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 Mali, Conflict

Conflict of Political Groups in Mali

As the sun sets in Tongou, Mali, Mariam watches the city through her window. Mariam is 16 years old and has never known a life without the constant conflict between political groups of Mali. Mariam wonders if she will get a chance to go to school. She questions when her next filling meal will be, and how she will get it. Mariam wonders if her brother will get the proper medical attention he needs for his constant, rough cough. All these thoughts and wonders have been caused by the large outbreak of conflict between Tuareg and government forces, and the military coups formation. Mariam has watched her friends and family slowly leave due to the conflict. In this fictional narrative, Mariam's life, education, and health have been challenged by the constant uncertainty and fighting, just like the people of Mali.

Mali is a Level One, impoverished country, according to gapminder.org, located in Western Africa. The population of Mali is around 20,000,000, with about 45% living in urban areas. Their main exports include coal, maize, rice, millet, watermelon, gold, lumber, and cotton. Mali has a subtropical climate, having hot and dry weather from February to June, and rainy and humid weather the rest of the year (*Central Intelligence Agency*). Only seven percent of Mali's 43.7 million hectares are currently cultivated, which is low in the potential number of acres ("Agriculture..."). The average farm size is around 3 hectares, equivalent to 7 acres. Mali still has room for agricultural and economical improvement.

Like many other countries, depending on the region where you live in Mali you may experience different types of life. However, overarching similarities are still found. The average family size in Mali is around 5.8 people. These families typically live in homes made of mixtures of earth/cement, but they also live in mud huts, concrete homes, and villas ("Mali. *Encyclopædia...*"). The typical family diet consists of rice, millet, corn, tô (millet, corn, and sorghum mixture), milk, dates, and fresh fruits. Families usually get their food from local markets, farm, or stores. However, places to get food are often reduced due to conflict. Common jobs include subsistence agriculture, manufacturing, and working with livestock. Around 4/5 jobs include subsistence agriculture ("Mali. *Encyclopædia...*"). The average minimum wage is around \$1,284.00 per year in US dollars, which equates to 744,048.00 CFA franc, Mali's currency. ("Mali Minimum...") due to conflict it may be hard to find jobs and retain them. Without a job it may be harder to obtain services like education.

Access to education in primary and secondary school in Mali is free, but schools do not have high attendance, and are often only located in urban areas. Many students also live in rural areas, which are spread apart and hard to reach during conflicts within the city. Getting rural students access to education is a focus of many NGOs; "School reform has focused on such programs as "ruralization," in which rural schools teach students about trades such as sewing, building, and farming in addition to such subjects as French, history, mathematics, and geography" ("Mali. *Encyclopædia...*"). Helping these students attain greater knowledge helps the country grow in intelligence as a whole.

Medical care is also very important to Mali, which "has few resources for health care, and child and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world. State hospitals at Bamako and Kati are supplemented by a network of medical centres, maternity centres, dispensaries, and a mobile service that visits patients in rural areas" ("Mali. *Encyclopædia...*"). Since a majority of the population lives in rural areas, it is very important to allocate resources to support those populations. "Mali is still challenged by a lack of

personnel, facilities, resources, and supplies and by difficulties involving poor access to much of the country. Malnutrition and inadequate sanitation are also problems in many areas” (“Mali. *Encyclopædia...*”). Improper sanitation is a major contributor to the decline in health, and, like education, it is hard to get important resources to rural communities. Access to quality health care and sanitation is low with “More than one million people in Mali still practic[ing] open defecation, which has a direct impact on the health, dignity and the safety of communities. While 80% of Mali’s population now has access to improved sources of drinking water, this number drops significantly in rural areas, where it is only 70%. Displacement in conflict-affected areas of Mali has further limited the access of families on the move to clean water and sanitation” (“Water, Sanitation...”). Conflict in Mali has only increased the growing need for family, health, and education services.

Mali has been in a constant form of confusion and discontent in Mali for almost 10 years. “Mali has been mired in crisis since 2012, when a northern separatist rebellion led by members of the minority ethnic Tuareg community prompted a military coup and Islamist insurgent advance, all during a regional drought. The coup contributed to the military’s collapse in northern Mali... President Kéïta won elections later that year, leading the United States to lift coup-related aid restrictions. President Kéïta was reelected in 2018, but opposition mounted over his administration’s apparent interference in legislative election results, corruption scandals, worsening insecurity, militia violence, and economic hardships” (“Crisis in Mali”). Shortly after, in August of 2020, nonviolent mass protests demanding Kéïta’s resignation caused Mali’s military to seize power. In the following months, Mali’s military arrested the interim presidents and prime minister. This prompted the government to be “deemed by many as a “coup within a coup”” (“After Two...”). This conflict has created devastation among the communities of Mali whether urban or rural. It has affected access to education, nutrition, and safety.

The needs of Mali have only increased since the devastating conflict. Many have grown up in unstable communities and homes, “The greatest needs of children and families in Mali are food security, health, and all aspects of child protection. Without reliable sources of food, families are cutting back on how much they eat, and more children are becoming malnourished. As many as 4.3 million people don’t have enough food” (Reid). Around one fifth of Mali’s population faces food insecurity, which creates hordes of other problems separate from the conflict. If they don’t have access to food, they don’t have proper tools to power their brains, impacting education.

Education has also been greatly impacted. Around two million are unenrolled in school and unable to receive an education, “With children vulnerable to violence and recruitment into armed groups, they need opportunities for education and strong support systems within their families and communities” (World Vision). Armed groups present a major reason for the continuance of conflicts as they often take children or force them into the group before they receive a proper education. Many aspects of the conflict have created offshoots leading to pressing problems like education and nutrition. The situation in Mali is making the livelihoods of its citizens much harder. A country’s main goal should be to protect and support its citizens and provide safe living conditions. While the conflict is based in Mali’s government, solutions should be based on Mali’s people.

The first step to helping the Malian government recover and reform would be a ceasefire or truce between the two fighting groups, the government and Tuareg forces. This would create a calmer environment for the Malian government to reconsider and reapproach accepting help from a neutral outside organization or government. The two sides of the conflict in Mali would need to also come up with terms that they would like to get out of the cease fire. Most likely a mediator would need to be involved as a go between for each side. They would go step-by-step, examining each part of the country and how to make it better. Officials need to see that if Mali continues down this path, they could severely hurt their country and their

people. An article from the Global Humanitarian Overview states, “Rampant impunity and widespread armed violence will continue to generate multiple and protracted displacements, accentuating the civilian population’s vulnerabilities and negative coping mechanisms and increasing the risk of community tensions...the agricultural harvest of 2021-2022 forecasts a 20-50 percent drop in crops is observed in the central regions due to floods, water scarcity and abandoned fields as a result of the escalation of violence” (“Mali.” *Global...*). Not only will Mali be affected by the political conflict, but they will also be affected by the poor economics in the region. A ceasefire would provide the security needed to maintain a calm system to create change for a country much in need of a proper helping hand.

The second step would be for the Malian government to compare their economy and government to that of more successful countries. Both sides and mediators could look at what a good example of a stable country looks like and view the areas that they could make changes to. From there they could decide where to allocate funding. The biggest areas to create changes would be healthcare and food security, issues that have both stemmed from the conflict taking place. They need to take a step back and decide what they truly want in order to be a successful country. A mediator, especially someone with training and experience, could help focus the mindset of improvement on the people. The mediator could help show the government that educated citizens help the country to be more successful. The people of Mali are the biggest concern, they deserve to live a life in which they are able to prosper.

The third step would be for the government to invite a team of experts to help them make the correct decisions in future steps. This team could include experts in health, sanitation, nutrition, economics, policy, conflict, and foreign relations. These experts could work hand in hand with different member of Mali’s government. This would allow each individual section to grow stronger, creating a more robust central government with outreaching arms. The United Nations could use some of their peacekeepers currently in the region or pull experts from other areas to aid in this effort. Peacekeepers main jobs are preventing/containing fighting, providing assistance in transitions of power, and implementing peace accords (“The Role...”). This makes the peacekeepers specially equipped to give Mali the aid they need, as they also already have a significant presence of around 17,500 peacekeepers in Mali. It would not be an extreme reach financially for them to also assist in helping restructure after fighting.

The last step would be making sure the new adjustments and improvements make it to the people of Mali. Both the rural and urban communities of Mali are facing the negative effects of the conflict in Mali. During the ceasefire systems need to be developed to ensure the safety, sanitation, food, and education to the people of Mali. Education is an incredibly powerful tool, “Africa is the youngest continent, with 200 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24, the Africa-America Institute reports. By 2040, Africa will have the world's youngest labor force. Young people in Africa need jobs and a positive outlook for their lives ahead. They need to realize their vision and to lead Africa forward. A quality education is the foundation and the essence of their future” (*Education Is...*). Educating the younger population will allow for growth within the broader region. Smaller nonprofits are already working to help the country gain greater intelligence and structure. The goal needs to be to keep the educated people in the country to help continue to help them prosper.

It also needs to be noted that Mali’s government may be too far for a ceasefire, they may need direct military intervention from a country neutral to the conflict. This foreign government would need to be stable and able to provide time and resources to draw out the corrupt nature of Mali’s government. This has been proven to work in other countries, “European Recovery Plan post-World War II, which became the Marshall Plan, was central to the recovery of Europe and helped to rebuild the war-torn European continent and construct a stable foundation on which future allies could grow economically and structurally” (Ebitz). This plan focused on the United States military intervening with the European

governments. A similar plan could be used in Mali, it could provide a way for an outside source to help reform a government that is in dire need of assistance. The United States is a country that can provide similar assistance to Mali, “Within the main elements of national power (diplomacy, informational, military, and economic, or DIME), the military is often considered the last resort. However, the U.S. military has been a key player in, for instance, the spread of democracy, building partner countries’ strength through military-to-military relationships (including in the form of bi- and trilateral exercises to support standing Operation Plans, NATO, the United Nations, and Theater Security Cooperation), personnel exchange, and humanitarian assistance operations” (Ebitz). The United States could be the foreign power that could create stability with their already advanced military and government knowledge. Mali could use this assistance to help set up a new government system, a better economy, and make choices best for the people. A better economy allows for better access to food and education, which are both major components of a healthy, stable country. The United States in return would receive not only get a more stable trading partner but also a foothold in Western Africa. This interaction allows for cultural exchange and opportunities to further a nations capability (Ebitz). They would be able to provide exchanges of ideas and government that could help Mali gain a way to intrinsically end the corruption facing their nation. This may help Mali gain a more direct approach to the political tensions, and help the people gain better standards of living quicker.

Focus needs to be on the people of Mali. They need support and sustainable resources if they want to become a successful region that no longer faces intense conflict. No child should have to experience what a girl like Mariam does on a daily basis. Creating a way for conflict in Mali to subside is imperative for the survival of the citizens of Mali. They deserve to know where their next meal is coming from, when they get to attend school, and that they are safe.

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