

Climate Change and (In)Security Project Briefing Note

Resource Scarcity is Not Driving Conflict in Mali – but its Impacts on Human Security Are

Maliens are acutely feeling the impacts of climate change. In a country where most food production is via rain-fed agriculture, changes in precipitation have devastating impacts. Farming yields plummet, cattle die, and wells dry up. Some have started to link climate change and resource scarcity with conflict. This briefing note argues that climate change is not exacerbating the conflict through scarcity, but it is through its impact on human security. Interventions should therefore focus on stimulating sustainable economic growth, which can not only increase human security, but also make Mali more resilient to climate change.

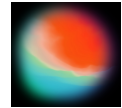
Climate Change and Resource Scarcity

It is a frequent and perhaps intuitive discourse that climate change induced resource scarcity creates conflict in Mali (ICRC 2019). Higher temperatures and drought decrease water access, causing competition between user groups. Some point towards violent farmer herder clashes as a demonstration of that – whereby the livestock of pastoralists encroach onto the farmland of sedentary farmers. This conclusion also appears supported by the apparent agricultural priorities of different ethnic groups (BBC 2019; ICRC 2019). Farmer-herder clashes are most common in the centre of the country, where the traditionally pastoralist Fulani and the hunter-farmer Dogon ethnicities are in closest proximity. But this is not a theory shared by many Malians. As noted by an anonymised interpreter, these clashes are not a recent phenomenon in Mali, it is the nature of them that has changed:

'People talk about the land use [and conflict] between farmers and herders, and they all confirmed that this is not something new. But to take heavy weapons against one another is really new'.

Research into the climatic impacts on farmer herder conflicts tends to agree. A study which analysed agricultural disputes that had been through the Malian state legal system before 2012, found no link between changes in climatic conditions and the number of disputes (Benjaminsen et al. 2012). Drought and extreme weather events are not new to Mali, and nor are competing demands for scarce water resources. Linking ethnicity to farmer herder clashes also dangerously oversimplifies how Malians perceive themselves. One individual may have an ethnic, an occupational, a religious and a national identity (Leuprecht and Roseberry 2018). It also ignores that many Malians simply do not sit in their assumed ethnic occupation. Many Fulani have been sedentary farmers since severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, for example (Holthuijzen and Maximillian 2011).

A more likely explanation for these violent clashes is the power vacuum left by the absence of traditional and government authority. Before conflict erupted in 2012, a



series of land management reforms decreased pastoralist access to land, and simultaneously weakened the power of traditional leaders that had previously arbitrated farmer-herder clashes. Post 2012 this has been exploited by extremist groups, who have provided an alternative system of environmental resource management (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019).

Climate Change and Human Security

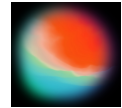
There is no doubt that climate change is decreasing human security in Mali. It impacts economic wellbeing, personal health, and access to food, and degrades the environment. This is where the impacts of climate change are exacerbating conflict. Agricultural livelihoods in Mali are especially affected by increasing temperatures. The number of dry days during rainy seasons has grown (Traore et al. 2013), environmental degradation has accelerated, and the mortality of livestock increased (Zougmore et al. 2017). Rapid population growth is also expanding the number of people reliant on agriculture. The most recent World Bank data puts 62% of Malian men reliant on the agricultural sector for employment (World Bank 2019). Opportunities for education are also severely limited.



A dry riverbed in central Mali which historically supplied local farms in the dry season

Malians are faced with few possible adaptations to their circumstances. One of the most common methods of adaptation is migration, either internally to urban centres or across international borders. This has been a traditional method of adaptation to climatic variances for centuries in the Sahel and elsewhere (Mielke et al. 2020). Cross border migration, however, is not a method of adaptation that complements the security interests of many international stakeholders. Poor levels of education also reduce the opportunities for work available to migrants (Van der Land and Hummel 2013). Prior to today's level of conflict, Malians could also find employment in artisanal crafts and tourism sectors – options which are much more limited now.

Another adaptation exists that does not need involve migration or education and can provide a secure income. As explained by two anonymised interpreters:



'Because of poverty, you have a lot of things that are easier for people to do here in Mali, especially terrorism. People are poor, they are not secure, to be secure, they need to go with these bad guys'

'When a Fulani who is a herder has lost his cattle... then at the same time some terrorists are recruiting for a better salary than I don't know, like a freelance bricklayer or other role which is not paid, he will easily join the group even if he knows that he will be killed one of the days'

Other studies also suggest that diminishing human security can incentivise membership of extremist groups (Barnett and Adger 2007; Ibrahim 2017; Ohlsson 2000). The appeal of employment in violent extremist organisations is broad (Ibrahim 2017). For example, it restores a sense of power to otherwise marginalised young men who have reason to resent established power structures and offers leadership opportunities and social mobility (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019). Even more attractive and immediate is that these groups offer the economic means to live. Malian frustration with the UN, French and EU missions is also significant, increasing the likelihood that anti-international/ Western discourses take hold.

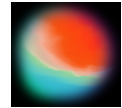
'That is happening because there are not any national forces to protect those villages. No commanding staff nor education and healthcare. That is why we have different auto-defence groups who are trying to protect their villages and people because UN-MUNISMA is not fighting, and people are losing everything day after day' (Anonymised informant)

'Today we are in 2020, all the big nations around this world are in Mali: MINUSMA is more than 15,000 military, beside MINUSMA we have Malian Army, Barkhane, EU and tomorrow new special forces will be deployed. Despite all [of] these efforts Malians are killed every day [and] the villages are destroyed. In the beginning the problem was in the North, now it moves to the centre and it's still moving south. Of course, the conflict is continuing because since 2012 until today nothing has changed, contrary the situation is getting worse' (Anonymised informant)

There are many reasons why those in Mali might find it desirable to join an extremist organisation – the impact climate change is having on livelihoods is only one. But if climate change is contributing to the conflict, it is through destruction of human security, and not directly through increasing resource scarcity. This is an important distinction as the two require fundamentally different mitigation strategies.

What Next? A Proposal

The situation in Mali makes any international effort to improve human security challenging. Any intervention must also face the dilemma of inadvertently financing an unelected government, corruption and possibly terrorism. Nevertheless, a stable Mali is of benefit to global security. Current international interventions are not improving the situation. With the French Barkhane mission withdrawing and both the EU Training Mission and UN mission future's uncertain, new creative solutions are required.



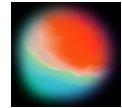
Mali is resource rich. Prior to the pandemic, most of Mali's exports were to South Africa and Switzerland (each comprising 36% of total exports) (Trading Economics 2022). Minerals, gold in particular, make up most exports followed by cotton. In both industries, Mali is one of Africa's top producers. Mining has continued despite recent sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) after the current Malian administration reneged on a promise to hold democratic elections. Cotton farmers on the other hand have felt the squeeze. International pressure to hold elections needs to be increased significantly on the current military administration. Once elections are held, ECOWAS will be able to lift sanctions, and market power can be channelled to simultaneously increase climate resilience and human security.

Once sanctions have been lifted, corporations should be encouraged, via policy, to work in Mali and use Malian products within their supply chains. Incentives could be provided for environmental regeneration, diversified incomes, and child education. Nestlé, for example, have initiated a similar approach in Ghana and the Ivory Coast, creating a win for the business, for society, and for the environment (Nestlé 2022; Porter & Kramer 2011). The company has established long-term relationships with their suppliers, securing access to high quality cocoa yields well into the future. In return, farmers receive a living income, and the environment is made more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Beyond transparency of financial flows, why would businesses take on risk in their supply chain by importing from a fragile state? Here we can note that state fragility has not interrupted gold exports from Mali, cobalt exports from the DRC nor fashion retailers operating in Myanmar. Furthermore, mining and cotton farming take place predominantly in the more stable south of Mali.

A risk companies will have to mitigate against will be minerals sourced from artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). ASM is often informal, bringing with it environmental damage, low transparency, and child labour practices. Some brands understandably prohibit ASM minerals from their supply chains, but this has only served to push the industry into shadowy practices and decreased access to finance. Fairphone, the Dutch mobile phone company, show one way forward here, with their Fair Materials Sourcing Road Map (Fairphone 2023). Their approach is to look to formalise the ASM sector rather than banish it, providing incentives for sustainable improvements and simultaneously gaining access to resources their competitors cannot.

We cannot get away from the fact that economic growth and human development are often intrinsically linked (Stewart et al. 2018). Low GDP per capita has proven a good predictor of civil war (Vestby et al. 2021). The current government in Mali must take the first step, perhaps in response to international pressure, by holding democratic elections. Once sanctions are lifted, attempts at stimulating economic growth can begin. Stabilisation interventions to date have been expensive and had no discernible benefit for the average Malian.

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*This briefing note is written in the authors' personal capacities and should not be taken as reflecting the opinions or policies of the CCI Project, Reuben College, or CHACR.

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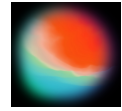
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