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CENTRAL REGIONS: FIVE DIALOGUES SUPPORTED BY MINUSMA TO REUNIFY COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT

In view of the community dimension of the crisis affecting central Mali, and in accordance with its mandate, MINUSMA has placed social cohesion and inter-community dialogue at the heart of its actions. From January to October 2020, in close collaboration with the regional authorities and with the support of the Civil Affairs Division (CAD) of the Mission, the Bambara, Bozo, Dogon, Marka and Peulh communities took part in exchanges as part of a project of "Community dialogue and community conflict resolution in five target localities in the region of Mopti and Ségou". Swiss funds financed this project to the tune of 23,615,075 CFA Francs, through the Office of the United Nations Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.

"This project offered a space for dialogue to the different communities concerned who discussed their problems, examined their differences together, and who, subsequently, decided to move forward together to restore peace and live together." Rejoiced Fatou THIAM, Head of the regional office of MINUSMA in Mopti.

As part of this project, a series of five inter-community dialogues were held that targeted 14 communities and directly involved more than 250 people from interest groups and stakeholders. Among them, traditional, community and religious leaders, local and communal authorities, women and young people. The objective is to contribute to the restoration of communication, social cohesion and living together, through dialogue and mediation between communities affected by conflicts at the local level.

In the region of Mopti, the context of conflict which, since 2016, has grown between the communities targeted by this project, is characterized in particular by land disputes or by deep disagreements on the management and use of natural resources. Over the years, these misunderstandings have led to other incidents that have worsened relations between communities, thus affecting social cohesion and mutual trust. The five dialogues therefore constituted a significant step in the efforts to restore social cohesion in these areas deeply affected by ethnic violence. In most cases, religious leaders facilitated the initiation of dialogue and advocated forgiveness between communities.

Signature of four reconciliation agreements ...

Of the five dialogues, four resulted in the signing of reconciliation agreements and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms for their implementation. These are agreements between the communities, for the first conflict, from the municipality of Toguéré Coumbé in the Ténenkou circle; for the second, those of the village of Woko of the rural commune of Néma Badenya Kafo, in the circle of Djenne. The third concerns the villages of Mougna and Kossouma in the rural commune of Néma Badenya Kafo, in the circle of Djenne.

"In my commune, Peulh and Bozo grew up together and were friends with each other. This dialogue initiative was beneficial, because we no longer knew how to approach our differences. I am proud today to be one of those working to bring back those who had left the area because of these conflicts ", testified a municipal authority.

The following dialogue concerns the commune of Dioungani, circle of Koro, where since 2017, the twenty villages and the thirty hamlets sheltering Dogons and Peulhs, were experiencing a complex conflict, both inter and intra-community. Between the Peulhs and the Dogons, including between the latter themselves, questions related to access and management of land, natural resources as well as cattle rustling, among others, ended up degrading the climate.

The numerous negotiations between the local leaders of the different communities led to the signing of an intercommunity reconciliation agreement on September 20, 2020. In order to be able to capitalize on these achievements, the United Nations system has registered Dioungani in these priority areas in the regions of central Mali.

In the case of the villages of Nouh Bozo and Nouh Peulh, respectively located in the rural communes of Kewa and Diafarabé, circles of Djenné and Ténenkou, important steps have also been taken in terms of reconciliation of these communities. The latter have managed to jointly adopt practical solutions for the delimitation of fishing zones along the Niger River which separates the two villages. If in this case there was no signed agreement, the project first established a dialogue between the main protagonists and then restored harmonious relations between them.

... So that communities remain committed to the path of peace

Together with local authorities and community leaders, the various partners have set in motion several dynamics of direct dialogue and conflict resolution, to jointly reach practical solutions accepted by all parties. According to the Field Coordinator of the Civil Affairs Division of MINUSMA in Mopti, Mr. Jens

Kristensen, the collaboration with the communal and local authorities, the Regional Reconciliation Support Team (ERAR), as an organization the state and the local NGO partner the Malian Initiative for Support to Local Development (IMADEL), "makes it possible to ensure not only an inclusive approach by taking into account the diversity and local specificities, but also the follow-up of the resolutions adopted by communities to walk together in the direction of lasting peace and living together". In fact, in each case, a joint committee composed of representatives of the communities was set up, in close collaboration with the town halls, with a view to consolidating the achievements. Among other follow-up actions, awareness-raising meetings in each village of the municipalities were carried out.

For Ali Samba Diallo of IMADEL, "each conflict has its specificities. However, as soon as we arrived in the communities, there was a lack of communication between them. Our approach has therefore been to facilitate the resumption of dialogue. The approach used initially prioritized separate meetings with each community, to facilitate their understanding of the process and gain their buy-in and consent to engage in dialogue with the other party. On the other hand, the different communities in dispute subsequently came together to identify the problems that concern them and to reflect together.

MINUSMA and OSAPG: two UN entities in favor of the stabilization of the central regions

In accordance with its mandate and as part of its efforts to prevent atrocity crimes in Mali, OSAPG supported these five dialogues to contribute to responses to inter-communal violence and tensions, in close collaboration with the Civil Affairs Division of MINUSMA and the local NGO IMADEL, an implementing partner. As part of these discussions, emphasis was placed on the communities' full ownership of these peace and conflict resolution initiatives with a view to lasting reconciliation between them. This, because re-establishing relationships, as well as mechanisms for dealing with future grievances, is an important step in preventing violence and criminal atrocities that could eventually arise. In the implementation of their two mandates, MINUSMA and OSAPG will continue to support these initiatives to contribute to the stabilization of the regions of the Center, as well as to consolidate the restored inter-community relations.

It should be noted that among other efforts to support the protection of civilians, particularly in the face of threats from unidentified armed groups, the UN Force established temporary bases of operations, which facilitated the movement of populations and their goods. , in particular to go to intercommunity meetings.