

Working paper on implementation of EU crisis response in Mali

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The EU, security sector reform and border management in Mali

EUNPACK Paper

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1. Introduction

The EU's concern with the fragile states of Sahel is not new. This became evident already in 2011 through the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (EU 2011). The conflict that erupted in Mali in 2012 pushed the issue of the Sahel even higher on the agenda, and the migration crises of 2014/15 made the Sahel a concern of 'high politics' for Europe. As a result, the EU and other international stakeholders are increasingly involved on the ground in Mali and several other Sahel countries through Operational Serval and now Barkhane (France), MINUSMA (the United Nations) and the deployment of two EU police and military training missions. It is the latter two missions that constitute the main case studies in this report. They are the EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and the EU Training Mission to Mali (EUTM). Despite the efforts of these international interventions, security in Mali is deteriorating, and the conflict has spread to the centre of the country. Central Mali is currently gripped by escalating insecurity, due to an increase in inter-communal conflicts, the proliferation of self-defence groups and non-state actors including violent extremist 'jihadist' groups and bandits. Consequently, 2017 has been the most violent year since the French intervention in 2013 (see Ba and Bøås 2017).

This paper offers a critical review of the EUTM and EUCAP in Mali, arguing that this is another example of international interventions that may be well-intended, but that end up producing very mixed results on the ground. One reason for this is the gaps between intentions and implementation and between implementation and local reception/perceptions. Whereas the first gap points to mismatches between EU policy intentions and what effect the implementation of these policies actually have (see for example Hill 1993), the latter gap reveals the inability of an international actor to both understand how key concepts such as 'security sector reform' and 'border management' are understood on the ground as well as translating its own policies and Brussels' developed mandate into policies that makes sense for people on the ground (Cissé, Bøås, Kvamme and Dakouo 2017).

This paper will therefore assess the opportunities, limits and consequences of EU crisis response on the ground by studying the match or mismatch between the mandates and the practices in the field. The crisis responses examined are the EUTM, EUCAP as well as the border management policies within the EU Trust Fund (EUTF). In doing so, we will investigate and evaluate the EU's practices of 'conflict sensitivity' and their bottom-up considerations by describing its practices in engaging local actors (elites as much as affected communities) and

evaluating the presence or absence of local ownership and the latter's significance for the impact-effectiveness of EU policies.

This paper is based on review of documents and detailed fieldwork in Mali. Most of the interviews and meetings that forms the background for this work was conducted when most authors of this report were in the field in October and November 2017. As most of the information given to the authors was based on confidentiality, we have anonymised respondents and interviewees. However, when we quote directly from an interview we refer to institutions and place where this is possible. We are grateful to several EU officials in Mali that work for the Delegation and for EUTM, EUCAP and EUTF for their willingness to meet and engage with us, and we would also like to thank several other external and internal stakeholders who shared views and information with us.

2. Two key gaps

The first gap that we refer to as the **intentions–implementation gap**, relates both to the capacity to make decisions, respond with one voice and deploy the necessary resources to achieve one's mandates (the 'capability–expectations gap', see Hill 1993), as well as how these responses are implemented on the ground by EU institutions and member states and how other actors – local and international – enhance or undermine the EU's activities. In the case of Mali for example, the work-sharing and policy-coherence between the EU and France can be a crucial factor to consider. The reason for this is the role of France in Mali, both its historical past as a colonial power and currently through the substantial French military engagement on the ground. This potential gap is also of crucial importance as it highlights the relationship between EU institutions on the ground and local actors. One example here is the relationship between EUTM and the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA). EUTM is attempting to train an army that for all practical purposes is fully operational and engaged in an armed conflict with several insurgencies. This is complicated, but as the current EU mandate does not allow EUTM staff to follow the FAMA personnel it has trained into the battlefield, almost all direct monitoring and evaluation depends on the FAMA's own reports.

Second, we also address the gap between the implementation of EU policies and approaches, and how these policies and approaches are received and perceived in target countries. This is what we refer to as **the implementation–local reception/perceptions gap**. In our study of local Malian perceptions concerning the EU crisis response in Mali, we found

that even local Malian stakeholders that were working quite closely with the EU had problems understanding the EU approach, and how to interpret concepts like SSR and ‘border management’. Thus, what this gap may reveal is first a failure to communicate in a way that is easily understood locally. This may be a real and substance barrier to a conflict and context sensitive approach that facilitates local ownership. Secondly, this may be even further undermined if there is a lack of coherence between the priorities of an external stakeholder and those of local stakeholders. Improved border management in the Sahel is a high priority for the EU, but this may not necessarily be the case for local stakeholders and communities. Conversely, this may be for some local communities who depend on cross-border trade and other types of economic activities seem more like a threat to their livelihoods than beneficial. We are not arguing that this must be the case, but that policy makers must seriously take into consideration how these policies can be interpreted locally.

Our main working hypothesis is that we within these gaps can identify issues that hinder the EU’s impact on crisis management and thereby also its ability to contribute to problem-solving on the ground. This implies that the EU must recognise the need for local ownership of external assistance programmes, instead of imposing its own preferences and policy recipes.¹ This has been established as an important precondition for policy effectiveness (see Nathan 2007; Osland 2014), and the EU itself has already acknowledged this through its comprehensive approach to crises – but this is rarely employed in practice (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Bøås and Stig 2010). In this paper we combine a bottom–up approach with an institutional approach. This enables us to tackle both the implementation–local perceptions gap between the target countries and the EU, and the intention–implementation gap at the EU level, and, in this way, investigate the limits and potentials of EU crisis-response mechanisms in the field.

3. Introducing Mali: Lasting instability²

Mali is in serious trouble. The rebellion in the North that surfaced simultaneously with the military coup in 2012 has still not come to a sustainable settlement. This is evident in the prevailing insecurity in the North that allows groups such as Belmokhtar’s *al-Mourabitoun* to conduct attacks like that of 18 January 2017 against a UN base in Gao that killed more than 70

¹ See the Paris declaration of March 2005 that set new rules regarding public aid policy. Here, ownership is among the core principles.

²This section draws on Ba and Bøås (2017).

Malian army soldiers and militia members (see *France 24* 2017). The continuing Jihadist insurgency has now spread to Mali's central region, embedding itself in local conflicts in the Niger River Delta in the Gourma-Mopti area (see Guichaoua and Ba-Konaré 2016; Rupesinghe and Bøås 2018). In addition, trafficking of illicit goods is a serious issue along with wide-spread corruption. As a result, many Malians have lost faith in the modern state, as it does not present credible answers to their livelihood challenges (Bøås 2015a). In some areas in the North and in the Delta of the central region, the Jihadist insurgents have become more relevant than the Malian state and its external stakeholders.

3.1. 2012, the 'long' year

The crisis of 2012 is not yet solved, but continues in similar and in different forms, making 2012 the 'long' year in Mali's history. Indeed, the current crisis is far more serious than the one in the 1990s, and it can no longer be defined as a crisis of North Mali exclusively.

When Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was elected president in August 2013 by a huge majority, he won based on a campaign platform of restoring Mali's territorial integrity and tackling the massive corruption and mismanagement of the country (Ba and Bøås 2013). However, as not much progress has been made on these fronts, the people of Mali blame their president as well as his external sponsors. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has lost much of its initial popularity; so has former French President Hollande and Operation Barkhane. The EU is so far less affected by this directly, but as many local Malians have problems understanding what the EU interventions are and what actions are unilaterally undertaken by France, anger and frustration with France also sometimes affects the EU.

3.2. Contemporary Mali

Mali is one of the world's poorest countries, ranked as number 179 of 187 countries (UNDP 2017), where most people make a living from agriculture and animal husbandry. Its current population of approximately 18.6 million is projected to increase to over 45 million by 2050. This projection is based on the current annual population growth of over 3%, and each woman in Mali giving birth to an average of 6.2 children. Half of the population is below the age of 15, and two out of three persons in Mali live on less than two dollars per day (World Bank 2016).

This trend is not sustainable, and its consequences are further exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Like its neighbours in the Sahel, Mali is in the unfortunate position of being among the countries in the world least responsible for global CO² emissions, but among those most negatively affected. In the Sahel, a rise in temperature of only a few degrees will have devastating consequences for local livelihoods.

For Mali, the combined forces of population growth and climate-change decrease the amount of land available for agriculture. Moreover, the purchase of land is increasing, particularly loaned lands, leaving the owner without access to land. The inevitable result is greater competition for land – often violent, and with the potential of being appropriated by those who employ force, as is taking place in the Delta area in the Mopti region (in the centre of the country). Traditional arrangements such as customary tenure regimes have increasingly become dysfunctional or are simply not able to cope with the conflicts, while the apparatus of modern administration such as courts is often absent, inefficient and sticky into corruption and mismanagement.

Land-rights conflicts in Mali are nothing new, but their importance as *drivers of conflict* is clearly increasing these last years. The main reason is that land is an existential commodity in a country like Mali. It provides survival and it is a guarantee for future coping. If access to land is under threat it must be protected, and this protection must be sought where it can be found – also among Jihadist insurgents, if no other alternatives are credible or available (see also Bøås and Dunn 2013). Such conflicts can emerge in communities (between different lineages, for example) or between communities with differing preferences for land use, as with agriculturalists vs pastoralists. Not all land-rights conflicts in Mali are based on this cleavage, but as more and more land in the Delta along the River Niger and branch rivers is cultivated, there are fewer corridors available that allow access to water resources for pastoralists and their cattle. Thus, in the Delta along the River Niger we find a multitude of such conflicts, some of them appropriated by Jihadist insurgents.

The first example was seen in and around the town of Konna in 2013, with Fulani herders pitted against local farmers. That same year, there were similar conflicts in the Gao area involving Fulani and Tuareg communities, where the former gained the support of the Movement for Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). This is currently taking place in parts of the Delta, where local land-rights conflicts are appropriated by the Fulani-based Macina Liberation

Front (FLM).³ We have reported on the situation in the Delta elsewhere (see Rupesinghe and Bøås 2018); here let it be noted that even if we see land-rights conflicts and their appropriation by violent entrepreneurs as a major driver of violence, we take issue with how this is framed in the anti-terror framework that has become the hallmark of international operations in Mali.

After the failed attempt in early January 2013 by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) to respond to the Malian crisis, France launched a military operation, Operation Serval, based on a request from the transitional authorities in Bamako. This was followed by the AU operation, the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). Operation Serval succeeded in pushing the Jihadi insurgencies out of main northern cities like Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. However, reluctant to take formal ‘ownership’ of the international engagement in Mali, but also concerned that AFISMA would not be able to maintain Serval’s military gains, France insisted on a stronger multilateral arrangement (see Thérout-Benoni 2014). France wanted AFISMA to be transformed into MINUSMA. That would also enable France to wield considerable influence over MINUSMA, whereas the costs and possible flaws could be more widely distributed. All this was possible because France holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, from where it was responsible for drafting resolutions on MINUSMA (see Tardy 2016). This situation did not change when Serval was replaced by Operation Berkhane in July 2014. This expanded the scope of the French mission to include other former French colonies in the region – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger. Thus, even if Berkhane represented a wider geographical focus, it also reinforced the anti-terror approach to the Malian crisis, an approach that has been strongly promoted by French security and foreign politics (see Marchal 2013). We are not arguing against the need for a military approach to insurgencies such as Belmokhtar’s *al-Mourabitoun*: but the fact that the Malian crisis has been framed within such a narrow focus has come to inform how the Malian state, opposition groups, contentious political actors on the ground, and other international actors approach the crisis and the issues at stake. This is particularly pertinent in the case of the government in Bamako, as having the crisis defined as caused by foreign terrorist insurgencies provides a convenient excuse for not dealing with the underlying internal causes of conflict and drivers of violence.

³ The FLM does not have a base, although it operates in the centre of the country.

4. The EUTM and EUCAP

This paper examines the EU's two key programmes in Mali that aim to contribute to the restoration of state authority in Mali – the EUTM and EUCAP. Moreover, this paper examines the border management component of the EUTF. While the EU, along with other development assistance partners, has long been present in Mali,⁴ these programmes have a stronger emphasis on security in their approach than previous ones, a result of increasing instability in Mali since 2012. The programmes are key components of the EU's overarching security-oriented efforts in the Sahel (the third one being the EUCAP Niger programme that supports counter-terrorism and crime activities in Niger).

4.1. EUTM

The EUTM was established by the EU member states in February 2013 in the context of a request from the Malian Government and based on the UN Security Council Resolution 2085 (UNSC 2012). Its stated goal is to support Mali's Armed Forces (FAMA) in restoring state authority throughout its territory. To do so, it seeks to enhance the leadership skills within FAMA by providing 'legal and leadership skills education as well as on tactical and strategical education, training planning process, basic military principles and International Humanitarian Law' (EEAS 2016b). The EUTM's third mandate was given in March 2016 and lasts until May 2018. This mandate expanded operations northwards towards the river Niger loop, and hence intends to expand trainings to the regions of Gao and Timbuktu. Per 2017, the EUTM consists of 575 servicemen, with participants from 27 countries (EUTM 2018). The budget for the third mandate is €33.4 million (EEAS 2016b). The clear majority of personnel are stationed in the Koulikoro training camp 60 kilometres northeast of Bamako. EUTM Mali remains a non-executive mission and does, therefore, not participate in combat nor accompany FAMA in operational zones (Ibid.).

4.2. EUCAP

The EU's Capacity Building Programme (EUCAP) for Mali was established in January 2015 with, as EUTM, a mandate to support the restoration of state authority in Mali (EUCAP 2018). To do so, the EUCAP provides 'assistance and advice to the national police, the national

⁴ Beyond engagement since the establishment of the Malian state, and especially by the former colonial power France, the EU has allocated large funds to Mali. Latest, from 2007 to 2013, this amounted to €1.569 bn (EEAS 2016a).

gendarmierie and the national guard in the implementation of the security reform set out by the new government' (EUCAP 2018). It has, until October 2017, trained around 3400 officers in, amongst others, command structure, professional methods, human rights and gender issues (EUCAP 2017). Its mandate was in January 2017 renewed until January 2019, with a budget of 29.7 million EUR the first year of operations (EU Council 2017). In its second mandate, there is a greater emphasis on Mali's counterterrorism services and, most relevant to this report, support to Malian authorities concerning irregular migration, including trafficking, as well as border control (EUCAP 2017).

4.3. EUTF

The EU perceives the 'problem of porous borders' to be one of the key challenges in Mali, and in the Sahel region more broadly. The EU is therefore involved in a number of projects with border mandates and components in Mali. In interviews, officials at the EU Delegation in Mali stated that one of the biggest changes to their work is that borders and border management have become one of their main targets, as well as supporting the Ministry of Interior and working with police, something they never did before. This also means equipping the EU Delegation with new expertise and staff in areas not traditionally pertaining to the foreign policy sphere. Border control also became part of EUCAP's second mandate in 2017, as well as a target under the new funding tool of the EU Trust Fund – which has the mainstreaming of migration management in all EU external action as its core objective. While the EU's border control activities are mostly security-focused, they also sometimes include components which aim at development particularly in (remote) border areas. The EUTF is therefore not one particular programme like EUCAP and EUTM, but a fund that operates through other programmes. There are several of these currently active in Mali.

An important one is PARSEC, a EUTF programme (€29 million large) that is aiming to support enhanced security and of the management of border areas in the Mopti and Gao regions – however in reality only focusing on Mopti and the border to Burkina Faso. This programme is working in co-ordination with EUCAP and EUTM, but is also operating as a supporting component of a larger Malian plan for enhancing state forces and supporting local governors' capacity to protect and administer security.⁵ PARSEC also rehabilitates and equips border posts (such as the one in Koro). Equipping border posts normally means, among other, to install the

⁵ Interview with EUCAP official, Bamako, October 2017.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)-developed MIDAS software (which links to the Interpol database and has the possibility to include biometric data collection) as well as solar panels to make sure there is electricity, so these technologies can function. PARSEC objectives also include setting-up a fluvial brigade, maintenance of vehicles, communication, and a multi-force coordination crisis-room. These activities may be much needed, but the question can also be asked how much of this really has to do with the root causes of migration.

GAR-SI is a regional EUTF project (€41.6 mill) to be implemented in all G5-Sahel countries, with a component in Mali (€5 mill). Not being a border control project per se, this project aims to train specialised counter-terrorist (also responsible for stopping transnational organised crime) units within the G5-Sahel countries' gendarmeries which will cooperate with one another across borders and control borders areas. The units will be mobile, flexible and 'autonomous', and able to control territory as well as having the power of judicial police to arrest perceived criminals. Based on the Spanish counter-terrorism unit to fight ETA terrorism, GAR-SI is in Mali still in its diagnostic phase. The next phase will include the training (including training the trainers) of 120 Malian gendarmes, which in phase three will be deployed near Mopti, in Dinongorou. The GAR-SI units are supposed to be able to, for instance, make coordinated operations on both sides of the (initially Mali-Burkina Faso) borders, setting up checkpoints and controlling people travelling on the roads.⁶

Another regional project which the EU supports through the EUTF is the G5 Sahel, and the EU has deployed a designated border expert to support the G5 Permanent Secretariat in elaborating a regional border strategy.⁷ Moreover, just like the GAR-SI, the G5 Joint Force is envisaged to consist of military units in each of the G5 countries which will coordinate with each other across borders. With headquarters in Sévaré (Mopti), the Malian units are planned to be deployed in two border zones: the Western Zone (Mali - Mauritania) and the Central Zone (Mali - Niger - Burkina Faso), with a third zone for deployment of the joint force will be the Eastern Zone (Niger - Chad).

⁶ Interview with GAR-SI, officials, Bamako, October 2017).

⁷ This is part of the project 'Support for regional cooperation in G5 countries and for the Sahel Security College' (2016-2018) funded by EUTF with €7 mill.

5. Analysis

Within this analysis we pin-point matches and mismatches between the mandates (intentions) and the interventions in the field (implementation). In this, we investigate the underlying assumptions, such as the idea of ‘restoring state authority’ and the problematic aspects of cooperation with a disputed actor like the Malian State. Within this analysis we critically discuss the issue of conflict sensitivity, including whether or not mandates and programmes are tailor-made to local contexts.

The stated goal of the EU is to contribute to the restoration of state authority in Mali. What the EUTM and EUCAP contribute directly to is, respectively, the restoration of its military and police capacity. Already, however, one has made important assumptions that may possibly help explain the gap between EU intentions and implementation. Firstly, based on our research, we deem it pertinent to ask if there really was a functioning Malian state before 2012 (see Bøås and Torheim 2013), and, hence, if that is a state one should strive to restore. Secondly, and relatedly, one should ask if the current government and FAMA have the authority and support from the population to become a legitimate state authority (see Ba and Bøås 2017).

First, the Malian state is per January 2018, as it was before 2012, characterised by inefficient and often badly managed state institutions, including a seriously flawed justice system. The EU has had project(s) on constructing and equipping courthouses across the country. However, the problem is that some judges are mostly corrupt and do very little, at the same time as there are very few people with legal training in Mali in general. The EU does not monitor if the courthouses are used as intended, and risk ending up building big and nice but empty courthouses for corrupt judges without files on their desk.⁸ The EU has done little monitoring of the courthouses it has constructed and equipped across the country. (Removed since repetition of previous sentences.) Corruption is widespread also in other sectors that the EU is active in, suggesting that deep and critical analyses of each sector may be a precondition for engagements. There is, therefore, according to Malian civil society leader Segdi Ag Rhally, a ‘considerable risk that with the current institutional setup, one risks pouring money into the hands of usual suspects and unaccountable powerful actors’. In Ag Rhally’s view, ‘today Mali is a factory of invoices, but most of them are false’.⁹

⁸ Interview Dutch embassy in Bamako, November 2017.

⁹ Interview Bamako, October 2017.

Second, there are several indicators that suggest that the state as of now is unfit to become a legitimate state authority. Most evident is the rebellions and attempted declaration of independence of the state of Azawad in 2012. However, and more importantly, this reflects an underlying disagreement on who makes up the state and who governs it. An illustrative example was given to us by a local consultant on security and local development. According to him, this is illustrated by the ethnic imbalance in the Malian Army which is essentially composed of the people of the South, and particularly from the Bambara ethnic group that also has dominant positions in politics and the economy. Hence, whenever the police are used to settle any local conflict in the centre of the country, the populations see this as Bambara aggression.¹⁰

A further challenge is that the EUTM training has become short and rotational because FAMA and police units are busy being both trained and used as fully operational at the same time. According to a EUCAP staff member, this necessitates ‘replacing a wheel while the car is going at full speed’.¹¹ As we will come back to regarding security sector reform, these processes will by necessity take a long time, while the EU perspective seems very short-term, with limited potential to build legitimate, operational and sustainable police and army forces.

5.1. Matches and mismatches

The EU’s policy in Mali is to leave a ‘light footprint’ through building ownership with local partners and with people on the ground. However, the programme designs seem predominantly to arise from policy makers in Brussels concerned with terrorism, trafficking and refugees. While there is significant interest in Mali in tackling both the issues of terrorism and migration, the relevance and local rooting of policies are limited. According to Peters et al. (2017: 82) there seems to be a ‘lack of clear distinction between the different groups in Mali in the respective Council documents’, suggesting a lack of grounded conflict sensitivity. This is likely partly a result of a tendency to develop policies in Brussels with limited consultations with local partners in Mali – sometimes even the EU delegation itself.¹² As the National Platform for Civil Society in Mali (an organisation that co-ordinates civil society in Mali) suggest; ‘They ask our

¹⁰ Mahamadou Diouarra, consultant, on security and local development, Cabinet GAIA – 06/11/2017.

¹¹ Interview EUCAP, Bamako, October 2017.

¹² Mentioned by EU Delegation, Chef de Cooperation Géza Strammer and Chef d’Équipe Section Économique et Gouvernance Julien Bouzon, Bamako 26.10.2017 during a meeting about EUTF.

opinions, but then don't want to further engage with us. They ask us to comment about pre-conceived needs, not about our needs'.¹³

This paper therefore suggests that while the EU intends to be conflict sensitive, it does not manage this very well and in a coherent manner. This is in line with another EUNPACK paper, Peter et al. (2017: 83), which states that the 'EU's output effectiveness has also been hampered by a low degree of conflict sensitivity and encountered problems in creating local ownership in qualitatively terms, although the quantitative metrics show a more positive result'. Indeed, as our summary of perception studies in Mali suggest, over half of the respondents find the EU to be conflict sensitive, but notes that interviews were only conducted in Bamako where many may not feel the conflict as directly, and who might in any case prefer the current situation over the highly tumultuous times in 2012-13 (Cissé et al. 2017:7). Hence, qualitatively speaking, and based on the research conducted for this paper, EU conflict sensitivity is limited, which the examples of EUTM and EUCAP illustrate (see further below).

On a more overall level, explaining the gap between intentions and implementation, alongside limited consultations, one could see Mali as being a 'laboratory for EU crisis response policies' (this was suggested to us by an informant with intimate knowledge about the EU in Mali). This suggests a limited interest or ability to tailor-make policies from the EU's side. The EU member states wish to build local ownership, but it seems like the EU system leaves programme designs rushed and without the necessary (and ideally sought-after) local consultations. Also on the ground, EU actors exhibit wishes to become more conflict sensitive, e.g. by getting involved in the analysis of local conflicts, but seem unable to so. There are several reasons for this as this is an outcome both of a precarious security situation and the EU's own risk averseness. EUCAP is trying to work its way around this by sending mobile training teams beyond the area around Bamako, attempting to further analyse local conflicts. In general, however, the EU's approach seems short-term in nature. As the president of ARGA (EUNPACK's Malian partner) argued in a conversation about our project, 'current EU Intervention mode is not [a] sufficient and lasting solution, but just (...) to gain time'.¹⁴ (Since the president of ARGA is not anonymised here in any case, should his name be cited?)

Another mismatch, which is becoming more pronounced with the introduction of the EUTF, the big new EU player in Mali, concerns the focus on security and border management.

¹³ Interview with National Platform for Civil Society, Bamako, October 2017.

¹⁴ Interview, ARGA, Bamako, October 2017.

There is firstly a mismatch between intended results, the development of effective institutions and structures, and implementation, where the support of FAMA and Police have been shown counterproductive at times, for example regarding the human rights abuses that FAMA has conducted in Mali's Central Region. These are well documented (see Ba and Bøås 2017). The EU is not directly responsible for this, but the combination of a narrow security and border management focus and failure to monitor and evaluate leads to certain critical questions that must be raised to the EU and that also should be raised internally in the EU.

A related mismatch concerns EU personnel, where the EU Delegation finds itself with people from development backgrounds working on unfamiliar security aspects and collaborating with security experts in the Ministry of interior and police, something that has never been done before.¹⁵ Related to this is the claim by Malian stakeholders that for example the training courses provided by EUCAP are not always relevant for the local context. The reason for this they claim is that the trainers and experts come from Europe to teach about something that for the local people are completely abstract. This suggests a lack of knowledge of the local reality, and ends up being useless. This also includes some of the equipment sometimes provided that is too technical for people to use and ends up just being stashed away. Not only are training sessions often seen as irrelevant to the local Malian context, but they are also usually quite short – from a couple of weeks to the human rights and gender course to train the trainers that only lasts for three days. Added to this is the fact that there is huge load of different actors that provide training courses to law enforcement officers and due to a lack of oversight the same course can be provided to the same group several times. One reason for this is the huge turnover of EUCAP staff, whose missions are normally one year-long. This may be way too short as it takes time to understand the local context; often staff members only start to master this towards the end of their secondment. Improving the institutional memory of EUCAP and similar EU programmes and interventions would help in this regard.¹⁶

5.2. The implementation–reception/perception gap

This section examines how EU policies are implemented, and identifies potential gaps between what is being done (often by local partners and local communities) and how local communities

¹⁵ EU Delegation, Chef de Cooperation Géza Strammer and Chef d'Équipe Section Économique et Gouvernance Julien Bouzon, Bamako 26.10.2017.

¹⁶ This is based on a number of interviews in Bamako in October and November 2017 with Malian stakeholders, EU officials and staff members from other international organisations.

perceive these policies (including analysis of whether they make sense for people on the ground). As part of this, we discuss how local communities and actors are involved in the design and implementation of programmes, which likely has important implications for local ownership, and, next, how local actors and communities receive them. As in the previous section our focus is on the EU's crisis response in the areas of security sector reform and border management.

5.2.1. Security Sector Reform

The security sector in Mali is struggling, something the EU, through for example EUTM and EUCAP, seeks to address. However, two paradoxes are evident and critical to consider.

First, the EUTM's approach seems to have a short-term perspective, whereas security sector reform (SSR) typically takes long time. For example, training has been found to be 'too short', in part because the army is stretched and needed in combat. Moreover, by 'training the trainers' and training leaders, for example in international humanitarian laws or gender issues, one might not necessarily be able to change the culture of management in the long run. Regarding the whole programme design, the EUTM admits that they start from 'our [European] experience in needs assessment, acknowledges top-down approach, and only then attunes to Malians' feedbacks. EUTM claims it is hard to prioritise needs when everything is lacking, and you need to re-build from scratch. Hence, priorities of needs come from the EU in the first place'.¹⁷ This paradox both talks about a short-term perspective, which might not produce much result in the long run, and a lack of conflict sensitivity that comes from Brussels-made mandates.

Related to its short-term perspective is that while the EU training of the Malian army is appreciated, it focuses on technical training. For a longer-term security sector reform, however, one needs an inclusive Malian process that tackles deep-rooted problems in FAMA. As one observer from MINUSMA puts it, 'The Malian Army is struggling with his history, [and has a] hard time to accept civilian authority'.¹⁸ Ever since the return to civilian rule after the 2012 coup, different Malian stakeholders have argued for the need to create a new army with a republican spirit, free of corruption, privilege based on ethnicity and networks, and nepotism. This process has not yet happened, and its delay is partly caused by the fact that this is an army

¹⁷ This is based on meeting with security officials based in Bamako, October 2017.

¹⁸ Interview with MISUSMA staff member, Bamako, October 2017.

at war, but is also an effect of a high level of impunity that turns also the army recruitment into a vehicle of economic commodification (see also Ba and Bøås 2013).

The second and more concrete paradox is that the EUTM personnel train an army at war while not being able to track trained soldiers on the ground. This considerably limits the EUTM's ability to provide valuable follow-ups, and to monitor whether the training really works. One important barrier to increased crisis response efficiency is therefore the very mandate that the EU provides the EUTM with. We understand the need to be risk averse, but here this comes on a collision course with the need to understand whether resources spent leads to anything on the ground.

The SSR agenda has faced several delays and challenges since it was re-ignited after the Presidential elections in November 2013. A participatory meeting involving all stakeholders (including not very relevant ones) was held, which agreed on some principles and deferred the matter to a SSR National Committee. Negotiations were prolonged, however, as some armed groups also wanted to be represented, but a council was finally established in July 2016. The SSR National Committee has, however, not really started to work yet. There are several reasons for this. One is according to informants close to the process due to poor coordination. Projects often overlap or are duplicated, often a result of donors coming with different proposals, and the Malian Government accepting all of them. However, the process is also stuck because armed groups refuse to lay down arms until they see some progress in other domains, such as development and justice, and mostly ad-interim authorities, because this is the main channel to capture aid funds and control the territory. Finally, armed groups have either not provided list of combatants, or exaggerated and duplicated their number of men-at arms to increase the benefits they hope that SSR will bring them.¹⁹ This process is therefore about politics as well as the potential spoils that the various groups, the government included, hopes to receive from this. Thus, what we currently are left with is a political process around SSR characterised by the inability of all parties to make the compromises needed, combined with external stakeholders without the leverage or political will needed (see also Dakouo 2017).

¹⁹ Some armed groups also claim they do not provide such lists because they are not an armed group but a social movement in which people take up arms spontaneously, interview with MNLA member, Bamako, November 2017.

5.2.2. Border Management: Responding to the ‘problem of porous borders’

The EU perceives the ‘problem of porous borders’ to be one of the key challenges in Mali, and in the Sahel region more broadly. On the one hand, borders are a key sovereignty prerogative and the ability of the state to control its borders is neatly linked to its territorial integrity and control. On the other hand, the main security threats to Mali and the EU alike (the ‘internal-external security nexus’ being one of the key principles in EU foreign policy) are conceptualised by the EU as being *cross-border*, such as terrorism, organised crime and migration to Europe. Border management and security has increasingly become one of the, if not the, most important EU response to these problems, and is considered the main way to bring the state ‘back to its territory’ in even remote areas.

The EU is, however, not the only donor or actor on border security in Mali. Indeed, this is a crowded field of external intervention with a multiplicity of donors and agencies constructing border posts and implementing other types of border-related activities. The various actors have a similar (albeit, not always the same) concept of border management,²⁰ and in the Sahel region it varies by country which agencies the EU employs to implement its projects. The tendency is that EU Member States increasingly prefer to implement border security through their development cooperation agencies, like in Mali where the main EU project dealing with borders, PARSEC, is implemented by Expertise France.²¹ The EU’s border control activities cannot, however, be reduced to the construction of physical border posts. Rather, border is at the heart of a variety of EU projects in Mali and the Sahel region dealing with both security and development.

One thing that one must kept in mind when assessing the feasibility of EU border control projects in Mali is the geography and topology of the Malian borders. The Sahel has inherited colonial borders that cut across local communities, tribes and ethnic groups. Due to this, there is lots of cross-border mobility with families and communities residing on both sides of the border. Most of the borderlands are remote places where government services glimmer by their absence. This is particularly true in the north of Mali, where the Tuareg conception of their proclaimed state of *Azawad* stretches across the borders of Mali, Algeria and Niger. In the Saharan desert the conceptualisation of territoriality and borders is not understood as lines in

²⁰ Interview with external border management consultant, Bamako, November 2017.

²¹ Some EU Member States have also been very busy with constructing and equipping border posts in their bilateral cooperation with Mali, such as for example Spain, which provided money for equipping 17 Malian border posts although it is unsure whether the money ever arrived at the border posts. See Dünnwald (2016).

the sand, but control over strategic posts of water and fuel, and control over trade and traditional caravan routes. We are speaking of thousands of kilometres of borders that stretch across the (semi-)desert where the central state has never really been in control.

The idea of border control seems to mean first and foremost control of the major routes and roads that cross these borders.²² The border is supposed to, on the one hand, facilitate free movement and trade (which is made possible – and obligatory - by an ECOWAS convention ratified by all its member states), and, on the other, it should stop illegal trafficking and movement.

However, there are several severe problems with the objective of border control to stop transnational terrorism and cross-border illicit trafficking, while facilitating trade in general. In the case of Mali, the most obvious is that the state does not control most of its territory and borderlands in the first place, and so-called ‘terrorists and agents of organised crime’ are already on Malian territory. Thus, it seems more plausible that the real objective is one of containment: stopping them from spreading to neighbouring countries and to Europe. However, the international actors present in Mali, and in particular the EU, can operate only in very few areas due to security restrictions. Even for personnel contracted to construct border posts, most of Malian territory is simply too dangerous.

Even if there would be border posts in northern areas, all illicit cross-border trade could easily circumvent the border post, or paying a bribe to the border guard in charge. In neighbouring Niger, the increased amount of border and police checkpoints resulting from the enforcement of the anti-migrant smuggling law in 2016 resulted in multiple new opportunities for police to increase their salaries by taking bribes (see Molenaar, Ursu and Tinni 2017). It is hard to believe that half a day of human rights training or counter-corruption training at EUCAP would counteract this livelihood strategy. On the contrary, there is also the risk that increased securitisation of the border could lead to higher stakes and risks, and thus higher profit margins and (para)militarisation, of cross-border trafficking and smuggling (see also Strazzari 2015). In this regard one Malian interviewee questioned whether combating organised crime is really the objective of all the border-focused activities as they focus on the centre of Mali. That is, however, not where the major traffics are – they are in the north (from the Polisario area in the borderland between Algeria and Western Sahara to Niger via Azawad).²³ Another interviewee

²² Interview with UN official, Dakar, November 2017.

²³ Interview with MNLA member, Bamako, October 2017.

concluded that the focus on borders is ‘mere advertisement, because Malian borders are too large. All these projects are designed to fail’.²⁴

Two interesting components which are included in EU border control-related projects in Mali and the neighbouring countries, and those of other international donors as well (such as IOM and the Danish-led Sahel Programme), are ‘proximity policing’ and co-operation with the local populations in border areas to survey the border.

‘Proximity policing’ is a European concept where the police are close and communicate with the local population, and helps them with what they perceive as problems. In Mali, implementing this concept is supposed to counteract the perception by local communities of security forces as being predatory and repressive. EUCAP is doing trainings on proximity policing, and also the GAR-SI units are supposed to have this function. In Mali, there is an idea (from the EU side) that personnel to the GAR-SI units should consist of some people speaking the local languages in which the units will operate to facilitate communication and integration in the local communities. This shows that the project does adapt to local context. However, this is an idea that is not in the project documents (i.e. project design) but is the idea of personnel in charge of the implementation of the programme, and, as such, context-sensitivity is very person-dependent. It also remains to be seen if the Malian government, which in the last instance is the one in charge of selecting personnel to the unit, follows up on this idea. In any case it will be interesting to see whether enhancing dialogue between local communities and security forces will bear fruit.

The related idea of involving local populations in policing and surveying the border is becoming increasingly popular in the border control projects of various donors including the EU. The first step in doing this is to sensitise the local population on where the border actually is, because, according to an interviewee, only 30-35 percent of the Malian borders are marked.²⁵

The local communities will then organise a security watch and report any suspicious movement to the security forces – which they will trust because there will be dialogues organised between local communities and security forces. Ideally there should be livelihood alternatives added to that, to prevent local border communities to engage in illicit trafficking.²⁶ However, as nice as this idea might seem on paper, unsurprisingly it has proved very difficult

²⁴ Interview with GAITA member, Bamako, October 2017.

²⁵ Interview with external border management consultant, Bamako, November 2017.

²⁶ Ibid.

to implement in practice. As earlier noted, Malian borders are seldom well-marked, and families, tribes, and ethnic groups live on both sides of the border. The results from such an EU-funded border project on the Senegalese side of the border with Mali showed that local populations are unwilling to report to security forces, among other because the people that engage in trafficking are part of their local community or even (extended) family.²⁷ The same problem was also reported by IOM about their border control project on the Mali-Burkina border, although they did not know the reason why local communities did not report to the security forces.²⁸

It is clear from the interviews that if there is to be established trust between local communities and the state, the state must be present – not first and foremost with security forces (although security forces should be a part) but with services that correspond to the basic needs of people. Many interviewees (including several EU staff) were worried that the EU’s approach in Mali is too focused on security. Interestingly, there is now a second component of PARSEC (with another €30 million approximately) being developed, more focused on development, which aims to ‘foster a comprehensive approach to security’.²⁹ This project will precisely focus on how security forces can respond to the needs of the local populations and be linked with other types of service provision than security. Importantly, it should be noted that this second component of PARSEC is being developed locally at the EU Delegation in Bamako – and it is probably the only project that could be said to be to some extent bottom-up and potentially context-sensitive in an otherwise Brussels-driven package of EUTF projects.

Intentions-implementation gaps in EU policy are, however, not confined to the bilateral level. Also, the drafting of a regional border management strategy at the G5 Secretariat proves to be a challenge.³⁰ The first reason for this is that there are no national border strategies or legal frameworks on border control (e.g. deciding amount of border posts, detailing the need to enter through one of the legal border posts to be legally in the country) except in Mauretania. This means that the countries cannot define, first, their own national border posts, and second, agreeing between each other on where the common border posts between the countries will be. However, there are negotiations on this currently taking place. It should also be kept in mind that negotiating on border security is a sensitive issue. It takes time to negotiate such as issues

²⁷ Interview with senior official in Senegalese Customs, Dakar, November 2017.

²⁸ Interview with IOM, Bamako, November 2017.

²⁹ Interview EU official, Bamako, November 2017.

³⁰ Interview EU Official, Niamey, November 2017.

because this topic is so intimately tied to a state's sovereignty. And the EU is seen not necessarily as a 'neutral' actor like the UN, but as an actor with its own strong interests. Migration (together with terrorism) is undoubtedly dominating the EU's political agenda in Mali and the region more generally, and border control is also supposed to be a measure to stem the flow of migrants towards Europe. It is important to note, again, that citizens of ECOWAS countries are free to move across borders within the ECOWAS space.

Ousmane Diarra, President of Association Malienne des Expulsé (AME), for example, suggests that EU migration policies are a 'complete failure in terms of tackling the root causes of migration, or reducing the number of departures'. He also argues these policies may be counterproductive, given that hindering regional mobility has a negative impact on development and trade, while major traffickers (drug traffickers, gold traffickers) can continue their business undisturbed. It may be that the EU, in its struggle to achieve numerous things at the same time and with limited consultation with local actors, has produced counterproductive policies that may end up decreasing support for its policies on the ground and with Malian actors.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, EUTM and EUCAP as well as the border management component of the EUTF show laudable intentions, though are complicated by divergence in stated intentions, real member state intentions, and sometimes contradicting ones (e.g. regarding border management). While these EU responses strive to be conflict sensitive, the solutions remain imported, not built with a bottom-up approach and, as a result, with a limited ability to effectively transform the security situation on the ground.

There are opportunities, efforts and intentions of making the EU's crisis response in Mali more conflict sensitive. However, as this paper has shown, several obstacles work against this. This includes little willingness from EU Member states to consult local actors (and the EU delegation itself) before making actions and not tailor-making programme designs to today's Malian context. Also, the security aspect in Mali prevents further access and monitoring, exacerbated by what some call an excessively risk adverse EU approach. With the status quo, however, one of the greatest challenges is that while the current EU responses such as EUTM and EUCAP can provide technical solutions, to rebuild legitimate and operational

army and police capable of restoring state authority, one needs an inclusive Malian process and a longer-term perspective.

The EU's crisis response projects in Mali are centred on security issues, with the larger aim of restoring the Malian state authority. However, the Malian state has limited legitimacy on the ground, and the structures that uphold it are fragile and disputed. There has been some optimism regarding the ETUF, for example to re-establish the implementation of already existing and newly launched programs and make it more sensitive to conflict. However, also the EUTF has gotten a more security-oriented approach, and still faces considerable challenges in becoming conflict sensitive. Indeed, as several of our interviewees in Bamako suggests, the EUTF is 'a politically oriented instrument (used both by Brussels and the European capitals) in which most of the projects were developed by European development agencies without much consultation with local actors in Mali, the Malian government or even the EU delegation'.

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