



# Environmental Peacemaking in Liptako Gourma

A mapping of issues and initiatives

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# The project

Efforts to make peace rarely integrate a deep understanding of the environmental factors underpinning conflict, and potentially, resolution, peace building and reconciliation. It is for this reason that, with support from the Directorate of Defence of the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the European Institute of Peace and TrustWorks Global launched their 20-month "Environmental Peacemaking in Liptako-Gourma" project, beginning in March 2022.

The project applies the environmental peacemaking approach to support existing local, national, regional, and international mediation and stabilization processes, rather than seeking to add yet another self-standing initiative. The goal is to support them in addressing unsustainable, unjust, and inequitable natural resource management practices, which should enable peace processes to respond to root causes of conflict and deliver tangible peace dividends that increase the durability of agreements.

So far, the project has already been able to offer bilateral continued exchange on analysis and approaches, tailor-made capacity building on concrete challenges, and the organisation of several events in the region.

**Contributors and disclaimer:** The 'Environmental Peacemaking in Liptako-Gourma' project is implemented in a partnership between TrustWorks Global (TWG) and the European Institute of Peace (EIP). The project is funded by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. This report expresses the views of the implementing organisations, based on analysis and consultation with local actors, but it does not represent the official views and policy of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

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# Introduction

The present “mapping report” is the result of the first phase of the project “Environmental Peacemaking in Liptako Gourma”, implemented jointly by the European Institute of Peace (EIP) and TrustWorks Global (TWG) with the support of the Directorate of Defence of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The project assists peace initiatives in the Liptako Gourma region on the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It aims to work with these initiatives to better address the environment-related drivers of conflict and harness cooperation over shared natural resources and common environmental challenges as a way to promote peace.

The mapping draws upon: in-person consultations conducted in Bamako, Ouagadougou and Niamey between March and June 2022; a literature review; and, a first regional workshop held in Niamey in December 2022. Rather than an exhaustive list of environment-related conflicts and initiatives, the mapping provides an overview and analysis of environmental and natural resources-related conflicts in the region as well as a typology of actors involved. It also offers a sample of initiatives deemed relevant to the “environmental peacemaking” concept and practice - either because they are peacemaking processes in which an environmental approach could be strengthened, or because they are environmental (and natural resource-related) initiatives on which a peace approach could be strengthened.

Preliminary consultations with local actors emphasized the relevance of applying an environmental and natural resources lens to peacemaking efforts in the Liptako Gourma region. Many mediation actors active in the region recognize that while they largely focus their efforts on “putting out fires” and brokering local agreements to halt violence, the root causes of many local conflicts related to access to and sharing of natural resources often remain unaddressed. While there is an intuition that focusing on including natural resources can lead to better mediation outcomes and natural resource management, mediation actors do not necessarily have the relevant tools and resources to achieve environmental peace dividends.

These consultations also highlighted the fact that there are already many peacemaking actors and initiatives – notably at the local level - and that there is little appetite for more stand-alone peacemaking initiatives or strategies. However, there is a need to complement existing initiatives with mediation tools and expertise in environmental and natural resources governance. Many local actors consulted also cautioned that while an increased focus on environmental and natural resources in peacemaking is needed, it should not overlook the structural political, security and economic drivers of conflict. A greater focus on environment and natural resources should not lead to “depoliticizing” conflicts and or weakening peacemaking efforts but should instead strengthen efforts to address the drivers of conflict.

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### 1 Better understanding of the environmental root causes of conflicts

The Liptako Gourma region is experiencing an extended period of violent conflict. It is the result of a complex political, economic and security governance crisis, which is compounded by climatic variability, competition over scarce resources, and demographic pressures. Since 2015, violence has spread from northern Mali into Burkina Faso and Niger, and in more recent years, to the coastal countries as well, which are intimately connected to the southern Sahel, including through transhumance and trade. While the responses of national governments and their international partners have often focused on short-term militarised counter-terrorism approaches, deep-rooted insecurity in the region is the result of poor governance, demographic pressures, widespread poverty, climatic variability, and competition over natural resources.

Years of land clearing and unsustainable farming practices led to widespread desertification across the region. For instance, one-third (over 9 million hectares) of productive land has been degraded in Burkina Faso. Meanwhile, the Sahel region is highly exposed to climate change. It will likely become hotter and experience increased but erratic rainfall. With Sahelian temperatures rising 1.5 times faster than the global average<sup>1</sup>, local populations will likely experience more unpredictable livelihoods and increased food insecurity in the years and decades ahead.

These climate impacts affect the availability and accessibility of the region's natural resources, which are already unevenly distributed. Thus, the pastures are particularly rich in the areas of Hairé, Seeno and Gondo (Mali) of Seeno (Burkina Faso) and Tillabéri (Niger), while the Gourma Central is a reserve of elephants. The Sourou River and its ponds are rich in fish, especially at the Mali-Burkina Faso border. In the same area is the cross-border Samory forest, while the Ansongo forest is further east, straddling the Mali-Niger border. The Niger River crosses the Liptako Gourma over 1,400 km, offering many resources including water, fish, and fertile alluvium.

The dam projects in Mali and Niger are supposed to allow hydroelectric development as well as the intensification of agriculture and livestock, and the development of fishing and aquaculture. The Liptako Gourma region also has significant mineral reserves (manganese, phosphate, cement limestone, iron, gold, etc.). Despite significant obstacles to large-scale mineral exploitation (distance from the sea, lack of transport infrastructure and high cost of energy), artisanal gold panning is booming, including in Intekaha between Gao and Gossi.

Many local conflicts in the Liptako Gourma relate to rivalries over the use and management of agro-pastoral natural resources. While farmer-herders clashes are by far the most recurrent in Mali, Burkina Faso

*'Many local conflicts in the Liptako Gourma relate to rivalries over the use and management of agro-pastoral natural resources.'*

and Niger, some clashes also take place between farmers, between herders and fishermen, and among herders, farmers and mining companies and real estate operators. Tensions between formal and customary justice, agricultural promotion as part of development policies, urbanisation, land grabbing and artisanal gold mining are among the many factors that lead to and/or fuel inter-communal tensions and conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

The management of natural resources in Liptako Gourma is particularly prone to spark conflict, due to several factors including:

- The status and multiple dimensions of land (productive, social and political);
- The multiplicity of access rights negotiated between users, rights holders and the regulatory authorities; and,
- The weakening of traditional, non-traditional and formal conflict management mechanisms.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cascades.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CASCADES\\_Scenarios\\_Sahel\\_final-EN-with-back-cover.pdf](https://www.cascades.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CASCADES_Scenarios_Sahel_final-EN-with-back-cover.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.g5sahel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/G5S\\_Report\\_Conflicts\\_Analysis-English-Summary.pdf](https://www.g5sahel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/G5S_Report_Conflicts_Analysis-English-Summary.pdf)

# Environmental Peacemaking in Liptako Gourma:

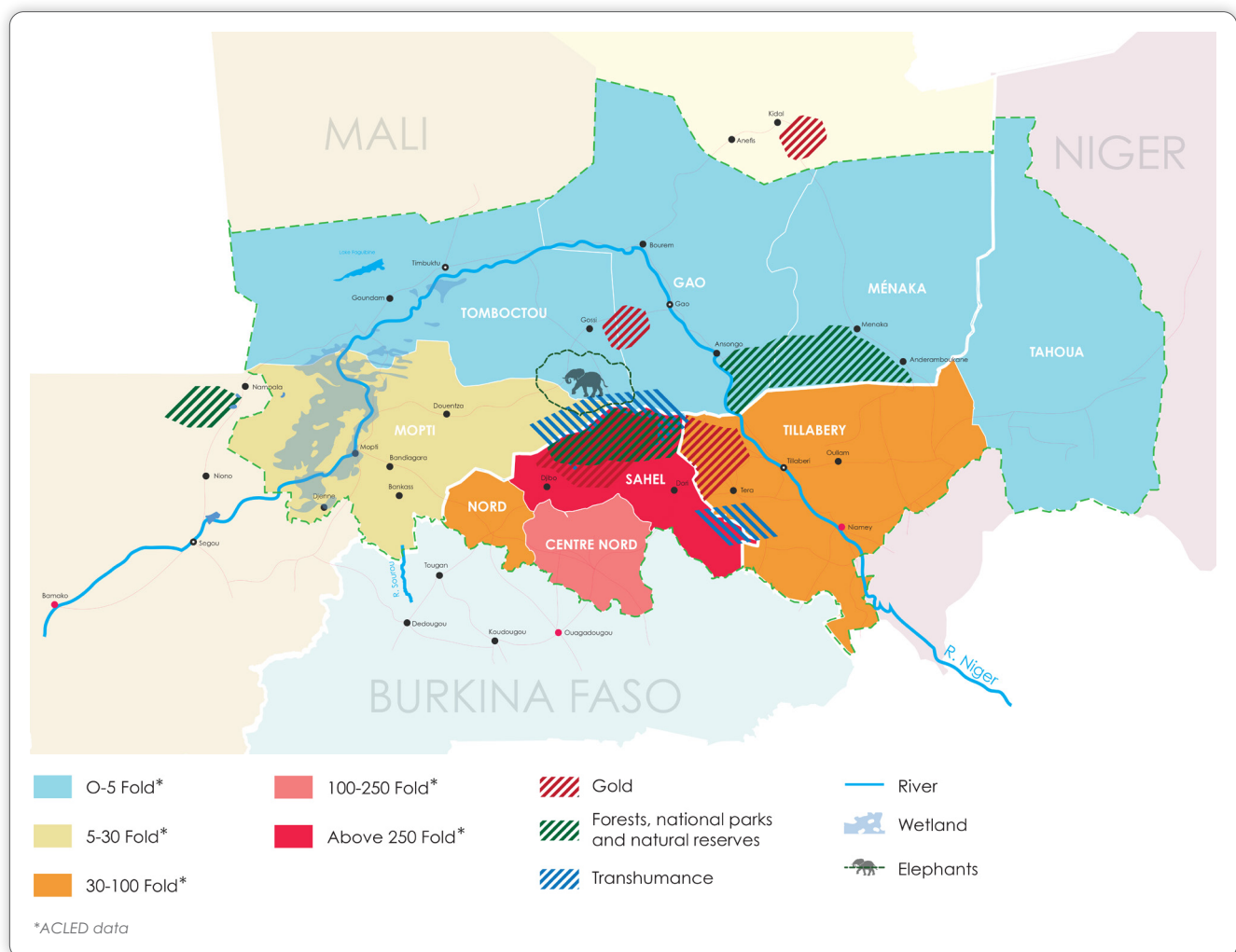
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The impact of climate change - notably on forecasting seasons and weather events - and environmental degradation. This unsustainable management practice leads to significant agricultural expansion, detriment of pastures, and disrupted relationships between user communities, giving rise to increased competition for access to natural resources. This is aggravated by a deterioration in the tradition of mutual aid between communities (e.g., barter of harvest residues for manure, cereals for milk, and transport of harvests by herders), which further strains relations and is at the origin of the

increase in conflicts, which frequently escalate into inter-community clashes, even in resource-rich areas.

While intercommunity conflicts have been present in the Sahel for centuries, in recent years, the proliferation of weapons and the involvement of political elites and armed groups have made communal conflicts more violent and deadly.<sup>3</sup> A remarkable additional challenge has been the exploitation of these tensions by jihadi groups operating in the region. These include Al-Qaeda affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin groups

### Natural resources and increases in violence in Liptako Gourma (2015-2021)



3 <https://unis-sahel.org/2022/11/02/sahel-predictive-analytics-report-moving-from-reaction-to-action-anticipating-vulnerability-hotspots-in-the-sahel-in-support-of-uniss/>

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including Katiba Macina in Mali and Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso, as well as IS-affiliated groups. The map on the next page shows an important correlation between the presence of natural resources - which often draw various populations - and an increase in violence.

traditional, customary and/or religious authorities -, state structures and representatives, local or international NGOs, or the United Nations.<sup>4</sup>

The present mapping intends to provide a broad overview of the types of initiatives deemed relevant to environmental peacemaking, and does not intend to be exhaustive. The map on the next page offers a sample of these initiatives.

## 2 Mapping relevant environmental and peacemaking initiatives

In the context of the spreading of instability and violence from northern Mali initially (partly addressed in the May-June 2015 inter-Malian peace agreement) to Central Mali (Mopti region), then North and East Burkina Faso (Boucle du Mouhoun, Nord, Sahel and Est) and Eastern Niger (Tillabery region), which have all experienced deadly intercommunity clashes, the three countries have adopted different approaches towards peacemaking in the Liptako Gourma. These approaches have also evolved over the past decade and official government positions have in turn affected the ability of local and international NGOs as well as of "insider mediators" to initiate and/or continue peacemaking initiatives in the Liptako Gourma.

There are multiple and diverse peacemaking initiatives with relevant environmental dimensions Liptako Gourma, for which different typologies are possible centred around:

1. the type of natural resources at stake (land, water, forests including protected areas, mineral reserves, etc.);
2. the type of conflict parties involved (communities including farmers, herders, fishermen; state actors including at local level; private operators including mining companies, etc.); and
3. the type of peacemakers or mediators involved, whom can be "insider mediators" – including

Some of these initiatives are peacemaking processes with relevant environmental dimensions. For example, there are state-led initiatives such as the *Haute Autorité pour la Consolidation de la Paix* (HACP) in Niger which has set up *Communal Peace Committees* (CCP) in the communes of the Tillabery region since 2015. They organise the mediation of community conflicts and frameworks for dialogue on land and natural resource management, including pastoral water. Another illustrative case is the work of the *Mission d'appui à la Réconciliation Nationale* (MARN) in Mali, created in 2017 and which relies on *Regional Reconciliation Support Teams* (ERAR) for the implementation of programmes and projects of the Ministry of National Reconciliation of Mali in the regions, including conflict management and inter- and intra-community dialogue in the conflict zones in central Mali.

Others include environmental initiatives with relevant peace dimensions. There is, for example, a project to strengthen the resilience of youth and women to climate change in the regions of Mopti and Gao, with elements of environmental and natural resource governance, including in relation to the Land Commissions (COFOs) supported by the NGOs *West African Network for Peacebuilding* (WANEP) and *Search For Common Ground* (SFCG). Another relevant initiative is that of *Vétérinaires Sans Frontières* (with the support of the Swiss Development Cooperation/SDC), which encourages the development of pastoral areas with new water points around the waiting areas for livestock.

Several projects have cross-border and/or subregional Liptako Gourma dimensions. This is, for instance, the case of the work supported by the *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue* (HD), which supports a network of around 2,000 agro-pastoral mediators across Mali,

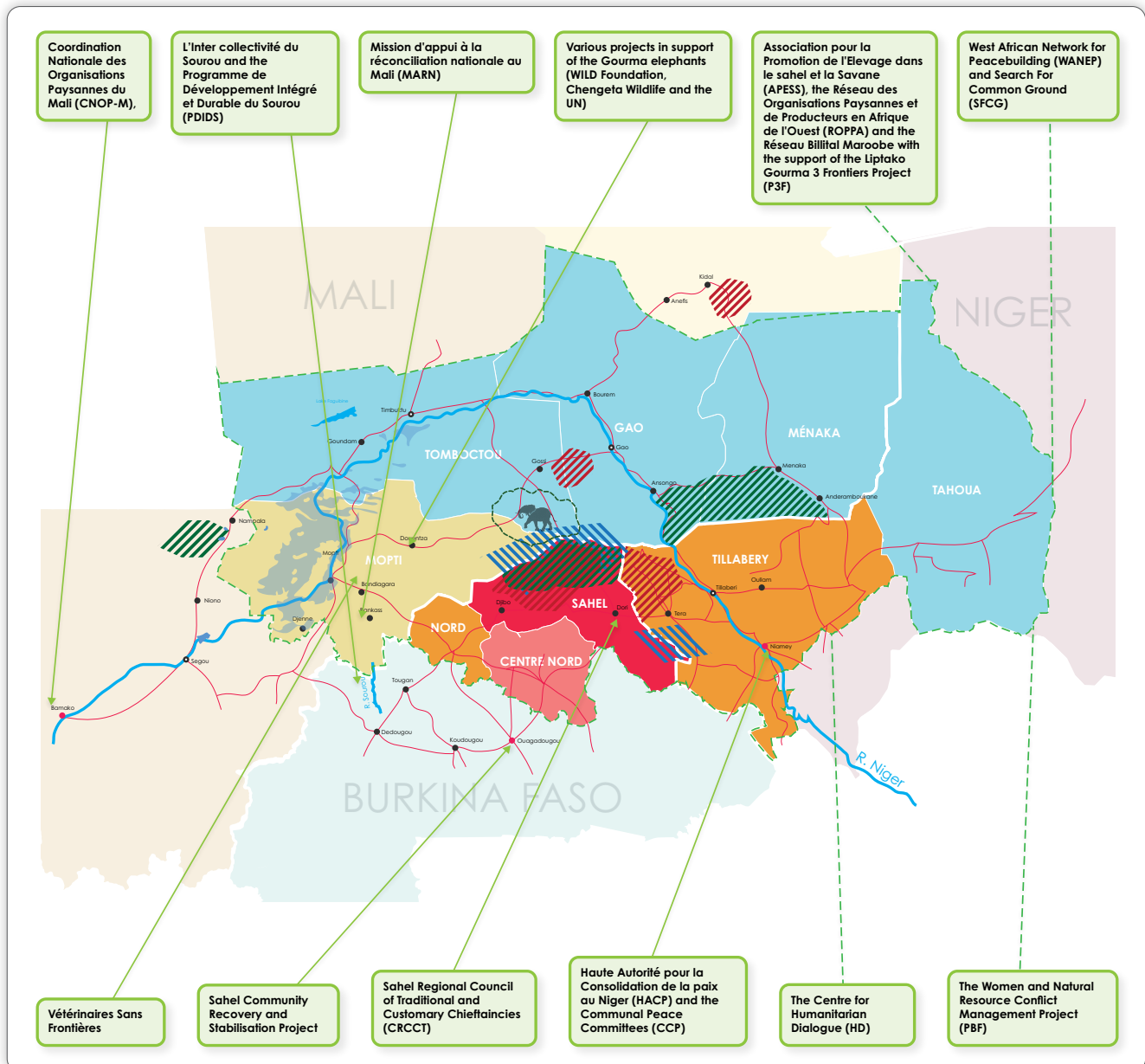
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2012-UN-Peace-Operations-Local-Mediation-and-Peace-Processes.pdf>



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## Sample of initiatives relevant to environmental peacemaking in the Liptako Gourma



Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania to help settle micro-conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, and broker local agreements over management of resources and demarcating corridors for safe movement of livestock.<sup>5</sup> Another interesting initiative is the *Inter-Collectivité du Sourou*. This was founded by communities of the Sourou

River Plain who joined together in 2018 as a cooperative to develop a *Programme de Développement Intégré et Durable du Sourou* (PDIDS) aiming to coordinate natural resource management (with support from CARE Mali and funding from the Dutch Embassy in Bamako).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HD-Agro-pastoral-mediation-in-the-Sahel.pdf>

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A number of agro-pastoral associations also play an important role in the broader context of 'environmental peacemaking' efforts. These include the *Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage dans le sahel et la Savane* (APESS), the *Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs en Afrique de l'Ouest* (ROPPA) and the *Réseau Billital Maroobe* (RBM). The *Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali* (CNOP-M), created in 2004 in Mali, was involved in the process of drafting the 2006 *Loi d'Orientation Agricole* (LOA) and remains a privileged interlocutor of the Malian authorities on the issues of agroecological development, agricultural land management and, in particular, the problem of land grabbing.

Some of these agro-pastoral associations benefit, *inter alia*, from the support of the Liptako Gourma 3 Frontiers Project (P3F) (managed from Ouagadougou), launched in 2019 by the French Development Agency (AFD). This project aims to support agro-pastoral communities to improve environmental protection, transhumance and the prevention and resolution of conflicts related to natural resource management.

Also based in Ouagadougou, the subregional organization *Autorité de développement Intégré de la région du Liptako-Gourma* (ALG) created in 1970 manages various regional projects, including the Sahel Community Recovery and Stabilisation Project, launched in 2021 with the support of the World Bank, which aims to respond to the needs generated by a combination of factors, including an emergency situation, climate change, the intensification of pressure from forced displacement, and competition for access to natural resources (including land and water resources). Some of their projects are supported by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) - such as the Women and Natural Resource Conflict Management Project - and promote an approach based on women's involvement and resilience to the effects of climate change for the reduction of community and cross-border natural resource conflicts. It was launched in 2020 in Mali and Niger, and implemented by UNDP and UN Women with the support of the PBF.

Lastly, at the very local level, traditional and customary chieftaincies including, in some cases religious leaders, ("*légimités locales*" in French) also continue to play an important role, even if their authority has often eroded

over time. For instance, the Sahel Regional Council of Traditional and Customary Chieftaincies (CRCCT) contributes to development activities throughout the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, including since 2017 in the resolution of conflicts related to the management of natural resources, particularly in the context of transhumance.

## 3 Local peace agreements and environmental peacemaking

Over the past few years, many local peace agreements have been reported - particularly in Central Mali where more than 40 have been brokered since 2019 alone. Based on our own review of these local agreements, at least a third of these include some provisions related to access to natural resources. It is however not easy to fully understand these local agreements because the exact terms of the agreements are rarely public (and even when agreements are written, there are often unwritten clauses), many have not held very long (but their brokering is more often reported than their collapse and follow-up mechanisms that would allow to track them often lack). The following analysis should therefore be considered preliminary.

Despite these challenges, many local agreements have led to temporary reductions in violence against civilians. However, the governments in Mali and Burkina Faso - and some international donors - who may have supported international and local NGO mediation efforts in the past have grown increasingly suspicious that the terms of such deals may look like "giving in" to jihadi demands. The power imbalance in favour of jihadi groups in some area (the October 2020 siege of Farabougou in Central Mali and the February 2022 siege of Djibo in Burkina Faso are two emblematic examples) led to "imposed peace" deals whereby local villagers had to subscribe to distancing themselves from the Malian army and the state more generally, having to lay down arms, drop demands for the return of stolen property, especially livestock, and in some cases led to

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the application of Sharia/Islamic law and education, and Islamic dress codes for women.

The past year has been marked by a return to militarized approaches following successive military coups in both Mali – where the *Wagner* group arrived in early 2022 – and Burkina Faso – now relying on some 50,000 Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP) self-defence auxiliary militias to support security forces in the fight against jihadis, but which have been reported of committing abuses against civilians. Niger for its part continues to combine military and negotiated approaches, as illustrated by the recent January 2023 Banibangou agreement.

Many of the more interesting local agreements in terms of environmental peacemaking were brokered since 2019 in Central Mali with support from local and international NGOs, as well as sometimes from the UN peacekeeping operation in Mali, MINUSMA. As a result of these local deals, violence reduced significantly since the Fall of 2020, and markets reopened in some localities, allowing the resumption of trade between communities. Some of these local agreements that the authors were able to access included provisions related to natural resources, such as:

- Managing transhumance routes where they pass close to farming communities;
- Preventing livestock theft and returning stolen cattle;
- Protecting farming/agricultural land and respecting land loans;
- Access to grazing rights and water resources;
- Avoiding excessive logging/deforestation;
- Agreeing to respect and enforce existing local and customary rules and verdicts by traditional authorities in relation to the above issues (access to land and water as part of transhumance, pastoral and agricultural activities).

When looking at the specific provisions of most local agreements, while they recognize these issues as root causes of conflict, they are rarely addressed other than in a superficial manner. The limited ability of the state to regulate these issues at the local level and to accompany local agreements with peace dividends in the form of basic services and a return of state

administration often leads to a delegation to traditional authorities with limited means. Although traditional authorities can mediate disputes between and within communities, they are usually not equipped to deal with major violations.

The overall impact of local peace deals has, ultimately, been underwhelming,<sup>6</sup> in part because they have not adequately addressed local land conflicts, which the state has lost the capacity to regulate in a peaceful way that is acceptable to all. Local mediation efforts are also not always well coordinated, leading to actors competing with one another, but also a disconnect with national-level politics. As a result, many local agreements are violated and/or collapse within weeks, and many observers see local deals as being primarily the result of communities being tired of the violence and displacements rather than genuine attempts at addressing the root causes of conflicts.

## 4 The way forward: towards more effective environmental peacemaking

Environmental peacemaking seeks to pursue more effective prevention and resolution of conflict by addressing core climate, environmental and natural resource drivers of conflict, and bringing in environmental issues that can help resolution and more sustainable peace or create mechanisms for future collaboration. This includes bringing divided communities together by finding new ways to share and sustainably govern the natural resources of their territory (including land, water, forests, and minerals), and jointly addressing common environmental and climate-related security challenges.

The project is premised on the fact that with appropriate multidimensional analysis and tailored support to certain relevant initiatives, these environmental-related security challenges may become entry points for dialogue and trust-building, as well as opportunities to

6 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/mali-enabling-dialogue-jihadist-coalition-jnim>

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foster collaboration and mutual learning around issues. The protection, equitable sharing and sustainable management of land and natural resources are the essential and long-term conditions for sustained peace and economic growth, and these issues will continue to intensify due to climate change. More needs to be done to engage new and powerful actors on the ground in ways that support local solutions, contribute to identifying peace dividends, and to design investments that can sustain agreements.

As part of the next phase of the project, EIP and TWG will therefore continue to support existing local, national, and regional processes and partner organizations in the Liptako Gourma to integrate an environmental peacemaking approach. This will entail:<sup>7</sup>

- i. **Promoting relevant, promising environmental peacemaking initiatives in the region** through the exploration of topics in short practice notes, such as the conflict and peace relevance of land commissions in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso; a local mediation initiative with a strong environment and natural resources management dimension; how to better factor pastoralism in agro-ecology in the Sahel; evolution of cattle population and meat demand; protected areas; and, access to natural resources as 'peace dividends' within mediated local agreements.
- ii. **Facilitating networking and sharing of experiences within the region**, including participation in knowledge-sharing workshops and conferences, and beyond with multilateral and bilateral actors on environmental peacemaking matters.
- iii. **Supporting certain initiatives by providing tailored expertise according to the specific needs expressed by partner organizations**, including thematically on climate and environmental responses/adaptation, peace-positive natural resources management, peacemaking and mediation, as well as dedicated support on capacity-building, development of tools, and knowledge sharing.

<sup>7</sup> For more information see <https://www.eip.org/current-project-environmental-peacemaking-in-liptako-gourma/> and <https://trustworksglobal.com/environmental-peacemaking-liptako-gourma/>



EUROPEAN  
INSTITUTE  
OF PEACE

**European Institute of Peace (EIP)**

Rue des Deux Eglises 25  
1000 Brussels, Belgium

[www.eip.org](http://www.eip.org)  
[info@eip.org](mailto:info@eip.org)



**TrustWorks**  
Global

**TrustWorks Global**

Rue de l'Évêché, 1  
Geneva 1204, Switzerland

[www.trustworksglobal.com](http://www.trustworksglobal.com)  
[info@trustworksglobal.com](mailto:info@trustworksglobal.com)