

PRSC 2002 LEARNING PROCESS

**STUDY OF THE CONTEXT FOR THE EMERGENCE AND
ACTIVATION OF MALIAN CIVIL SOCIETY**
[English translation]

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List of Abbreviations

ADEMA-PASJ	ADEMA- African Party for Justice and Solidarity
ADIDE	Association of Job Seekers and Initiators
AJDP	Association of Youth for Democracy and Progress
AMM	Malian Association of Municipalities
AMUPI	Malian Association for Islamic Unity and Progress
APE	Parent/Teacher Association
APCAM	Permanent Assembly of Malian Chambers of Agriculture
ARD	Associates in Rural Development
ASACO	Association of Community Health Organizations
AV	Village Association
AOPP	Association of Professional Farmer Organizations
CAFO	Coordinating Committee of Women’s NGOs
CAGCDM	Coordinating Committee of Retail Merchants Associations and Groups
CCA-ONG	Coordinating Committee of Activities by Malian NGOs
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission
CCIM	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Mali
CMDT	Malian Company for the Development of Textiles
CNID	National Congress for Democratic Initiative
COPO	Coordinating Committee of Opposition Parties
CSLP	Strategic Framework of the Fight against Poverty
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FENAPE	National Federation of Parent/Teacher Associations
OMAES	Malian Aid to Children of the Sahel
PNAE	National Environmental Action Plan
PRSC	Program for the Strengthening of Democratic Culture in Civil Society
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SECO	Secretariat for the Coordinating Committee of NGOs
SOCIMA	Cement Companies of Mali
SOMIEX	Import/Export Companies of Mali
SONATAM	National Tobacco and Matches Company of Mali
SPCK	Peasant’s Union of Kita
SYCOV	Union of Cotton and Food Crop Producers
SYNEM	National Herders Association of Mali
SYPAMO	Peasants Union of Western Mali
SYVAC	Union for the Raising of Cotton Prices
UDPM	Democratic Union of the Malian People
UNTM	National Union of Malian Workers
US-RDA	Sudanese Union – Democratic African Assembly

Introduction

The PRSC [Program for the Strengthening of Democratic Culture in Civil Society] was designed to deepen the practice of democracy in Malian civil society organizations and to enhance their capacity to influence the decisions of public sector actors.

It is useful to inquire into the bases of support for the emergence of a democratic Malian civil society and to explore the internal and external factors that might affect the sustainability of the process of training in democratic culture initiated by this project.

What are the lessons learned from the PRSC experience and what seem to be the prerequisites for people in civil society to be able to have decisive influence with people working in the public sector?

The goals of this program are to assist civil society actors to play an expanded role in all of the areas of development, while helping them to accept their roles and responsibilities for the development process. Given these goals, there are a number of different factors can be cited to explain the emergence of civil society and its current position in the present-day game of the management of public affairs.

When considering a learning process, the pedagogical approach taken by the teacher must take into account the background of the learners. This is the sense in which the current study considers the issue of the context for civil society's emergence.

1. The Traditions of a Centralized and Paternalistic Political and Administrative System

Mali's administrative tradition remains imprinted by over-centralization stemming from the colonial era. The defining of administrative sub-divisions on Mali's territory after independence, for example, did nothing to reverse either the hierarchical logic or the attitude of a centralized command structure put in place by the colonial regime. Regional and local level (district and county¹) administrators strictly followed the orders that they received and were accountable to these higher level officials.

In this colonial culture the role of administrators was to make people obey, to « train » them, to collect taxes, and when necessary to punish them. The « Commandant de cercle » was the « virtual king of the countryside » playing his role as a part of the administrative hierarchy. To enforce this conception of administration, the «Commandant» had at his disposition the necessary coercive forces (policemen, soldiers and guards).). Abuse of power became the norm, manifesting itself in the form of demands for bribes and other forms of harassment of the people that persist to this day.

The administration made no distinction between regional or local characteristics of this huge (more than 1.200.000 km²) and physically and culturally diverse country.

¹ In the French system, a «cercle» corresponds to an Anglo-American «district» and an «arrondissement» corresponds to a county.

The attitudes and practices of the administrators set up their relationships with the people. This relationship was characterized by paternalism and violence on the administrators' side and complete mistrust on the people's side. The cooperatives established by the « socialist » regime of the 1960s are typical of this style of centralized management by the Malian state. The same rules and working methods were imposed on both sedentary villages and nomadic groups, on farmers and herders alike. Membership in these "cooperatives" was obligatory, violating the most basic concept of the cooperative. Only repressive oversight of these cooperatives enabled them to function until their complete collapse following the coup d'état in November 1968.

The political systems that followed were just as centralist and unitary. Both the US-RDA and its successor under the military regime, the UDPM, were in effect party-states. In theory, their operational method was based on "democratic centralism." Their organizational base--the youth, women's, and union associations—strongly reflected this mentality of centralism and uniformity.

2. Values and Traditional Norms of Associating

There are three principal questions that can be posed about the impact of "traditional" Malian cultural beliefs and practices on the development of a democratic civil society:

- Are these values compatible with modern notions of democratic governance, and do they contribute to the spread of a democratic political culture?
- Do Malians' pre-existing habits and practices of association contribute to the growth and deepening of civil society?
- Is the level of political trust or social capital that Malians already have an advantage in the forging and spreading of civil society ?

a. A cultural context at odds with an official democracy

The socio-cultural environment that surrounds Malian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is governed by still vital secular values and norms that do not correspond with the principles and practices of democratic governance. A quick review of some of these can give a better idea of the gap between these traditions and modern notions of democracy.

i. The Concept of a Single Chief for Everything and Everyone

As a general rule, only one chief is designated or elected. He is charged with representing the entire community or association in all of its aspects and in every domain. Everyone owes him respect and even submission. His decisions, symbolic of the unity of the group, are treated as orders. In the name of some distant, sacrosanct principles he cannot be:

- Publicly contradicted;

- Required to be held accountable;
- Replaced unless and until he becomes seriously ill physically or mentally or if he commits an extremely serious error.

Power is concentrated in the hands of the chief who guarantees unity. He is expected to be the central figure in forging this sense of group cohesion. The notion of cohesion, however, does not fit well with the idea of accepting differences. Hence, principles and rules of good governance, such as transparent management, and periodic selection of leaders can appear to be extremely offensive because they contradict the customary notions of group cohesiveness and its corollary, the continuity of leaders.

ii. Participation Determined by Membership in a Group or Separate Status

Another characteristic of Malian groups and associations is the separation of people by gender, age or other criteria such as ethnicity, caste, or geographic origin. The notion that one belongs to a group defined by age or gender seriously limits individual freedom of expression. Meetings vary widely in terms of how much discussion takes place based on which social groups or categories of people are in attendance.

It is important to note that women, who are well-known for speaking out loudly in discussions amongst themselves, will keep silent or even seem to disappear in the presence of men. Traditional norms demand that they cede the public space to men. This does not suggest, however, that they do not have any influence over community decisions.

When there are meetings of youth led by their elders, this same pattern of silence can be noted. Notions of gerontocracy prevail, prohibiting younger people from speaking without permission from their elders, and surely they can never contradict their elders in public.

iii. The Norm of Containing or Suppressing Conflict

The ability to suppress conflict is highly valued both within the family and the group. Groups and their leaders invest a great deal of energy and time to accomplish this. Open conflict is seen as a threat that can disrupt the unity of the group. A leader is valued for his capacity to contain conflicts and forge real or seeming cohesion. This norm tends to suppress the expression of alternative points of view and makes it more difficult to clarify the various needs of members of the group.

iv. An Oral Tradition

Another cultural characteristic is one of oral tradition. As the proverb states, “A human being is not caught by his tail nor by the nape of his neck but by the words of his mouth.”

This very vital oral tradition means that people prefer to communicate directly in an informal manner. People feel much more connected and bound by oral communication

than by written texts. This preference for direct oral discourse explains internal organizational dynamics and relations with external actors much better than written constitutions and by-laws that are often ignored.

v. The Role of Griots (Nyamaka), Performers, Historians and Craftsmen in Social Mediation

The role of conflict resolution or mediation is most often played, not by specialists or by the most influential members of society, but by members of a social category called “members of castes.”². These people, the “griots” (or *Nyamakala*), play the roles of historians, performers, and mediators in every community. They, rather than the written record, record the history as an oral record of events. They establish social connections through marriages and alliances, and master language and all that is associated with sound (discourse, story-telling, genealogy, interpretation of the past, and the playing of musical instruments). Because they have relatively easy access to people of all social categories, including decision makers, they have a special advantage in conducting mediation.

vi. *Sinankuya*, a Tool of Communication and Attempted Influence

The word *sinankuya* connotes what anthropologists call joking relationships, or relationship between cousins. This relationship plays an important role of relaxing tensions and easing communications in a society that is traditionally quite hierarchically organized. These relationships exist between different ethnic groups, people with different surnames, and people from different regions. They allow the « joking cousins » to tease each other and speak frankly about differences without resorting to violence.

Joking relationships also play a vital role in advocacy—the right to try to influence a decision maker or to ask for a special favor. In olden days, a king (*Faama*) would find out if joking cousins of his lived in a village before attacking it. If there were, these people could communicate to him requests from the community for better treatment. This notion of advocacy, based on specific personal or group inter-relationships, is quite different from the Western notion of advocacy. In contrast to this highly personal approach, Western notions of advocacy are theoretically based on group interests and relationships of power and influence forged from the capacity of groups to mobilize allies and support.

b. Traditional Associational Life: Rich but Hardly Democratic

It is often contended that, despite its history of authoritarian rule, Malian associational life is rich and constitutes a strong foundation for decentralized and plural governance as an underpinning for a modern participatory civil society (Poulton, 2002). This tradition of associational life, it is argued, can be credited with having contributed to the resolution of violent conflict in Mali, such as the rebellion in the North (Owen, 2002 and ARD, Inc.

² Normally “members of castes” are considered to be of a lower social status.

2002).³ However, an examination of the evolution of one such association, the “ton,” raises questions about this proposition.

The notion of the “ton” dates back to pre-colonial times, and encompasses the essential paradoxes of Mande/Bamana governance. Transformed initially from the simple organization of age grades representing an instrument of an egalitarian and decentralized society, it was reinterpreted in turn as an instrument of consolidation of power and the assertion of authoritarian and centralizing tendencies.⁴

It is true that traditional Malian society, particularly sedentary rural society was historically based on a strong sense of association. In the past children from a young age were taught to value the spirit of association as a way of life and a community value. In the Bamanan et Malinké communities, for example, children from the age of seven were invited to join the *domo*, an association freely constituted by children of this age and supervised by an adult of their choice. Children who joined would remain members of this organization until the age of circumcision at about 16 years old. Members were expected to contribute small amounts of work to the community in exchange for modest payment. Income from these activities went to pay for annual festivals organized by members of the group.

Following circumcision, young people formed their “ton,” or age group. The *ton* functioned like a *Domo* at the level of the village, neighborhood, or group of members of a given caste. Each ton had at its head a corps of officials including a chief (*Ton Kuntigi*), an assistant chief, and an official responsible for organization. All members of a *ton* were given more social responsibility. In addition to performing work tasks like cultivating fields and repairing houses, the village council could ask the *ton* to undertake work of importance to the community as a whole, such as road repair and help to needy community members. Revenues earned by the ton could be expended for an annual festival to which girls from neighboring villages would be invited. Historically, then, the *ton* represented the ethic of mutual assistance and interest among members.

According to one interpretation of Malian history, the *ton* reached its apex in the Bamanan Kingdom of Ségou under the reign of former *ton* chief, Biton Coulibaly. Coulibaly abused his power and used this association as an instrument of war to consolidate his position. Following the founding of the independent state of Mali, the USRDA tried to make use of the traditional form of the *ton* as the base of its political organization of rural Mali. The military regime of General Moussa Traoré similarly made use of the concept of the “village *ton*” to impose its will on the people.

³ Olly Owen, MALI – Reinforcing the Foundations, ; London, Centre for Democracy and Development 13 March 2002. He states that the “‘Flames of Peace’ ceremony in Tombouctou in March 1996 stemmed entirely from local initiatives, based upon a tradition of village, community-based and inter-ethnic consensus-building politics.”

⁴ David Rawson, ‘Dimensions of Decentralization in Mali’ in R. James Bingen, David Robinson & John M. Staatz, *Democracy and Development in Mali* (Michigan State University Press, Chicago, 2000), 267-68.

In particular, the Malian Company for Textile Development (CMDT) used the *ton* as the basis of its Village Associations (AV). In theory the AV was a “pre-cooperative” that would eventually be transformed into a *ton villageois* when its members became more experienced. These associations served to structure the relationship between cotton producers and the para-statal CMDT beginning in the early 1980s. In effect, the AV, whose membership was theoretically voluntary but was restricted to a single grouping per village, became the sole instrument through which the CMDT provided training, credit and services to the village level. As the AVs and *tons villageois* came to manage increasingly important sums of dividends and bank credit, they became increasingly less transparent in their management and increasingly fraught with internal tensions over charges of corruption and over the refusal of their leadership to be replaced. These internal tensions led to the break up of many AVs with negative consequences for the cohesion of the villages upon which they were based. In addition, the fact that the AVs became less and less capable of representing the interests of ordinary members led to the birth of a number of producer unions, notably SYCOV, SNAPRO, SPCK, and GSCV.

This first effort on the part of the state to organize associations in rural Mali took place under governments that were authoritarian and that attempted to monopolize decision making power. Instead of constituting the basis for an authentic democratic civil society, the resurrection and deformation of the age-grade structure was part of strategy to render the organization of rural Mali overly centralized and bureaucratic, and very little in tune with democratic principles.”⁵ The structures that followed--producers associations and unions-- would not grow out of the distorted forms of the *tons* but parallel to them. They would, however, still have to contend with these old forms and habits as they struggled to become more democratic institutions.

c. Social Capital--Mali's Particular Advantage?

Given the relatively high density of associational life in Mali, it might be presumed that Malians exhibit a high degree of social capital. In writing about the peace process in the North, Poulton asserts that social capital, that is “essentially civil society, and the indigenous values of participative democracy,”⁶ proved to be decisive to finding a durable peace settlement.

One problem with this notion is the fact that the very concept of social capital is far from determined. A common element in many definitions, however, involves the attitudinal dimension in which members of a society share a broad sense of interconnectedness based on attitudes of reciprocity and trust.

Is Malian society particularly well endowed in this kind of social capital, and does it therefore constitute a favorable environment for the development of civil society? The

⁵ Abdoulaye Sall, *L'organisation du monde rural du Mali, 1910- 1988*, Bamako : Edition-imprimerie du Mali, 1989.

⁶ Robin Poulton, “To Make Peace, Support Civil Society and Keep Out of Sight: Technical Cooperation and Peacemaking in Mali,” UNDP, Insight in 1000 words series.

answer is not clear. One recent study casts some doubt on this proposition. Based on a comparison of attitudes of interpersonal trust in fifteen African countries, the authors of the Afrobarometer study conclude that “social capital,” at least as measured by this one dimension, is in fact lower in Mali than in many of the other African countries surveyed.⁷ While this single measure no doubt does not capture the entire range of what social capital means, it should serve as a caution to the popular assumption that Malian attitudes are more conducive to the emergence of democratic civil society than is the case for many other countries on the continent.

3. Political Attitudes

Mass political attitudes are learned over long periods of time as people are socialized in and react to their cultural and political environment. These attitudes can play a significant role in the way people see themselves associating and particularly in the way they see themselves participating in the democratic process, as participants in the making and application of public decisions.

When people’s political attitudes are very positive toward the broader system and to democratic principles in general, they are much more likely to be willing to invest their time and resources to participate in the advocacy process. The way in which people will participate and their expectations of the results of different tactics are also likely to be influenced by their attitudes. For example, when people think that their system permits them access and that political leaders will listen to them and take their views into consideration, they are much more likely to engage in policy advocacy in a constructive manner. When they are skeptical about the responsiveness of public actors and about the fairness of their decisions, they may prefer to avoid engagement or may engage in conflict to force policy makers to pay attention to their concerns.

Two major surveys of political attitudes have been conducted in Mali in the last few years. The Afrobarometer, a cross-national study of political and economic attitudes in twelve transitional African democracies, was conducted in Mali in 2000 and again in November 2002. This study was funded by a consortium of donors including USAID, the National Science Foundation (USA), the University of Michigan (USA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A second study is, “A Study of the Progress Made in Mali’s Governance,” financed by the Economic Commission for Africa and directed by the Malian firm Koni Expertise in 2002. Unfortunately, the full study which includes an account of the sample, method and

⁷ Michael Bratton, Massa Coulibaly, Fabiana Machado, “Les perceptions populaires de la bonne gouvernance au Mali,” Michigan State University/ Bamako, Mali : *Afrobarometer Working Paper 9*, 31 mars, 2001.

questionnaire is not yet available and the results of the preliminary report must therefore be treated with a great deal of caution.⁸

The Afrobarometer study for the year 2000 (2002 data is not yet available) finds that at the mass level Malians are not highly convinced of the preference for democratic government. According to the survey, Malians are somewhat more likely than those surveyed in the other African countries to agree with the statement that “under certain circumstances non-democratic government may be preferable to democratic government.” Malians also do not score high on their understanding of the basic notion of democracy, particularly if democracy is defined in terms of pluralism and open competition for leadership.

The ECA/Koni Expertise study, on the other hand, indicates that both Malian elites and members of households score Malian leaders high on the index of progress made in governance during the past ten years. Specifically they agree that “Mali has good political representation,” that it now has “a democratic pluralist political system where the rights of minorities have their place and that encourage popular perception of the management of public affairs.” Respondents agree that Mali possesses “a highly legitimate political framework, accepted by everyone, with recourse to universal suffrage for the choice of its political leaders.” Respondents report that they believe that the country has a leadership that is “minimally restrictive in creating and operating political parties in total security” and that “the political parties have equal access to the media during electoral campaigns.” They believe that electoral rules have been applied fairly, assuring transparent and credible elections and that the Malian state respects the rule of law.

Low voter turnout is still a significant concern. A reading of the data in Table I confirms the relatively low interest that Malians have shown in the electoral process. It should be noted, however, that these national data mask very considerable differences by region and over time. In some places turnout and interest is much higher, but in other areas, and notably in the North, it is even lower than these averages indicate. According to the IDEA Voter Turnout Project, these results place Mali at the very bottom of democratic countries in terms of electoral turnout.

Electoral turnout remained very low during the 1990s, hampered in part by the decision of many of the opposition parties to boycott the parliamentary elections of 1997 and the municipal and local government elections of 1997 and 2000. It is interesting to note that the highest turnout since the founding elections of 1992 occurred in the elections for local government in 1999. The elections of 2002 continued this positive direction as the political landscape changed, with the disintegration of the former Presidential party group and the Coordination of Opposing Parties (COPO) and with the creation of several important new political formations, notably Espoir 2002. Still, the level of voting in the

⁸ The only account of this study presently available is the document “Sythèse du Rapport Provisoire-Décembre 2002.” For this reason, the data and results must be treated with some reserve. It appears that the primary method was to interview a panel of experts on Mali and to average their responses.

second round of the Presidential election, won decisively by Amadou Toumani Touré, remained very low.

Of concern as well is the lack of confidence that many Malians expressed, at least until 2002, in two of the most important institutions of plural democracy: parties and the parliament. According to the 2000 Afrobarometer political parties and the National Assembly were among the least favorably viewed institutions, comparing very unfavorably with the army and the local government.

TABLE 1 RATES OF VOTER TURNOUT IN MALIAN ELECTIONS:⁹

	1992 (%)	1997 (%)	1999 (%)	2002 1st/2 nd Round(%)
Constitutional Referendum	40			
Legislative elections	21.9	21.57		?/ 25.98
Presidential elections	20	29.02		38.3 / 30.17
Local election (rural communes)			40.88	

Finally, Malians exhibited the lowest levels of knowledge and interest in national politics of any of the countries surveyed, according to the Afrobarometer. These low levels of knowledge of and support for democracy are certainly not unexpected, however, if one considers the levels of economic development and basic education in Mali, which are still among the lowest in the world. These factors, as will be discussed in another section, certainly can discourage knowledge, a sense of efficacy, and the availability of resources to pursue political participation and advocacy.

There are, nonetheless, positive signs in the Malian political culture. One such sign is the fact that despite the low levels of economic development and some severe economic shocks, Malians are right at the average of the citizens of the 15 countries surveyed (about 60%) in expressing their satisfaction (fairly or very satisfied) “with the way democracy works in [their country. The ECA/Koni study provides additional support for this general observation.].” The fact that the majority of Malians are not alienated by the political process is without a doubt a favorable factor for them to participate in democratic processes such as citizen advocacy.

⁹ Voter turnout was derived from data provided by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Website and IFES (International Foundations for Electoral Systems website.

4. Civil Society Owes its Growth to a Series of Crises:

The history of civil society in Mali is characterized by two major phenomena: the incapacity of the State, and a series of crises.

The emergence of the first generation of NGOs in Mali was largely due to the international reaction to the drought of the 1970s. A number of international NGOs and other donors forged networks with national and local counterparts through agreements with associations and emerging NGOs. As a result of the need to coordinate the various interactions of these actors, the CCA-NGO (Coordinating Committee for the Actions of NGOs in Mali) was formed, bringing together both national and international NGOs. The national NGOs in turn created the SECO (Coordinating Secretariat for NGOS) in an effort to make sure that their particular concerns would be well represented.

The revolution of March 1991 marked a decisive turning point for Malian civil society because it created a much greater opening for the expression of citizens' freedoms through the operation of a democratic political regime. This new regime committed to affirm the right of local freedoms in Title XI of the February 25, 1992 Constitution.

The Malian National Conference and the General Estates of the Rural World (Etats Generaux du Monde Rural), organized in 1991, set the course for improving the involvement of various affected actors in governmental decisions and more meaningful participation by both the population and the civil society in every development activity.

The new Constitution in its Article 5 affirmed the right of association, furthering the possibility for civil society to participate in the institutions and processes of governance. There were, however, gaps in this right as can be observed from a reading of Ordinance 59-41, which set out the conditions for managing associational life in Mali. Not only is the tone of this regulation a throwback to the authoritarian past, but it attempts to specify what role civil society can play for the nation in the governance game.

Nonetheless, the right accorded did translate into a much easier time of creating associations and NGOs. This right can be interpreted as an indication of the weakness of party politics, or alternatively as a demonstration of the strongly felt desire on the part of civil society actors to more fully participate in the life of the nation. It can also be interpreted as being a response to the profound economic crisis. Civil society could attempt to deepen its legitimacy by being involved directly in politics and national decisions and by being internally governed by democratic principles.

The NGOs also came to have a leading role in civil society because of their years of experience with multiple kinds of advocacy activities. This experience was supported by financial and technical aid in various key sectors such as education, health, water, and agriculture. This aid amounted to about 24 million CFA Fr a year.

The process of helping to settle the rebellion in Northern Mali, that had stemmed from poor administration, opened up to civil society organizations a space for action and gave

rise to the birth of a multitude of associations. This activity was due in large measure to the role played by women and other resource people in the areas affected by the rebellion. They must be given a great deal of the credit for the successful return to peace and reconciliation.

Today there are a number of prominent Civil Society Organizations (including unions, federations and networks) that are involved in trying to find a solution to the crisis in the schools that has plagued the country for the past decade. Specific organizations include NGOs (CCA-ONG, SECO, CAFO, and FENAPE), religious organizations (AMUPI, the Catholic and Protestant churches), and unions (UNTM and CCIM)

Like the education crisis, the political crisis following the 1997 elections, with its negative effects on the social climate, also proved to be an opening for civil society. A number of diverse civil society actors, such as CAFO, CCA, SECO, churches, CCIM, and UNTM were propelled into a mediation role, despite the fact that they may not have always been well prepared to fulfill that task. Through its participation in the search for solutions to these crises, civil society gained both an audience and a certain legitimacy in the eyes of both the public and the government and came to be viewed by both as playing the role of “fire extinguisher.”

Civil society also gained an opportunity to participate in and advocate policy and to argue for a more participatory and transparent form of governance through its involvement in the development of the Strategic Plan for the Struggle Against Poverty. It should be recalled that OMAES facilitated the Governance Thematic Group in this process and influenced and inspired other thematic groups through the quality of its leadership.

In this vein, it is also important to note some of the innovative methods that were promoted by civil society for involving citizens in posing questions to authorities in the Second Republic. The institutionalization of forums whereby citizens and other legally recognized actors could raise questions to governmental officials about violations of their rights has proven to be a particularly important force in growth and solidarity.

5. The Socio-Economic Crisis and Civil Society

In 1982 the government of Mali, confronted with the on-going economic crisis dating to the 1970s and with the failure of its earlier economic policies, adopted a structural adjustment program that accepted, among other things, the liberalization of the economy and the withdrawal of the State from some of the areas of production.

Since 1990, the Malian economy has finally been showing some signs of responding to nearly two decades of structural adjustment but the structural limits of this progress are still very significant: according to the final report of the Strategic Plan for the Fight Against Poverty (SPFP, or CSLP--Cadre strategique de Lutte Contre la Pauvreté in French), poverty still affects 63% of the Malian people. The 2001 UNDP *Human Development Report* ranks Mali 153rd out of 162 nations.

In fact the structural adjustment program seems to be accelerating impoverishment in Mali and contributes to the image of Mali as a country that is marginalized in the global economy. The public market of the Malian states is shrinking, resources are becoming more scarce and competition for them more intense, terms of trade are deteriorating, export earnings fluctuate widely, prices for agricultural commodities are low, the weather is unpredictable, the capacity of the State to manage the macro-economy is weak, the capacity to manage democratic governance and public resources in the interest of addressing the most basic needs of Malians are weakly institutionalized. It was in this concept of severe poverty that Mali adopted the Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty (CSLP). Structural adjustment has in fact accentuated social tensions and negatively affected the largest segment of those most vulnerable in society -- women, youth and children.

The proliferation of NGOs in Mali can be explained in part as a reaction to this social and economic crisis and the inadequate solution proposed by the State. This crisis also poses the issue of the relationship between economic and political democracy.

6. The Heavy Burden of Youth

Youth and the demographic distribution pose an addition heavy burden in Mali in terms of efforts to address the problems of education and employment. This burden is all the more important given that today's youth will have to manage matters in the first quarter of the 21st century. Is it prepared to do so? In fact 70% of the population has no access to education and the rate of school enrollment is only about 55% (and only 46% for girls). These figures, cited in the final report of the SPFP, mask the very considerable disparities across the country as indicated in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2 RATES OF SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Zones	Raw Rate of Enrollment (%)	Rate of enrollment of Girls (%)
Zone A (Mopti. Tombouctou. Gao. Kidal)	26- 38	21-28
Zone B (Kayes. Sikasso. Ségou. Koulikoro)	42- 56	32-42
Zone C (Bamako)	139	138

In addition, the school dropout rate is very high. Only 42% of the students who enter the first grade complete the 6th grade; such rates are even worse for girls.

This situation poses a very serious problem, not only for the transmission of social values to the next generation, but also in terms of Mali's chances of competing at least on the level of the sub-regional market.

On the other hand, the segment of youth that are secondary and post-secondary students are powerfully mobilized to demand scholarships and improvements in the quality of the

schools, focusing on the promises embodied in the “Memorandum” issued at the time of the National Conference. Their demands are expressed through strikes that are sometimes violent which have had the effect of closing educational institutions off and on for the past ten years. This is a heavy price for the Nation to have paid and yet it has not led to the satisfaction of students’ demands because the State has argued that it simply did not have the resources to do so, given the budget constraints imposed by structural adjustment.

7. Civil Society and the Game of Politics

Faced with a monopoly of power by the UDPM, the political opposition in Mali had a single demand—the return to multipartyism and plural democracy. This demand was essentially turned into street action by associations in civil society (notably by the AJDP, ADIDE, ADEMA, CNID). These challenges by associations were the sole direct route for confronting the monopoly on power, prior to the emergence of the opposition political parties.

The political parties that were created in the early 1990s had a very limited understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The only thing that was important to them was the electoral struggle, the competition for power. If the fact that there are at least 80 such parties indicates the victory for pluralism, their operation has done little to elevate the sense of civic responsibility on the part of Mali’s citizens.

For a new democracy like Mali, the role of aggregating opinion and training the population to become a democratic citizenry is at least as important a factor in democratic consolidation as the role that parties can play in countering the power of the State. In fact, for many actors the conception of the political party is poorly understood. The political game has been captured by the proliferation of parties that impedes a real debate on politics and policy.

In 1999 the UNDP conducted a study of the Perspectives for Mali in the year 2025 in which it noted that “the overwhelming majority deplore the current situation because the proliferation of political parties that often have no base and that represent no one complicates the political playing field. In these conditions, the notion of political alternatives becomes highly problematic.” As one actor said “political parties are poor in ideas, poor in action, and rich in demands, particularly electoral demands.”

The level of voter turnout discussed in section 3 above may be an indicator of how Malians feel about how representative their political parties are. Several different explanations for low turnout can be offered. The first thesis suggests voter fatigue and growing indifference. At first, turnout was relatively high for the vote on the new Constitution in February 1992, no doubt because people really hoped for change. The National Conference had prepared the way. Given the declining rates of turnout for the subsequent election of the same year, one can ask whether the population really felt concerned. Perhaps the low turnout rate could be explained by the fact that Malians were asked to vote four times in a space of only four months that year. Nonetheless, the

political parties should have taken this fall-off as a warning that they needed to work harder to mobilize the citizens. Apparently no one read these warning very well because the turnout rates fell even more. In 1997 the electoral system simply broke down as the opposition parties boycotted the elections. They objected that the elections were being conducted in an unfair and fraudulent manner that lacked transparency. They particularly objected to the operation of the electoral commission (CENI) which they felt was not operating autonomously from the government.

In 2001, after ten years of democracy, the upcoming elections of 2002 posed serious questions for the entire political class. Civil society organizations engaged in a series of forums and reflections in order to forge a new consensus that would allow the elections to take place under better conditions. These mediations allowed certain compromise measures to be adopted, notably Law 00-47 (July 13 2000) that recognized that all parties and coalitions could exercise their right to oppose the government both within the parliament and outside it. This law also dealt with the financing of parties. As a result of these discussions, a Code of Conduct for the electoral campaign of 2002 was adopted, that -- it was hoped -- would allow the election to take place in a peaceful and transparent manner. In addition to the new law, the parties established a consultative commission of parties that would meet weekly to discuss the progress of the campaign and problems associated with preparing for the 2002 elections. Lastly, the parties agreed to computerize and cleanup the electoral rolls. .

These measures were followed right up to the 2002 elections. These elections were marked by a large number of candidates, elections dotted with serious problems and challenges, and a very low level of turnout. The result of these elections was the election of an independent candidate to the Presidency and the installation of a National Assembly with no official opposition.

Others offer an alternative explanation of the low voter turnout rooted in the particular circumstances and obstacles surrounding each election. For example, elections have typically been scheduled in such a way that the electoral debate needed to take place during the rainy season. This argument no doubt does provide a partial explanation, but it should be noted that some of the elections took place at other times of year (January). Another argument that is more widely shared among civil society actors is that the low turnout rate no longer reflects disinterest but is now explained by citizens' hostility toward the form of political game being played by the parties in Mali—with the proliferation of parties, the division and reconstitution of parties with no mass input, the high number of candidates, the large amount of money mobilized for political campaigns, the non-existence of political programs by the parties, and the failure of parties to keep their electoral promises.

8. A Private Sector with More Capacity to Articulate its Interests

With the end of monopolies by para-statal and enterprises as a result of structural adjustment and of the blatant failure of organizations like SOMIEX, SOCIMA,

SONATAM, CMDT, there has been a sharp increase in the number of professional associations in Mali. The Malian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIM), for example, has been propelled into the role of becoming an organization for articulating the demands of its members. This positive development, however, quickly ran into the contradiction that the CCIM remains an appendage of the State. The same is true of the Chamber of Agriculture, which was transformed following a series of meetings into the State-affiliated Permanent Assembly of Chambers of Commerce (APCAM).

The status of these quasi-state organizations and the fact that it is impossible for them to hold the State accountable for its actions, has led to the emergence of a number of other more specific associations within these two broad categories. Thus, the Coordinating Committee for Associations and Retail Merchant Groups (CAGCDM) has formed within the CCIM. The Association of Professional Farmers Organizations, the National Union of Malian Herders (SYNEM), and the Federation of Cattle and Meat Professionals (FPBV) have formed within APCAM. These are examples of a new type of organization that clearly intends to defend the specific interests of its members and to try to influence policies and practices in their favor. These new actors have an entirely different relationship with the State because they clearly have greater autonomy compared to the old ineffective structures that were State-dominated.

9. Decentralization and Civil Society

One of the consequences of the revolution of 1991 was the acceptance of the principles of decentralization and of the participation of civil society in governance. These principles were translated into a policy of the devolution of State power to local governments. It is important, however, to be more precise about this decentralization because the actual devolution of responsibilities (transfer des competences) was to be done not by the executive but by the legislature. Local governments in Mali did not get the right to legislate. According to Articles 97 and 98 in the Constitution, they only got the right to “freely administer.” As such, however, they became the locus for genuine development and for a dialogue to take place involving civil society actors.

Law 93008 set the principles of “free administration” conferring on each local government the power and authority to manage its own affairs. Under this law, the local government has the authority to regulate all local economic, social and cultural issues. In this regard, the Communal Council, as the Executive Branch, has two principal powers—the power to make decisions and to consult. In this role the Council must be accountable to the citizens and citizens have the right to monitor the work of the Council and the duty to participate.

Law 95 034 provides a Local Government Code for the transfer of authority and establishes the methods of involving citizens in its work. Thus, the local governments must assure the citizens:

- That its meetings dealing with development programs, the resources to implement programs, gifts and donations made to local government, and all discussions of budget and communal accounts will be public;

- That any deliberations of its elected bodies will be publicly announced;
- That it will hold consultations with village councils, and councils of fractions and neighborhoods on certain questions;
- And that it will involve citizens in the implementation of economic, social and cultural development programs for the local government area.

As an instrument of the State, decentralized institutions must in a democratic framework fulfill specific responsibilities intended to improve the well-being of the population while being in harmony with their values. These conditions assume that the juridical and administrative climate will be developed and reinforced that will devote public resources in the interest of the governed, based on the notion of justice, equity, efficiency, and transparency.

It is obvious that this decentralization plan must deal with some daunting problems, chief among them being the transfer of authority and resources. It is through the association movement that local officials will be able to question the State. For example, according to its memorandum of November 22, 2000, the Malian Association of Municipalities (AMM) plans to contact the head of State and deliver the message that “the Mayors and elected local officials of Mali judge that since the consolidation of decentralization is intended to improve the capacity of the country to fight against poverty and to promote the interests of the nation...this presupposes that at the highest level of the State there will be a strong and unshakable political will in favor of decentralization, local democracy, and base-level development.” .

This advocacy campaign in favor of decentralization leads one to reflect on the model of electoral democracy on which decentralization rests. It is a model of delegation of the management of public affairs. Does it suffice to assure a close relationship between the population and locally elected officials?

Decentralization offers civil society organizations a space for action in the sense that they are more and more recognized and involved as actors and partners at the local or communal level. It is necessary, however, to acknowledge that the low level of education and the insufficiency of financial and human resources have limited the effectiveness of state-mandated and created civil society organizations like the APE, ASACO, TON/AV, and women’s associations.

This new devolution will naturally accentuate the capacities of these past institutions and the capacity of local governments to advocate for the early transfer of authority and concomitant resources to assure the development that is so fervently desired.

10. The Question of Gender.

One segment of civil society deserves special attention in the context of democratization in Mali—women. Women in Mali constitute 51.2 per cent of the population. Their economic contribution is beyond dispute. But they are marginalized both in decision-

making and in access to resources. Since the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement and particularly since the Beijing Summit on Women, women have been engaged in a struggle that is leading toward the inclusion of gender issues in all development activities. Nonetheless, women continue to confront a great many obstacles to their full participation in public life, not the least of which is the low level of participation of women and girls in formal education.

As a result of these constraints and in spite of some recent gains, women are currently under represented in public life and in the public discourse at every level of Malian society. The last legislative elections are evidence of this fact since fewer women were elected to this assembly (only 12) than to the previous one (that had 16). The candidacy of the sole female candidate for the Presidency in 2002 was invalidated on a technicality. President Touré's government, put into place in September 2002, contained only three women, compared to six in the previous Alpha Konaré government. The women's civil society umbrella organization, CAFO, took due note of this fact. Only 5 of the 703 mayors of communes in Mali are women. .

One very significant piece of legislation that will help determine the role of women in the political process and in the economy is the pending "Family Code." The debate on this law seems to be difficult, but open. For now, the most important struggles for women's participation, however, are likely to take place at the local level where women confront a whole series of serious problems of daily life. According to some women "democracy without women is only superficial democracy." To improve their bargaining position women have constituted a coordinating organization, the CAFO (Coordinating Committee of Women's Associations and NGOs). This association alone is insufficient to support the range of actions being undertaken by local level women's associations.

11. The Sub-regional and International Dimensions

Malian civil society is evolving in the context of sub-regional integration that translates into exchanges and the creation of networks.

The preparation for the various world summits held during the decade of the 1990s (Earth Summit, Summit on Women, Summit on Population, etc.), the participation in the preparation of various programs and plans, and the creation of umbrella organizations for the sub-region, such as the CILSS "Platform," have provided opportunities for NGOs to participate and to strengthen their organizational capacity and their place in national planning programs. Starting in 2002, the international community recognized that "one of the principal indispensable elements in the attainment of sustainable development is the participation of the public in decision-making."

Development partners, ranging from bilateral agencies, the U.N. specialized agencies, and international NGOs, have made this one of the mainstays of their interventions. Now every project must demonstrate that it has in fact involved the population and taken its views into account.

This process has helped the civil society actors feel more comfortable in their role as partners of the public sector and has given them permission to claim an important place in the process of planning the future. States have more closely associated NGOs and associations in negotiations over macro-economic policies (Network Initiative for Participatory Review of Structural Adjustment Programs) and these civil society actors have participated in the implementation of major government programs, such as the former Project for Support to Base-level initiatives (PAIB). Nonetheless, it is important to note that many strategic actors, and notably elected officials, women, marginalized groups and the poorest of the poor, have yet to be sufficiently involved.

Conclusion

Malian civil society in its various organizational forms has proven to be a “good risk,” but it is confronted with a number of problems, notably:

- inadequate organizational capacity;
- inadequate internal institutionalization; and
- inadequate access to resources.¹⁰

It is, as are nearly all Malian social institutions, in a transition phase marked by rapid expansion. Civil society organizations are in the trough of the wave trying to evolve and make a difference in a highly competitive world marked by the need for both transparency and results. They are, for the most part, conscious of their position.

¹⁰ “Study of Malian NGOs and their Priorities for Reinforcing their Capacity,” March, 1998 cited by CCA/NGO.