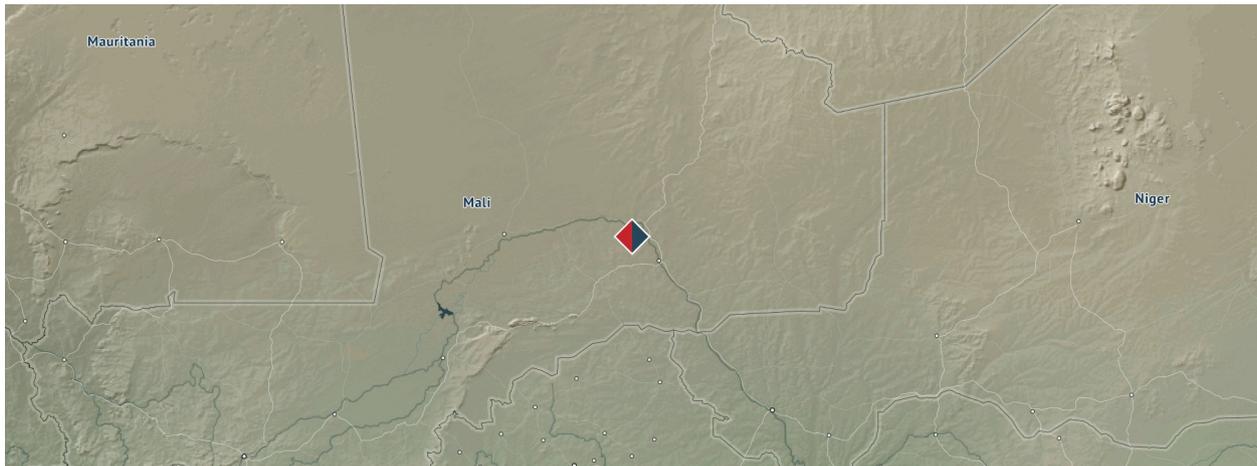




## Conflict Factsheet

### Climatic change, fragility and conflict in northern Mali

Type of conflict <b>Main</b>	Intensity <b>4</b>
Conflict Locality <b>Western Africa</b>	Time <b>2012 –ongoing</b>
Countries <b>Mali</b>	Resources <b>Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water</b>



Local resource  
competition



Livelihood  
insecurity  
and migration



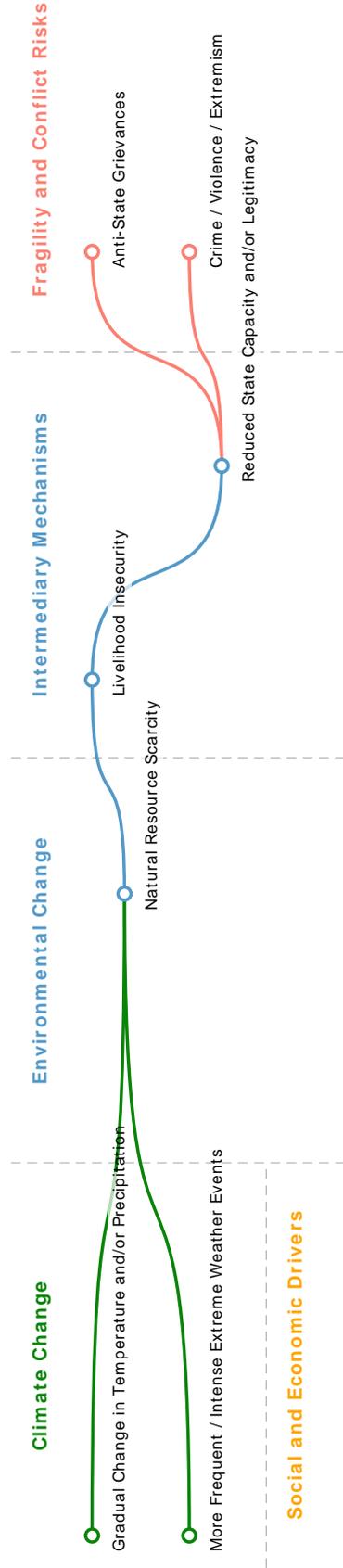
Extreme  
weather  
events and  
disasters

### Conflict Summary

Progressive warming and frequent droughts have aggravated an already complicated security situation in northern Mali. Despite a recent agreement with northern rebel groups and the presence of a sizeable peacekeeping force, communal tensions remain and radical Islamist groups continue to be a major threat to the region.



### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Food Insecurity  
Water-stressed Area

Eroded Social Contract  
History of Conflict  
Political Marginalization  
Political Transition  
Proliferation of Weapons  
Unresponsive Government



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## Conflict History

Mali is currently facing multiple and intertwined security challenges. From 2012 to 2015 a separatist rebellion spearheaded by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) shook the northern part of the country. After the intervention of the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Algeria and France, a peace agreement between the northern rebels and the Malian government was reached in June 2015. However, a number of violent incidents have occurred since, involving various non-state armed groups, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), as well as the G5 Sahel joint force and the government of Mali (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017a; Sieff, 2017), leading also to wide-spread suffering for civilians (MINUSMA, 2018). Moreover, conflict recently spread to the centre of the country as insurgent groups have moved south to the Mopti region (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017b).

Communal tensions in northern Mali - which were partly responsible for the 2012 uprising – remain and many of the underlying tensions between northern and southern Mali - in particular important gaps in development and access to essential services - are yet to be addressed (c.f. Davis, 2014; Rüttinger et al., 2015:31; Lorentzen, 2017).

Meanwhile, and partly in connection with the above conflict, and conflicts in neighbouring Algeria and Libya, northern Mali has evolved into a sanctuary for traffickers, bandits and radical Islamist organizations such as the Al-Qaeda affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (Benjaminsen & Boubacar, 2019), despite the presence of sizeable peacekeeping force and French troops, as well as the deployment of the anti-terror and anti-trafficking G5 Sahel joint force on Malian soil. The ongoing violence represents a serious threat to the country's security and risks to delay the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement (UN, 2016; Stigall, 2015; Ahmed, 2016). These threats arose after a serious legitimacy crisis in Mali's leadership and institutions. In March 2012, then-president Amadou Toumani Touré was overthrown in a military coup led by Captain Amadou Sanogo. He was followed by Ibrahim Boubacar Keita who won the election in 2013 and in 2018. However, after both elections, the opposition refused to accept the results. The latter was heavily influenced by violence, with up to 20 per cent of the polling stations affected and three percent having to close down completely (Deutsche Welle, 2018).

### Unstable neighbours, inner crisis and environmental change

The origins of this situation can be traced back to the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, leading to a massive influx of weapons and returning Tuareg combatants from Libya. Mali's leadership was gradually weakened, eventually culminating in the 2012 coup against Amadou Toumani Touré (Larémont, 2013; Jalali, 2013). Tensions between the North and the South have a long history and brought about four rebellions over the timespan of about 50 years (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017a). The most recent coup in 2012 followed a period, in which Touré allegedly supported AQIM in a bid to suppress mounting irredentism in the north (ibid.). However, the strategy backfired. Not only did it undermine northerners' trust in the government thus benefitting the separatist MNLA, but it also eroded Touré's support within the armed forces and more generally within the Malian population. Moreover, absent strong sanctions, AQIM and other terrorist groups were able to extend their influence in northern Mali (Bakrania, 2013; Welsh, 2012).



A further important and often overlooked factor behind the Malian crisis is climatic change. Mali and in particular its northern regions are suffering from the combined effect of progressive warming and increasingly erratic weather conditions, leading to intermittent and severe drought conditions, which accentuate existing grievances and enhance support for rebel and terrorist groups.

### **Changing climatic conditions exacerbate northern grievances**

Years of government neglect and lack of investments have left northern Mali with insufficient infrastructures and poor access to essential services. Socioeconomic indicators such as school attendance and malnutrition rank well below the country's average (Bakrania, 2013). In northern towns such as Gao and Timbuktu three times as many people live below the poverty line, when compared to the capital Bamako (Davis, 2014). Economic marginalisation in the north is also accompanied by political exclusion and the alienation of pastoral land, which have informed strong anti-state grievances among nomadic Tuareg and Fulani communities (see also [Tuareg Rebellion in Mali 1990-1995](#)).

Moreover, poverty and political exclusion have made northern Mali particularly vulnerable to progressive warming and increasingly frequent droughts (de Sherbinin et al., 2014). Since 1960, and partly as a result of anthropogenic climate change, temperatures in Mali have risen by 0.7°C (Goulden & Few, 2011; Niang et al., 2014). In the Sahelian centre of the country, a shift in rainfall patterns between 1970 and 2000 has led to a severe reduction of years in which crop production is possible, from which herders in the region have not been able to recover since (Gawthrop, 2017). At the same time, various sources indicate an increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts, with disastrous consequences for farmers and pastoralists in northern Mali (Arsenault, 2015; weAdapt, 2016; EMDAT, 2016; c.f. (Hartmann et al, 2013). These developments have not only exacerbated inequalities between north and south, but have also made northern populations brutally aware of the south's disengagement and thus increased support for separatist groups such as the MNLA (Lecocq & Belalimat, 2012; Bakrania, 2013; Morgan, 2014).

### **Droughts, destitution and 'food for jihad'**

Besides increasing support for northern irredentism, droughts and worsening ecological conditions also facilitated the recruitment of fighters by both separatist and Islamist armed groups (Morgan, 2014). As explained by a senior adviser to the Malian ministry of agriculture 'there is such poverty [in the north], the environment is so tough, that when the jihadists come they find it easy to get followers' (Arsenault, 2015). Indeed, lacking economic alternatives and seeing their livelihoods threatened by drought, environmental degradation and intermittent conflict, many young northerners seek employment and security with armed extremist groups (Davis 2014; Welsh, 2012). In other cases drought-induced hardships encourage criminal activities, such as smuggling, banditry and kidnapping, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of insecurity and further deteriorated livelihoods (Bakrania, 2013; Lecocq & Belalimat, 2012).

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## **Resolution Efforts**

The security crisis in northern Mali has prompted a number of responses from civil society organisations, the Malian government as well as the international community. Negotiations between separatist rebels spearheaded by the MNLA and the government of Mali led to an agreement in June 2015, which grants northern Mali more autonomy, a better representation in national institutions and more significant development resources. Further points of the accord are the demobilisation of rebel fighters and their



integration into the regular armed forces, as well as the progressive transfer of territorial control to the Malian army, while conceding local authorities the control over local police forces (Ahmed, 2014; Le Touzet, 2015; RFI, 2015a). In accordance with these provisions two major milestones were reached in 2017. First, a joint patrol between government forces, pro-government groups and rebels was established for the first time. Second, interim authorities were installed in Northern regions after an agreement was reached on their composition (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017a).

Despite some successes problems are manifold: Implementation of the 2015 agreement generally lags behind and violence and human rights abuses continue to be widespread (MINUSMA, 2018; Boutellis & Zahar, 2017a; Lorentzen, 2017). Agreements between northern separatists and the government in Bamako were reached both in 2006 and 2013, but since failed, due to slow implementation, the erosion of government credibility and conflicts of interest between different rebel factions (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015). In the short-term it is thus urgent to rapidly advance on the provisions of the 2015 agreement. In the medium-to-long-term, the government of Mali and its partners need to address northern communities' needs for security, prosperity and political participation.

#### **Rebuilding trust in the government and the army**

Past political crises have undermined the credibility of the Malian government. In particular corruption and clientelism have compromised political and economic reforms, while also preventing the formation of a meaningful political opposition (Davis, 2014; Crisis group, 2012). Increasing parliamentary oversight and extending the powers of parliamentary commissions could not only promote necessary reforms but also rebuild trust in the state and its institutions (Davis, 2014).

Central and local government structures could further increase their legitimacy by working more closely with traditional systems of governance and conflict resolution. To this effect, skills and financial resources need to be transferred from central to local government structures (Davis, 2014).

Most importantly, mistrust in the Malian army - which many northerners still consider as an 'occupying force' - needs to be addressed (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015). Indiscipline, varying loyalties, inefficiency, collusion with traffickers and serious human rights violations have tainted the image of Mali's security forces (Davis, 2014; MINUSMA, 2018). To rebuild trust in the armed forces, the government tries to reorganise its military command structure (Bakrania, 2013) and integrate ex-rebel fighters, a central point of the 2015 agreement (Roger, 2015). In addition, a 2014 executive order establishes the 'Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission'.

On the one hand, the Commission has been criticised for lacking legitimacy due the exclusion of important stakeholders and victims (Human Rights Watch, 2017). On the other hand, the establishment alone and the fast progress in creating internal structures and a general strategy have been hailed as a success (The International Center for Transitional Justice, 2016; MINUSMA, 2018).

#### **Economic development and climate change adaptation**

Revitalising the Malian economy and providing economic alternatives to northern communities are a further important step in curbing trafficking, crime and the influence of terrorists in northern Mali (Bakrania, 2013). After regaining its pre-crisis level, GDP growth recently slowed, but the economic outlook remains positive. The government of Mali has laid out various plans to spur socio-economic development: A special program, the Programme de Développement Accéléré des Régions du Nord (PDA/RN), is dedicated to northern Mali, in order to accelerate the implementation of local development projects (OECD, 2015).



In addition, in 2016 the government presented its development strategy *Cadre stratégique pour la relance économique et le développement durable (CREDD)*, which functions as a guideline to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d.).

However, the success of most efforts remains below expectations: The rapid growth of the workforce has surpassed efforts to create new jobs, educational reforms, so far, yield disappointing results, infrastructural development has been delayed due to limited financial and implementation capacities, and the expansion of cultivated surfaces is hampered by limited access to agricultural inputs and modern irrigation techniques (OECD, 2015; Davis, 2014). Consequently, need for humanitarian assistance is still widespread, especially in the north and food insecurity due to conflict and weather dependency remains a major problem in Mali (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018).

Given northern Mali's high vulnerability to progressive warming and extreme weather events and the links of these phenomena to security, particular attention needs to be given to climate change adaptation. Mali has completed its National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2007, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The programme has raised the awareness of climate change and existing adaptation measures within the government and among the population (Watts, 2012; weAdapt, 2016). Furthermore, USAID is working on an extensive climate information dissemination programme in cooperation with the Malian national meteorological agency (see USAID, 2014). However, local communities and local governments have not been sufficiently included in the NAPA, which makes it difficult to integrate and coordinate existing community-level adaptation strategies (Watts, 2012). Moreover, to increase food security and thereby reduce extremists' recruitments, there is a need to further diversify livelihoods into activities that are resilient to climate change (Giannini, 2017).

#### **Successes and limitations of international responses**

Under the aegis of Algeria, mediation efforts between the government of Mali and northern armed groups have included the African Union (AU), the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger and Chad (Bertrand, 2015). Moreover, ECOWAS has played a leading part in mediating the political transition after the 2012 coup and preparing the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) – replaced by MINUSMA) in July 2013 (Bakrania, 2013; UN, 2016). In January 2013, France launched a large military offensive against northern armed groups (Opération Serval), which, in July 2014, transitioned into a more durable counter-terrorism operation comprising the Sahel countries Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (Opération Barkhane) (Stigall, 2015). These responses have been accompanied by humanitarian actions and capacity building with a particular emphasis on strengthening Mali and other Sahel-countries against the double threat of terrorism and food insecurity (see Bakrania, 2013; EU, 2015).

These measures have facilitated presidential elections in 2013, eased a settlement with the northern rebels and brought most of the country back under Malian control (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015; Stigall, 2015). However, the international involvement in Mali has also been criticised for being biased, lacking coordination and upholding the power of a discredited political elite (Oluwadare, 2014; Théroux-Bénoni, 2013; Samba Kane, 2014). In particular the efforts of ECOWAS's lead mediator and Burkinabe president Blaise Compaoré after the 2012 coup have been qualified as 'chaotic and unilateral' (Bakrania, 2013), while



the french Opération Serval has been accused of exacerbating communal tensions in northern Mali (Davis, 2014).

### **Remaining challenges**

Despite notable progress, the situation in northern Mali remains fragile and the implementation of the peace agreement has lagged behind (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017a). In addition, the fragmentation and reorganization of non-state armed groups has led to new difficulties. Although, they are not signatories of the 2015 peace agreements, new groups have belatedly demanded involvement in the process and do not shy away from using violence to enforce their argument (ibid.). Moreover, traffickers and terrorist groups are still active in the hinterland and maintain working relationships with some of the signatories of the 2015 agreement (Ahmed, 2016; Roger, 2015).

Due to a strong emphasis on combatting terrorist groups, ethnic tensions between northern communities have not been addressed. Short-sighted counter-terrorism actions might even exacerbate these tensions in the longer term (Davis, 2014). It is also claimed that women have not been adequately involved in the negotiation and implementation process of the peace agreement, making it more difficult to attain sustainable peace (Lorentzen, 2017). Finally, the 2015 agreement foresees more autonomous institutions for northern Mali, but these are yet not well equipped to include minorities such as the Tuareg and could thus encourage new conflicts in the future.

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### Intensities & Influences



#### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



#### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Regional



Mass displacement

More than 100.000 or more than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.



Cross Border Mass Displacement

Best estimate that more than 100.000 or more than 10% of country population are displaced across borders.



### Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.

Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.

Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.



## **Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building**



**Disarmament, demobilisation & reintegration** 2

Part of the negotiations for the 2015 agreement included the demobilisation of rebel fighters and their integration into the armed forces. The creation of a joint patrol between government forces, pro-government groups and rebels further contributes to de-escalation.

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**Mediation & arbitration** 2

The government of Mali and northern armed groups have received mediation assistance from Algeria, the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations (UN), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. Even though these efforts have been relatively successful, international involvement has been criticised for being biased, lacking coordination and maintaining a discredited political elite in power.

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**Treaty/agreement** 3

An agreement between separatist rebels and the government of Mali was reached in 2015, granting northern Mali more autonomy, a better political representation, and more significant development resources. However, the implementation of this ambitious plan is largely lagging behind.

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**Social inclusion & empowerment** 1

The Malian government has implemented the Programme de Développement Accéléré des Régions du Nord (PDA/RN), with the aim of accelerating the implementation of local development projects in northern Mali. However, the success of these efforts remains below expectations.

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**Transitional justice** 2

Rapid progress has been made in the structural composition of the 'Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission' which was introduced in 2014. It is now necessary to overcome problems of legitimacy by better including conflict victims and reaching out to more stakeholders on future developments of the Commission.

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**Changes in constitutional balance of power** 0

In order to increase the legitimacy of the state and its institutions, the powers of parliamentary commissions could be extended, and the parliamentary oversight could be increased. Skills and financial resources could also be transferred from central to local government structures in order to work more closely with traditional systems of governance, and improve the legitimacy of the state.

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**Improving actionable information** 2

USAID is working on an extensive climate information dissemination programme in cooperation with the Malian national meteorological agency.

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**Coping with uncertainty** 2

Mali completed its National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2007



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