Key messages from the conference

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Bamako

Mali: Shedding Light on the Future
Lessons from the Past to Prepare for After the Algiers Negotiations

Once again, Mali is at the crossroads. Both its leaders and the armed opposition have a huge responsibility. Their legacy depends on whether they will be able to find a way to establish sustainable peace. But the future remains uncertain.

Alger’s “Mali: After Algiers” conference was organized in order to share experiences and findings in the run up to the negotiations which were due to resume in Algiers. This document presents the key messages from the event.

The conference was organized as part of the Humanitarian Evaluation and Learning Project (HELP), supported by USAID.

Groupe URD is an independent institute which specializes in the analysis of practices and the development of policy for the humanitarian and post-crisis sectors.
**Key message no 1**

Even though it is difficult to predict, the scenario which emerges from the Algiers negotiations will have major operational consequences for the population and aid organizations.

**The context: the Algiers negotiations**

The 4th round of negotiations between the Malian government and armed groups ended on 27 November without an agreement having been reached. Apart from the semantic and symbolic blockages over the issue of whether or not to use the term “Azawad”, the question of the degree of decentralization (ranging from the current situation inherited from the 1990s to a federal system, and even the separation of the country into two states) crystallizes opposition and holds back the peace process. What is more, despite the impetus from Algeria, the MINUSMA and certain states to structure the mediation, the negotiations have not made any progress. And in the meantime alliances have changed.

In addition to these internal tensions are regional weaknesses which could destabilize the recovery process in the country, from the Ebola epidemic to the many elections which will take place during 2015 in the sub-region. In such a context, there may be a strong temptation to push for an agreement to be rapidly signed, with the risk that this will neither be fully understood nor shared...

However, the fate of the population, and not only in the North, depends on these negotiations, and the consequences of a bad agreement could potentially be terrible for communities. Though the talks are the responsibility of political agents, Malian civil society and the international community can and should prepare for the different potential post-Algiers scenarios, and their operational consequences.

**Multi-scenario planning**

Changes are never linear and are often difficult to predict. The multi-scenario planning exercise that the workshop participants carried out aimed to explore the different options which could come from the negotiation process in Algiers, using an open and creative approach. Each decision-making level, whether political, military–strategic or operational, must work on a plan and make strategic choices depending on its mandate and its own strategic planning framework. Indeed, in order to improve the functioning of crisis response mechanisms, it is necessary to anticipate the nature of the crisis, and how it might evolve.

From an operational point of view, the multi-scenario approach underlines the importance of flexibility, which programs particularly need in complex, dynamic and volatile operational contexts: without being able to predict the future, organizations can – and should – prepare to adapt themselves to the different options possible.
Multi-scenario planning exercise carried out during the workshop

**ALGIERS NEGOTIATIONS**

- Agreement reached
  - Agreement reached on a solid and shared foundation
  - Agreement reached under pressure (notably international pressure) and not applied
  - Stagnation and status quo maintained
  - Reorganisation of alliances
- Agreement put back
  - Defiance towards the state
  - High level of tension
  - Dynamics become more complex
- No agreement
- End of peace negotiations
  - Return to conflict and violence
  - Deterioration of humanitarian access and withdrawal of organisations from certain areas
  - Improved humanitarian access
  - Gradual return of basic public services
  - Stalemate
  - Security context and humanitarian access remain critical
  - Return to conflict and violence
  - Deterioration of humanitarian access and withdrawal of organisations from certain areas
  - Growing number of attacks in the North and strong popular mobilisation in the South
  - Deterioration of humanitarian access
The fragilities of the context mean that the scenarios that are outlined are often not optimistic: even in the scenario where agreement is reached, the future remains complicated and there is significant danger of a return to violence. The planning exercise reminds us that an agreement does not mean that there will immediately be peace and security. We should remember that the national pact that was signed in 1992 did not directly end conflict between communities, which continued until 1994.

No matter what the result of negotiations, there will be major consequences for the Malian people, both in the North and the South. This will be all the more true if there is a middle-ground or pessimistic scenario in which humanitarian access will be all the more complex and access to basic services will be extremely restricted. It is therefore of primary importance that Malian institutions, civil society organizations, Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs), and international aid organizations mobilize as early as possible in order to:

- **Anticipate possible post-Algiers scenarios.** Each organization should reflect further on the issues raised during this workshop and think about possible future scenarios. It will be crucially important to share analyses.

- **Prepare for the operational consequences if there is an agreement – or not- in Algiers.** In a volatile context where scenarios evolve and change a great deal, the right strategy will be the one which allows rapid and continual adaptation of ongoing programs. As such, the flexibility of the monitoring system in place and its ability to detect unplanned phenomena and re-orientate projects will be determining factors for the response. The discussions highlighted five levers of success for activities undertaken since the beginning of the crisis, which will need to be used as wisely as possible: supporting the capacity of local communities and local people; technical, sector-based and geographic coordination; knowledge and understanding of the operational context; civil–military coordination; and human rights (see Key Message n°4).

- **Inform.** Though international pressure can have a negative effect by influencing the negotiation process and producing an agreement which is not fully accepted, the role of Malian civil society organizations is crucial in terms of defending human rights. It is fundamental to ensure that key information about the content of the agreement should be available to and understood by the population: a badly understood agreement will not be fully accepted, particularly amongst those in the capital and the South. Indeed, if they are not informed that the agreement will also have a positive impact on their living conditions, this will raise suspicion and discord. There is currently a lot of very passionate debate between citizens on the blogosphere. Civil society organizations need to take advantage of these communication channels to raise awareness about the critical issues of protection, justice and human rights.
Key message n°2
The fact that access to the field continues to be difficult due to continuing insecurity in the North is a major problem, holding up efforts to re-establish basic services. An agreement will not be effective unless security and confidence are restored sustainably.

Despite the return to constitutional order since presidential and legislative elections were held in 2013, the difficulties related to the current political process continue and the re-establishment of public services does not seem to be making any headway in certain regions, particularly the North where the security situation is critical. The clashes in Kidal in May 2014 significantly changed power relations, which led, at best, to anger, and, at worst, to defiance. In all cases it led to a major deterioration in humanitarian access. It is therefore very difficult for organizations to work in this extremely volatile and dangerous context, with attacks against the MINUSMA and the humanitarian community, and this situation should be condemned in no uncertain terms. The increasing complexity of the situation and the activities of armed groups make it all the more difficult to understand the context and choose implementing partners for programs in areas where there is limited access. This has a major impact on the evaluation of programs, and as a result certain organizations feel they are just improvising.

Key message n°3
Since the beginning of the crisis, organizations in the area have mobilized rapidly. Though coordination remains chaotic and needs to be improved significantly, there has also been some innovation.

Due to the complex and uncertain conditions in which humanitarian and development programs and coordination mechanisms are being implemented in Northern Mali, the quality of aid programs varies a great deal. However, the discussions during the conference highlighted the capacity of stakeholders in working together during the crisis and in mobilizing the different communities to analyze and implement programs. Though long-term forecasts remain difficult, there is no doubt that the efforts made have already produced positive results in the short term, notably due to innovative practices, such as the use of Cash For Work, which had previously been very rare in Mali, activities to build community resilience, and also the positive involvement of the Malian technical services by many NGOs in the North. The partnership approach in Northern Mali had a very positive effect, increasing the competencies of national NGOs and improving their organizational structure.

Coordination efforts were praised during the debates, including the ongoing process launched by the TFPs at the beginning of 2013 to establish a consultation body (the Commission Réhabilitation en zones post-conflit – CRZPC). The aim of this body is to reduce incoherence, improve program coordination and make relief and development aid more complementary.
The debates showed that it was fundamentally important to try to understand the mechanisms of success, and not only what had not worked. Five major pillars of the response in the last two years emerged as the determining factors of successful programs.

Pillar 1: Knowledge and understanding of the operational context

There is absolutely no doubt that the management of current crises has to be based on the optimal acquisition, sharing and dissemination of information and intelligence. However, it emerged from the discussions that even if knowledge exists, the key issue is the ability to make it operational: between detailed “micro” analysis which is difficult to replicate and broad studies which are not adapted to the specific characteristics of each context, it is necessary to find the right combination of micro and macro levels so that analyses feed each other. What is more, the issue of knowledge is not limited to being able to follow current dynamics. Understanding of a context also depends on our knowledge of the past. Unfortunately numerous studies and analyses are currently not used to their full potential. From the 1995 Timbuktu conference’s development plan for the North to the 2007 Kidal forum, there is already a great deal of information about sector-based development issues which should be exploited more.

Pillar 2: Community capacity building

The discussions highlighted the central importance of rooting programs in existing community dynamics. They should therefore take advantage of the interdependent dynamics which exist among communities and support local initiatives. To do this, it is crucial to develop high quality, detailed analysis and to ensure that the leaders in place are reliable.

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Pillar 3: Technical, sector-based and geographic coordination

Though the cluster system has undoubtedly allowed existing information to be shared effectively, there is now a need to decentralize/regionalize humanitarian coordination systems. There is also a need for greater dialogue between clusters and thematic groups which exist at the TFP level. Lastly, there is a need to improve the coordination between the FONGIM and the FECONGE for better results.

Pillar 4: Civil–military coordination

Though it has already been widely debated, this subject continues to be extremely topical and continues to raise numerous questions within humanitarian organizations. There still does not seem to be any shared understanding about how to guarantee humanitarian access while respecting the mandates of each type of actor. In the case of a more somber post-Algiers scenario, access to the field will further deteriorate for humanitarian organizations, and therefore it will be necessary to interact more with military bodies.

Pillar 5: Protection of civilians and Human Rights

The protection of civilians, Human Rights and justice emerged as central issues in the discussions. While the negotiations were going on in Algiers, the exchanges highlighted the risk of the politicization of peace, giving priority to agreement between groups rather than applying the Law and achieving justice. Indeed, short-term political stability should not be given priority to the detriment of justice in the long term: restoring confidence is crucially important, and this will depend a great deal on whether peace is built on foundations of justice. Political will is fundamental to support the process of transitional justice and national reconciliation, as is the role of NGOs and civil society to make sure these crucial subjects are given sufficient weight in the negotiations.
IN CONCLUSION

The many complex events which have taken place in Mali and the sub-region since the conference (the breaking up of the armed opposition, the death of Aménokal, the change in government in Mali, the hospitalization of the Algerian President, etc.) show how unpredictable the context is, and how important it is to build the resilience of the population and to make aid more flexible. Above all, it underlines more than ever the fact that it is up to the different Malian groups to find long-term solutions to this conflict which keeps coming back decade after decade.

History will judge Mali’s leaders, as it will the international community in terms of its ability to analyze the context with precision, to be proactive, to be intelligent in its choice of activities and to show determination in its support for the Malian people.